

'Sort of a taste test'

More than a dozen retirement communities will hold open house Oct. 22.

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For the first time, 15 continuing care retirement communities in Lancaster and Chester counties are joining forces to host an open house.

The "Explore Retirement Living" event — being held 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 22 — is not just for seniors in the market for a retirement community, but for their adult children as well.

"Baby boomers are much quicker to think about retirement now," said Deb Laws-Landis, director of community relations at Landis Homes, Lititz.

The free open house will give people the chance to visit as many of the non-profit facilities as they want — without having to make an appointment at each one, which "can be grueling," she said.

Most of those who will attend "have sort of a priority list already," Laws-Landis said. "You can pick three or five of your favorites."

Marketing people from continuing care retirement communities here have been meeting since 1996, she said, and the idea for an open house "started brewing less than a year ago."

They decided to go forward with it "as sort of an experiment," Laws-Landis said. "We were hoping for five to 10" participants, but the event "kept picking up momentum."

Taking part in the open house are Landis Homes; Brethren Village; Calvary Fellowship Homes; Fairmount Homes, Ephrata;

Garden Spot Village, New Holland; Homestead Village; Lather Acres, Lititz; Moravian Manor, Lititz; Pleasant View, Manheim; Quarryville Presbyterian; St. Anne's, Columbia; St. John's Herr Estate, Columbia; Willow Valley; Woodcrest Villa; and Tel Hai, Honey Brook.

Tel Hai is the lone Chester County representative; the other 14 are spread across Lancaster County.

"We're just thrilled to have that many," Laws-Landis said.

And if the open house becomes an annual event, more communities have expressed an interest in joining, she said.

A promotional mailer was sent to more than 155,000 households in



This is a property along Villa Court in Homestead Village. The "Explore Retirement Living" event is being held Oct. 22.

Justin David Graybill, Sunday News



Cottages like this one on Westcott Drive, in Homestead Village, will be shown during the open house.

Lancaster, Lebanon, Chester and York counties, as well as Cecil and Harford counties in Maryland, Laws-Landis said.

Information also is available on the website ExploreRetirementLiving.org.

The mailer itself has even produced business, generating calls from people wanting to set up appointments, she said.

And people who aren't ready to shop for retirement living now can keep the glossy brochure and refer to it later, Laws-Landis said.

"Each of us has a unique community," she said.

What the open house will do is "help people connect with the one where they feel most at home,"

Laws-Landis said.

"Lancaster County is really fortunate to have such a wide variety of continuing care retirement communities," said Connie Buckwalter, director of marketing for Mennonite Home Communities, which comprises Woodcrest Villa and Mennonite Home.

She described the open house as "sort of a taste test."

"Whatever you're looking for, there's a place for it," Buckwalter said.

Like Laws-Landis, she said non-seniors are starting to preplan. For example, coming to the open house will allow them to gauge the cost of moving into various retirement communities, Buckwalter said.

"It's an event to take away some of that mystery," she said. "Retirement can be a really exciting, wonderful time." ■



A view of The Mews at Homestead Village, off Noll Road.