

# Active adult housing options grow up

## More choices, less restrictions driving change

Larry and Debra Sluis were happy with their home in Algonquin, but when they became empty nesters about to retire, it was time for a change. Like many people reaching their 50s and beyond, they went looking for a suitable home for this next life stage.

"The biggest issue was having less maintenance," explains Larry Sluis. "We had a frame house with cedar siding and three acres which took a lot of maintenance."

The couple wanted a home that would require less of their time and resources but would still be close to their friends and family. Fortunately, today's builders are responding to this demand with active adult communities. Sluis found many options available from townhomes to single-family homes. They settled into a home in Four Seasons development in Belvedere this summer, which has been a perfect fit.

The National Association of Home Builders forecasts the share of households headed by someone 55 or older will increase through 2019 and account for more than 45 percent of all households in the United States. NAHB also reports the number of Americans 65 or older is expected to grow from 40 million in 2010 to 79 million by 2040. Many homebuilders are working to attract this age group by creating communities ideal for aging in place.

### So long sunshine state

Living in a warm climate is no longer the top priority for aging adults moving to a new home. Some seniors moving into active adult communities still are employed

so they need to stay close to work, reports Carma Yoder, owner of the Four Seasons development in Belvedere.

"People also want to remain close to family and friends. They want to be close to things they do regularly," she says.

The NAHB reports many developers are locating active adult communities near universities so the residents can take advantage of continuing education and cultural events. Living away from it all is not as attractive to adults who enjoy entertainment, shopping and family events.

### The floor plan

Whether it is a single or multifamily home, the 50+ crowd have several requests, according to George Caravelli, owner of Worthington Homes. His Cambria development in Lakewood is designed for active adults.

"Having everything on one level is the biggest request," he notes. "I have an optional second floor but most of them don't even want to see the design."

Spacious first-floor master bedrooms with walk-in closets are a must. An upscale kitchen with a large island is also important for entertaining guests.

Flex-space is also key, says Caravelli. Instead of defining a space for his clients, he provides options. The big open area off the kitchen can be a dining room, a family room or even an office. Other spaces can be designated as bedrooms, sewing rooms or other custom options.

Choosing a timeless design is also important.



Single story homes, like this one from Worthington Homes, are stylish and spacious.

"This age group does not want to have to update every few years," notes Caravelli. He also noted this age group wants to live in a beautifully landscaped area without having to pull out a lawnmower, so many communities offer complete landscaping and snow removal services.

### Hidden features

Active adults aim to remain healthy but are aware that limitations can arise after an unexpected illness. They are looking for life-assisting options that are in place without looking institutional. Caravelli says these features include comfort-height toilets, a bench in a shower spacious enough for a wheelchair and raised bathroom vanities that don't require bending over. Showers are equipped with both a handheld and a fixed showerhead to accommodate different needs. Rocker switches for lights and door levers allow for ease of use even with arthritis. Caravelli's homes also offer optional generators that will supply power during an outage with the flip of a switch. First floor laundry rooms and pull-out shelves in kitchen cabinets are other features in demand.

### Affordability

Part of the desire to downsize is about saving money.

"People want to spend less on their housing so they have enough money to do fun things like travel," notes Yoder. She says many baby boomers have a vacation home

or RV in addition to their main home so they are looking for affordable options. The Four Seasons homes are factory built new construction, which means they cost less but are still filled with attractive amenities. Yoder says today's seniors also look for efficiency and energy cost savings.

### The neighborhood

Many of the first active adult communities had age restrictions, but Caravelli notes "there has been a backlash over the age issue. Some residents like to see children around."

Professional single women under 50 who want a low-maintenance, high quality home are often attracted to active senior communities so age restrictions are disappearing.

Yoder agrees age restrictions are less attractive today.

"People want to have grandchildren come stay with them without worrying about restrictions. Some are even raising their grandchildren," she says.

More important than age restrictions is a sense of community. Four Seasons has a pool and park that residents enjoy. Many communities offer social events in a recreation center, hiking trails through attractive grounds and transportation to local events.

"People look for a community feeling with safe sidewalks, neighbors who you know and social activities so they can enjoy life," Yoder says.



Factory built homes in Four Seasons in Belvedere are affordable but still offer upscale amenities.