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Brethren Village



Gary Clouser tells Amanda Barber how his continuing care retirement community has built affordable housing for residents.

Affordable housing units are not often a luxury continuing care retirement communities can provide. However, since becoming president of Pa.-based Brethren Village, Gary Clouser has focused on serving the needs of his community, and those needs come in all shapes and income levels.

Brethren Village currently serves 850 residents on its 153-acre campus. Of those, approximately 165 live in skilled nursing, 80 live in assisted living, and 60 live in the campus' affordable housing units. The community's 110-year affiliation with the Church of the Brethren has provided a solid reputation from which future residents base their decision to apply for residency, and it's given Clouser a sense of how to plan for his community's future.

"We recognize there are individuals who can afford to live on our campus, but there are others who do not have the financial resources to access our continuum of care," said Clouser. "We recognized our community's need in the late '80s when we developed our first affordable housing project, Village Garden Apartments."

Money changes everything

The need for affordable housing has not diminished in the years since Village Garden Apartments were constructed. On the contrary, the need has increased. Brethren Village made a public announcement that on November 8, 2006, at 8:00 AM, they would start taking applications for the 60 new affordable housing apartments to be finished in April 2007.

On the afternoon of November 7, candidates started lining up and proceeded to wait all night in the rain, cold, and wind for the chance to apply. The doors opened at 5:00 that morning, and when applications were taken at 8:00, 61 individuals were waiting to apply for the 60 apartments.

Features

Spotlights



“As we speak, more than 100 people are on a waiting list for the 60 apartments,” said Clouser. “We’ve developed a waiting list even before the doors are opened.”

The completion of those apartments will be the culmination of three years’ work raising funds to design, construct, and maintain what will be Fairview Meadows. In 2004, Clouser applied to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for \$5.4 million to build the apartments and provide ongoing rental subsidy to the individuals selected for residency.

“The federal government has provided ongoing financial support to sustain the operations of these facilities,” said Clouser. “The individuals who move to those facilities only pay 30% of their income as rent, and HUD pays the balance up to what is considered fair-market rental for the apartment.”

In addition, Brethren Village applied locally to the Lancaster County Redevelopment Authority for \$1 million and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development for \$300,000, raising nearly \$7 million for the design and construction of the units.

Looking ahead

Fairview Meadows Apartments complex is only one of three construction projects underway at Brethren Village. Twenty-one two-bedroom, two-car-garage units are being built on the 153-acre campus. These market-rate units give residents the chance to personalize their living quarters, and some have already elected to upgrade with hardwood floors, enclosed patios, and daylight basements.

Although the same kind of rock-star craze did not occur when applications were publicly announced for these units as for Fairview Meadows, only four of the 21 units are unsold. “Residents have already moved into the finished units, and some of them are still under construction,” said Clouser. “The demand has fit hand-in-hand with the timing of the completed units.”

The future of Brethren Village is in the vision behind a \$90 million redevelopment project set to begin in 2008. In addition to the community’s current amenities, the project will add a 120-bed skilled nursing center, 135 additional market-rate apartments, 36 assisted-living units, and 24 assisted-living and memory-support units.

The new facilities will be built on the 153-acre campus, but Clouser and his team developed their plans with one thing in mind: maintaining a peaceful community. “We have open and frequent communication with residents about what is going on at each step,” said Clouser. “We assembled a number of teams to handle various aspects of the design phase, and some of them involved our residents.”

Most of the construction will be on the other side of the community,

diverting much of the traffic away from the heart of the community. Clouser carefully chose his partners based on their history with similar jobs for seniors, but he also tried to choose vendors who were part of the Lancaster community.

“All of our vendors, from the architects at Reese, Lower, Patrick, and Scott, to the preconstruction team from Wohlsen Construction, had a rich history in providing, designing, and constructing facilities for seniors,” said Clouser. “In most cases, they are also a local organization.”

With so many developments, Clouser has relied more on his team members than ever before. Brethren Village’s leadership team includes two vice presidents, a healthcare health services administrator, and 450 staff members who handle the day-to-day needs of their retirement community residents. Rather than worrying about what he may be missing, Clouser has full confidence his team will carry him through.

“We have an incredibly talented and committed leadership team,” he said. “Brethren Village has been in operation since 1897, and the same sense of value that was here so long ago remains because of the dedication of all of our employees.”

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