



Welcome Home!

Article 3

Westminster Village North
Indianapolis, Indiana

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.



Historic aerial photo of Westminster Village North.

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.



Independent Living courtyard hosts events and informal get-togethers fostering relationships and a sense of community.



The rehabilitation center's activity room can accommodate a family gathering to bake brownies, or a group of spirited residents viewing Sunday afternoon football games.

Creating a real sense of community

Communities may be organic by nature, but that doesn't mean they develop automatically. You can't simply take a heterogeneous group of people, place them in a complex of buildings, and watch a happy community emerge. It could happen, but it's unlikely.

The most successful and sustainable Life Plan communities become that way through thoughtful planning. They have a clear mission, strong leadership, and are willing to reach out for the expertise they need. As non-profit senior living communities face more and stronger competition, particularly from the for-profit sector, establishing a strong sense of community can provide a powerful advantage that will keep vacancy rates low.

Westminster Village North in Indianapolis is a shining example of a Life Plan community that has evolved from what was typical retirement housing just a generation ago. Originally constructed as a tuberculosis sanitarium, Westminster Village North has expanded its offerings to stay ahead of the changing marketplace while enhancing a strong sense of community since its 1971 opening.

Staying up-to-date

Cities and towns evolve over time, but many senior communities appear to be stuck at some point in the past. Often, that point was the most recent remodeling project. The amenities, the décor, the furniture -- everything becomes a snapshot of what was popular at that time.

Shelley Rauch, MBA, HFA has been Westminster Village North's executive director for nearly two decades. Recognizing that the only way a community can stay competitive is to evolve with the times, she was a strong advocate of the master planning process. Early in her tenure, she worked with the community's board of directors to assess the health of the community's infrastructure, and then to develop a plan that would update that infrastructure while enhancing Westminster Village North's standing in the marketplace.

"I've always been a believer that good competition makes everybody better," Rauch explains. "In the Indianapolis market, we've been able to study what other people have done and learn from the best practices."



The building scale, material selection, and details of the rehabilitation center addition sustain the feel of a quiet residential neighborhood.

Curb appeal is key

Impressions of a community are formed long before a prospect sets foot in the Welcome Center. Websites and marketing materials play a role, but the strongest impressions happens when people drive through the front entrance and around the community. Realtors talk about the importance of curb appeal when selling a home, and it's just as important when promoting a Life Plan community.

When K2M Design® developed Westminster Village North's first master plan in 2000, enhancing curb appeal was a primary objective. "Residents love the mature trees that surround the community because they enhance both privacy and connections to nature," explains Jerry Cripps, an architect for the firm who has overseen most of the improvements. "Unfortunately, the foliage was so dense that people couldn't see the community from the road." The master plan called for the development of a three-story independent living building as the community's centerpiece. The front of the building and its impressive portico faced the road, and the team recommended clearing a corridor along the entry drive. "Now, when drivers go by, that building is the first thing they see."

Reflecting surrounding neighborhoods

When the sanitarium was built in 1917, its area was sparsely populated agricultural land. In the late 1960s, farm fields began to give way to suburban development.

During the 1940s, Indianapolis built a dam about three miles north of the property to provide a reliable water supply. The project created the Geist Reservoir, and the land around the banks began to be developed during the 1970s and 1980s. The prime lake-front sites drew luxury-home developers, and the area now known as Geist earned a reputation as one of the city's most affluent districts. Land prices climbed, and local farmers sold out to developers.

Most of the housing around Westminster Village North is occupied by middle- and upper-middle-class families, and the community reflects that image. The northern edge of the community is made up of single-family ranch homes that provide a smooth transition to the two- and three-story buildings. When K2M Design remodeled the nursing care facility, it provided a separate entry with a portico that completed the architectural style of the homes. "We thought a lot about the neighborhood feel as we designed the most recent additions," recalls Cripps. "Because they were so close to the road, we refrained from building multiple stories. We thought that would change the whole impression of coming down the drive through the community."

Not only does the community blend visually with surrounding neighborhoods -- the level and style of finishes and amenities in the independent and assisted-living units are consistent with what local homeowners expect. That congruity also contributes to the strong sense of community.

Create gathering spaces

In towns and cities, people gather in a variety of places, whether that's the morning coffee klatch at the local McDonald's, the ladies who lunch every Thursday at noon, or the Liar's Club that trades tales on a particular park bench. Residents of Life Plan communities may be less inclined (or less able) to travel to spots off the property, so designers would be wise to create gathering spaces.

An excellent example is The Bistro at Westminster Village North. Centrally located and modeled after a coffeehouse, the welcoming space serves up beverages and light meal items. It has become a popular meeting place for friends and informal clubs, as well as a convenient break spot for staff members. Indoor and outdoor tables facilitate conversation and provide a sense of "getting away" that's just a short walk for residents.

Another well-thought-out space is an area the K2M Design team refers to as the Loggia. "It was actually a connection point to

provide a more direct route between the rehabilitation wing and the therapy room," Cripps explains. "Before we built that connection, rehab patients would have to walk down a corridor in the long-term care area. We also wanted to create multiple areas where family members could visit without having to sit in the rooms. We designed the Loggia as an octagonal space with windows all around, so it receives a lot of natural light. It becomes a wide spot in the corridor that provides great spaces for conversation."

Making consistent impressions

A hallmark of successful Life Plan communities like Westminster Village North is an image and attitude that is consistent through the entire community. From the moment a visitor arrives at the front office through wherever he or she goes within the community, every impression and experience reiterates the mission. The art and décor in all the buildings carries a nature theme, reflecting the residents and staff's pride in the community's wooded creekside setting. That brand is echoed in marketing materials and on Westminster's website.



The Loggia provides a natural light filled space for residents and visitors to gather, or a brief respite en-route to or from the therapy center.

Today's prospective resident approaches a community with expectations that weren't common when she started at Westminster, Rauch notes. "They want to see contemporary appliances, updated countertops, choices in flooring, concierge services, onsite banking, a 24-hour receptionist, and excellent dining. They want a community that's willing to work with their personal preferences and that is safe and secure. If they have to stay in the health center or the rehab wing, they want more than a pedestal sink in the bathroom. They want a cabinet where they can put their toiletries, just like they do at home."

The rehab wing includes many of the amenities used in the independent and assisted living sections, allowing it to serve as passive marketing. "Not everyone comes into a community as an independent living resident," says Rauch. "Sometimes they

arrive in long-term care or assisted living because of a catastrophic health change, and once they recover, they move to the next step in the continuum." Or someone who has a short-term stay in the rehab wing may eventually decide to become a permanent resident.

Rauch sees the consistent image as a key benefit of using the master planning process to enhance community. "It makes you think not only about what you want to do today, but how that is going to impact your campus in the future," she says. "We have great grounds, but like anyone else, we have a limited amount of land. Through the master plan, we were able to see how we could best utilize that land to maintain our warm and inviting campus. It gave us a great road map to determine exactly how it will all fit together in the end."



The Master Plan should be a "living" document that continues to evolve and adapt with the industry and market conditions.



Assisted living one-bedroom apartment unit, currently under construction.

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