



Article 1  
**Westminster Village North**  
Indianapolis, Indiana

A Life Plan Community



## The ongoing transformation of a Life Plan community

Not-for-profit Life Plan communities (the term LeadingAge advocates for continuing care retirement communities) are at a critical crossroads. While the aging of America’s population has created significant opportunities, the marketplace has become significantly more competitive, particularly through the emergence of aggressive for-profit senior care companies, as changes in payment models and insurance reimbursement threaten the financial stability of many communities.

Fortunately, the situation is far from hopeless. In fact, there may never be a better opportunity for not-for-profit communities to secure a solid future and withstand even well-financed competitors. The keys are in understanding the changing needs and expectations of the marketplace, creating a long-term vision, and investing in the future.

Westminster Village North in Indianapolis is a shining example of a not-for-profit Life Plan community that recognized changes and took a strategic approach to ensure its continued viability. Today, the community is prospering, and it continues to remain focused on the future, making it a model for other not-for-profits that wish to do more than simply survive. In this series of articles, we’ll examine the changes in our marketplace and the steps Westminster Village North took to become one of its market’s most desirable and successful communities.



Above: Historic aerial photo of Westminster Village North.  
 Top: Rendering of the new rehabilitation center.

# A place of isolation becomes a destination

Drive around the northeast corner of Indianapolis, and you'll see all the signs of a healthy, affluent region. Anchored by the luxury-home communities fronting the 1,890-acre Geist Reservoir, and rapidly filling with desirable subdivisions and aggressive retailers, the area has been a development magnet for the past three decades.

A century ago, the area held a different appeal, with empty meadows and few residents. The bucolic setting was the perfect place to isolate victims of the dreaded "white plague." In 1917, local health officials constructed the Sunnyside Sanitarium, a state-of-the-art facility for isolating and treating tuberculosis patients.

Sunnyside's last patient moved out in 1969. Two years later, Presbyterian Housing Program purchased the abandoned complex and transformed it into a modern retirement housing community under the Westminster Village North name. The main building became a central kitchen, and the smaller structures that formerly housed patient rooms were remodeled into modest apartments, with Plexiglas connectors linking the buildings.



Sunnyside fresh air school in Oaklandon, Indiana.

## Remaining competitive

Westminster Village North enjoyed a great reputation and healthy occupancy rates for the next quarter-century. It became its own locally managed non-profit corporation, and

in 1997, Shelley Rauch, MBA, HFA became Executive Director. She quickly recognized that updating the community was critical. For one thing, changing demographics were fostering new philosophies of senior housing, and Westminster Village North's design was becoming dated.

*"The board began to recognize that we couldn't maintain our reputation for long if we didn't address these challenges."*

- Shelly Rauch, MBA, HFA, Executive Director

An even greater concern was the decades-old infrastructure. "The age of the physical plant was starting to show," Rauch recalls. "We also knew we weren't operating as efficiently as we could. We had several buildings, some with as few as 10 apartments, but each had its own mechanical and electrical systems to maintain. Our reputation and quality outcomes were excellent, but we realized that wasn't going to be enough as people started talking about what the coming generations would expect from senior housing. Clearly, we needed to pursue some capital improvements."

## Debt can be good

Rauch was aware that Westminster Village North's board took pride in the community's lack of debt and might be hesitant to make a significant investment, so she initially focused on what the board would view as practical: the infrastructure. "The directors agreed to an engineering study to determine the life expectancy of everything from roofs, to windows, to electrical and mechanical systems. That study told us we had already exceeded the life of everything in all of our buildings."

A health facility planner who had handled much of the previous renovation work while on Presbyterian Housing Program's staff, Bruce Spear, had joined InterDesign, an Indianapolis architecture and engineering firm, now a part of K2M Design, Inc.®. Rauch reached out to Spear and discussed the situation. He referred her to an investment banking group, which performed an extensive financial analysis concluding that the community's ratios and cash position would be strengthened with the addition of some debt.



Main entrance of Westminster Village North, Indianapolis, Indiana.

“The board began to recognize that we couldn’t maintain our reputation for long if we didn’t address these challenges,” Rauch notes. InterDesign had handled a well-received renovation to the health center, and in 2000, Rauch asked Spear to create a master plan for the community’s future.

*“Early on, they recognized that they needed to take a long-term approach to repositioning the campus if they were going to remain competitive and fiscally viable.”*  
 - Jerry Cripps, RA - Senior Project Manager

“We talked with different architectural firms about what they could do for us, but the board and I appreciated that “InterDesign shared our vision that Westminster felt like a small college campus,” she recalls. “They didn’t want to reinvent us. Instead, they shared our residents’ pride in our grounds and wanted to update the facilities while embracing our history.”

### Thinking about tomorrow

“Westminster Village North’s board was very forward-thinking,” says architect Jerry Cripps, who became the firm’s liaison upon Spear’s retirement. “Early on, they recognized

that they needed to take a long-term approach to repositioning the campus if they were going to remain competitive and fiscally viable.”

The master plan put the board’s willingness to change to the test. The architects recommended razing five of the older buildings and replacing the Plexiglas “tubes” with more functional corridors. While those enclosed walkways were innovative at the time of installation, Rauch says they had become a point of frustration. “The heating and cooling was no longer functional,” Rauch explains, “and residents had to travel through them frequently. That was not the safest idea in extreme heat or cold.”

Why replace instead of rehabilitate? “A lot of the existing buildings just had too many limitations,” explains Cripps. “For example, some were built like hospitals, with low floor-to-floor heights and narrow distances between the center corridor and the exterior walls. Many of the masonry walls were load-bearing, with some first-floor walls 18 inches wide. Over the years, those tiny rooms were cobbled into a variety of funny-shaped configurations. It would have been very expensive to retrofit mechanical systems to ensure that they were meeting today’s codes and the expectations of today’s residents. Often it’s more financially viable to demolish a building and go back in with something you’ve designed for what you want to provide.”

## A modernized Westminster

The master plan's initial recommendations involved nearly \$23 million of new construction and renovations. Existing buildings were re-purposed to meet the changing needs of residents, such as space for patients with Alzheimer's -- a condition that wasn't readily recognized at the time of the original renovation. The plan provided wide, bright connecting hallways, allowed for an expansion of the health center, centralized all service activities, and added a three-story independent living building with plenty of office space. It also called for the construction of additional duplex residences with walk-out basements, which proved to be wildly popular among seniors who didn't want to give up their hobbies.



Independent living duplex residences with walk-out basements.

Our team of architects also examined ways to reduce costs by streamlining operations. "We hadn't realized how efficient we could be," says Rauch. "At the time they developed the plan, we had eight separate kitchens, including satellites, and eight dining rooms. Their recommendations helped us re-invent the way we provided meal service to our residents so it would be more efficient, make the best use of our staffing levels, and make processes easier for our staff."

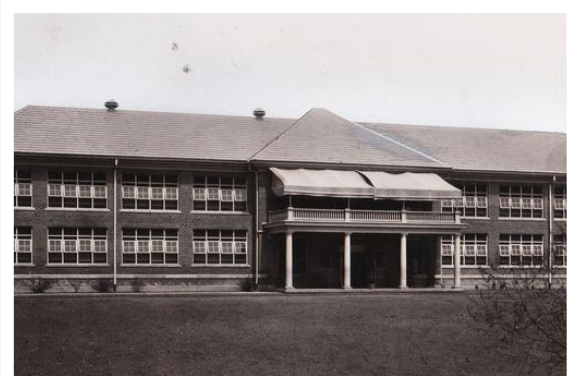
Just as important, the plan sought to improve the community's curb appeal. While residents enjoyed the wooded setting, the extensive greenery rendered the campus all but invisible from nearby roads. By clearing a corridor between Sunnyside Road and the new independent living building, the plan created an attractive front door while reinforcing the fact that Westminster was surrounded by mature trees.

Beyond making recommendations for the facilities, the plan also spelled out a three-phase approach to construction that would minimize the impact upon current residents. "The architectural team was instrumental in helping us accomplish these changes without putting the lives of our residents into turmoil," Rauch notes. "It showed us how we could get to where we needed to be and still satisfy our residents with a high-quality experience."

## The Sunnyside story

During the early years of the 20th Century, tuberculosis was just one of many feared diseases (diphtheria, smallpox, and typhoid among the others), but in Indianapolis, it was the most deadly. In those days, the most promising treatment for this airborne infection was plenty of rest, fresh air, and sunshine. States and counties opened sanitariums to isolate TB patients from the general population.

Tuberculosis didn't discriminate, but the medical community did. By 1915, white TB patients in central Indiana could recuperate in several facilities, but few beds were available for African Americans. The Marion County Tuberculosis Association and City Hospital remedied the situation by building Sunnyside Sanitarium in rural Oaklandon in 1917. The facility's pastoral setting welcomed both black and white patients for decades, even after treatment with streptomycin proved to be far more effective. The Sanitarium closed in 1969.



Sunnyside Sanitarium in rural Oaklandon, Indiana.



The therapy courtyard was designed with a variety of walking surfaces, curbs and ramps; in addition to native plants for color, texture and fragrance.

*“This architectural team has helped us find ways to utilize our grounds to help people with our wellness goals. That includes everything from creative therapy spaces, to outdoor therapy gardens.”*

- Shelly Rauch, MBA, HFA, Executive Director

## Improvements are ongoing

Since the original master plan, Westminster Village North has continued to work with this team of architects to keep the community ahead of the ever-changing marketplace. Recent projects have focused on adding space for short-term rehabilitation patients. “People who need a rehab setting aren’t as willing to accept semi-private rooms that look institutional,” says Rauch. “Hospitals are leading the expectations with more homelike settings, and we’ve moved to what feels like a private suite for rehab patients.” An added advantage is that someone who has a positive experience while recovering from surgery or a medical problem may be more likely to become a resident in the future.

Wellness considerations are important, too, Rauch notes. “This architectural firm has helped us find ways to utilize our grounds to help people with our wellness goals. That includes everything from creative therapy spaces, to outdoor therapy gardens, to offering indoor and outdoor routes between buildings to ensure that residents can get the exercise they need, no matter what Indiana’s weather may bring.”

In just under a century, the property has been transformed from a place designed to isolate people who need rest into a thriving community focused on active lives. Thanks to thoughtful planning and prudent investment, Westminster Village North is healthier today and better able to withstand competition.



Therapy courtyard with physical therapy stations and equipment.

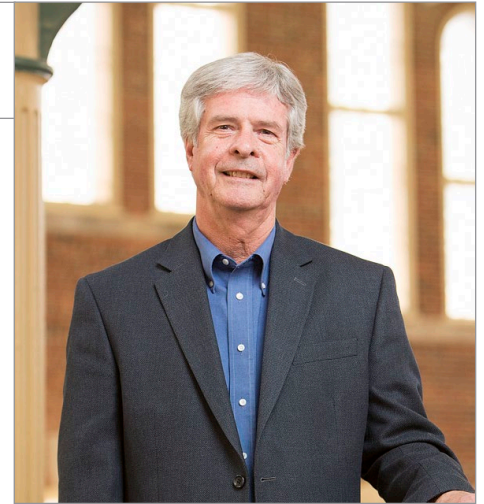
# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON TRUST AND RESULTS

## Dan R. Ware, RA

Senior Project Manager

Dan is a nationally recognized expert in long-term care planning with over 40 years of industry experience. As an active speaker for LeadingAge, Dan is influential in driving progressive change and innovation in long-term healthcare design and development. Focused on topics like healthy living environments, designing for Alzheimer's, and life safety codes, Dan continues to lead and shape the senior living industry.

- **Altenheim Community** Indianapolis, Indiana
- **Copper Trace** Westfield, Indiana
- **Golden Years Homestead** Fort Wayne, Indiana
- **Westminster Village** West Lafayette, Indiana



## Jerry L. Cripps, RA

Senior Project Manager

With more than 33 years of well-rounded architectural experience, Jerry offers a wealth of valuable skills and industry knowledge to any project. From design development to construction administrative services, the range of his abilities span throughout the entire design and construction process. Jerry excels in meeting the needs of his clients, and in managing the details of the project from the design stages thru construction.

- **Westminster Village North** Indianapolis, Indiana
- **Benjamin Manor Adult Living Apartment Community** Lawrence, Indiana
- **Indiana Veterans Home** Lafayette, Indiana
- **Traders Point Christian Church** Whitestown, Indiana

## Amy M. Back, RID

Senior Interior Designer

Amy has 15 years of professional experience including the design and renovation of senior living, healthcare, primary, secondary and higher education, library and faith-based facilities. Amy understands form and function, aesthetics and psychology. She designs for each market segment and end user appropriately. Whether the goal is calming traffic patterns for dementia patients, or fun and rugged material for K-12 students, Amy meets the challenge with fresh enthusiasm, open-mindedness, and polished professional skills.

- **Westminster Village North** Indianapolis, Indiana
- **Copper Trace** Westfield, Indiana
- **Crestwood Village South** Indianapolis, Indiana
- **Robin Run Village** Indianapolis, Indiana





Rendering of the lounge/activity area in the new rehabilitation center addition.

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