

Growing senior population spurs Valley growth of luxury developments (video)

By BoNhia
Lee

A growing population of seniors who want to downsize, but not downgrade their lifestyle as they age, is helping to fuel an uptick in luxury senior and assisted-living developments.

Gone are the 1960s-era communities that look and feel like nursing homes with a game room for bingo. Now, the resort-like campuses have fine dining, salons, movie theaters and even pubs that serve beer and wine brewed by residents.

"Today's over 55 population don't want less than what they currently have as they move through retirement," said William Swearingen, vice president of marketing and sales for Frontier Management, which is opening a Clovis development next month. "Why should I have to settle for less simply because I'm aging and I might need some support services?"

Nearly 300 new senior, assisted living and skilled nursing apartments are coming to the area: Frontier is getting ready to open a 107-unit community in Clovis. Seventy-nine apartments are under construction in a luxury senior complex in northwest Fresno. Another 100 apartments are being built west of Highway 99.

In addition, a popular northeast Fresno community with 386 apartments recently underwent a major renovation.

And there's more to come.

Developers are answering a demand from the aging population, particularly baby boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964, said David Lynn, a counselor of real estate and chief executive officer of Lynn Capital Management in Phoenix, which invests in senior housing.

"They are healthier and living longer," Lynn said. "Their bodies aren't wearing out and dropping dead. That's shifted the demographic demand bubble upward."

In California, the elderly population is growing twice as fast as the general population, according to the California Department of Aging.

The first of the baby boomers hit 68 this year and are retiring at a rate of 10,000 per day, Lynn said. They're about 77 million strong nationwide, he said.

"They're wealthier, educated, and they are getting ready to retire," Lynn said. "They're ready for these types of communities."

Residents can have granite countertops, tiles, cathedral ceilings and high-end fixtures plus new services, such as housekeeping and meals served all day.

Carmel Village at Clovis, Frontier Management's first assisted-living community in the central San Joaquin Valley, will even have wine storage for its residents.

The 85,000-square-foot building at Shaw and Fowler avenues will have studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments for seniors needing some sort of health services.

Construction is expected to begin early next year on phase two, which will include 48 memory care apartments for those with Alzheimer's and dementia, and 30 retirement cottages that range in size from 1,200 to 1,400 square feet.

The amenities include a movie theater, restaurant-like dining rooms, gardens, a salon and even a pub. Residents will brew their own beer, make their own wine and even press olives grown on the property to make olive oil, Swearingen said.

The company redefined its lifestyle program into "something a little more purposeful, a little more relevant in today's world, not just focusing on the life that was lived," Swearingen said. "It doesn't matter what age we are, we still have a lot to contribute. Our goal is to keep writing pages in their book. It's not in our book to build the end."

Oakmont Senior Living, a family owned development company based in Santa Rosa, also is making its Valley debut. A 75,000-square-foot luxury retirement community is under construction at 5605 N. Gates Ave., south of Bullard Avenue, and is expected to open early next year.

Oakmont of Fresno will have 56 assisted living and 23 memory care apartments ranging from 400 to 1,200 square feet. The apartments have 10-foot ceilings, crown molding and spacious bathrooms. Residents will have access to a library, movie theater, fitness center, activity rooms, a salon and day spa, and gardens.

"We chose northwest Fresno because there really was no (senior living) option here," said Laurie Heckman, marketing director. "There's need out here. People like to stay in the community they are used to living in."

Another 100 apartments from Paintbrush LLC and Ponderosa Communications Group are under construction west of Highway 99. The Paintbrush Senior Living facility is expected to be finished next summer.

Robert and Diana Kittredge considered moving closer to their daughter in San Diego, but it was pricey. And moving there also would mean living farther away from three other children and their families in the San Francisco area.

The couple decided instead to sell their 2,700-square-foot home in the Stonebridge community at Marks and Herndon avenues and move into an 1,180-square-foot apartment in The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens on North Fresno Street last month.

"We decided Fresno is in the middle," said Robert Kittredge, 86. And it is where "we have contacts, friends and know our way around."

The 26-acre continuing care retirement community is completing a \$120 million renovation this year, which transformed the 1960s development into a Tuscan-themed villa with four dining options, a pool, indoor and outdoor jacuzzi, a state-of-the-art performing arts theater, gym and salon.

The remodel also allowed the community to update its skilled-nursing area into a family-style living center where all the apartments open up into a common area that looks like a living room and kitchen.

"It's a home, not a facility," executive director Jessica Lopez said.

The Kittredges said they feel like they are at a five-star hotel. Diana Kittredge, 89, said she enjoys the housekeeping service, which allows her to do other things, such as volunteer at St. Agnes Hospital or take part in on-site balance classes.

The couple like having their independence, as both are still active. But they also like the social aspect of living at The Terraces and knowing that help is a call button away if needed.

"One thing that appealed to us was the "assisted living" if needed in the future, Robert Kittredge said. "Our children never have to worry."

For more information

Carmel Village at Clovis: (559) 297-4900, www.carmelvillageatclovis.com

Oakmont of Fresno: (559) 277- 5959, www.oakmontoffresno.com

The Terraces at San Joaquin Gardens: (559) 435-1999, www.theterracesatsanjaquin.com

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6495, blee@fresnobee.com or @bonhiale on Twitter.

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