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DESIGN

Top-of-the-line living: amenities and comforts for long-term care living

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The Amsterdam at Harborside is large by anyone's standards. But the 550,000-square-foot continuing care retirement community in Nassau County, New York, doesn't necessarily feel that big.

"It's very comfortable to walk around," explains Susan DiMotta, principal with design firm Perkins Eastman. "You feel cozy in the public spaces."

The billiard room, which has a bar and lounge chairs, is a good example of this intimate quality.

"It just has a warm kind of feeling," says Jim Davis, president and CEO of Amsterdam House Continuing Care Retirement Community Inc., the not-for-profit sponsor of the CCRC. "You want to shoot pool and take a nap after that."

The building is clearly more five-star hotel than Green House, but the ultimate goal of the project was to offer amenities and accessibility that allows people to age in place. It's clear designers succeeded. The building houses 229 independent living units, 56 skilled nursing rooms and 44 assisted living studio apartments, 18 of which are for memory support.

Amenities include several dining rooms (including a bistro), fitness center, a media room and library.

The skilled nursing wing, which is on the first floor, has its own dining area with waitstaff. A special kitchen is set up with its own entry and direct access to the patio. All of the skilled nursing rooms are private or semi-private and not "cookie cutter," DiMotta explains. The rooms are much larger than typical skilled nursing facility rooms. A lot of natural light brightens the wing.

Big undertaking

Like the building's size, the project itself was colossal. The Amsterdam represents the only CCRC in Nassau County, and one of the few in New York. Rigid zoning regulations as well as cost presented obstacles. Bonds financed the $300 million project. Construction alone cost $145 million, Davis says.

The community is a long time coming. Several years ago, the board of directors decided it wanted to build a CCRC in the county. Renovation of the other Amsterdam community, Amsterdam Nursing Home in Manhattan, took place from 1996 to 1998. Construction began on the new property in 2008. Residents started moving in at the end of August. As of October, 40 independent living residents had settled into the space.

"We thought it was important to continue the mission of serving seniors but in a way that was not government-reimbursement dependent," Davis says.

The building requires an entrance fee, which ranges from $400,000 to $1.8 million. Monthly fees cost between $2,400 and $7,000.

One of the main draws is that residents can move in, knowing that they will not get kicked out, even if they go on Medicaid, Davis says.

"You are, in a sense, buying the insurance if you go to skilled nursing and assisted living," he says. "It's a very attractive model."

The idea for the CCRC began before the market took a nosedive. But over the next few months, a steady stream of new residents is planning to call The Amsterdam home.

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Lessons Learned

1 - An owner's representative is essential to a good outcome from a budget and building standpoint

2 - A large building can still provide intimate spaces if it is designed well

3 - Zoning and finance restrictions force developers to be creative in their design