

# When should you investigate senior living options? Right now.

In senior communities, as in life,  
**timing is everything.**

**Where will you spend your senior years?**

The decision is incredibly important, with a host of considerations. Tina McLeod, Director of Marketing at The Cedars of Chapel Hill, says you should factor in your health as well as a community's financial model, its sponsor's reputation, medical facilities, wellness programs, staff-to-resident ratio, activities and environment. One detail that doesn't get the attention it deserves is timing. The Triangle's senior population is booming, and many people don't realize that communities may have long waiting lists. Here, we look at senior living options and how timing may affect your decision.

## **Continuing Care Retirement Communities May Have Waiting Lists.**

Continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) offer a wonderful, active lifestyle. They also give residents peace of mind knowing that their ongoing health and housing needs will be met on-site. One timing-related issue with CCRCs is that most assess prospective residents to determine whether they are physically and mentally capable of independent living before accepting them; wait too long and you may lose that window of opportunity. There's also the issue of long waiting lists. Maryella Cameron, Director of Marketing at Glenaire, says the wait is generally about two years but may be longer. She advises investigating CCRCs in your late 60s or early 70s.

Don Gardner, 80, started investigating CCRCs after his wife's death eight years ago. "I needed a place to spend my retirement years and chose a CCRC because of the health care. I didn't want to be a burden to my son." Fortunately, Gardner wasn't faced with a waiting list for his Chapel Hill CCRC because it was just being built. He says he's happy with his



decision and adds, "I've made some really good friends here."

## **Best to Investigate Independent Living Communities Early.**

Independent living communities offer apartments or homes with extra services such as maintenance, transportation and, sometimes, limited medical care. According to Yvonne Dewald, Marketing Director at Independence Village, these communities don't offer the continuing care that CCRCs do, but neither do they charge a CCRC's large, up-front fee for such care. Of the timing issue, Dewald says, "People should start investigating when they begin their financial planning, in their 40s. My advice is to look into options ASAP when you're young. If that doesn't happen, at least do it five years prior to retirement."

Georgie Tilley, 84, moved into Dewald's community in Raleigh a decade ago after breaking her shoulder at home. "I had all kinds of help but I realized I needed somebody on occasion. I immediately knew [an independent living community] was what I wanted and started making plans. I broke my shoulder on the last day of the year and made arrangements to move in September of the next year."

## Moves to Assisted Living are Often Unplanned

Assisted living communities are for people who need help with daily living but don't require nursing home care. Rebecca Smith, Regional Sales Manager of Brookdale Senior Living, says the top reasons for choosing assisted living are help with managing medications, bathing, dressing and grooming; being served three balanced meals a day; and enjoying healthy social interaction. When it comes to timing, she says a move is usually crisis-driven, not the result of careful planning. Adult children are generally the primary decision makers after their parents experience repeated falls, depression, weight loss or failure to take medication properly.

That was the scenario for David Fox and his mother Loma, 88. Until she suffered a fall last year, Loma was living independently and even driving. The fall required rehabilitation at a nursing home that recommended assisted living after her discharge. Loma initially resisted leaving her home but is now content, rooming in Durham with a former church acquaintance. "It's worked out real well," says David. "Her spirits are better because she's with other people."

## Skilled Nursing Usually Fills an Immediate Need

As with assisted living, admission to skilled nursing facilities is also frequently unplanned, since they usually fill an immediate, temporary need for 24-hour nursing care. Carolyn Nelson, R.N., Admission Marketing Director for Blue Ridge Health Care Center, says there's little pre-planning for short-term stays unless a patient has advance notice of a surgery such as joint replacement. "It may also be planned for a senior whose care needs have increased so that they require a more long-term care situation." She emphasizes that many skilled nursing facilities are full and that there's a shortage of long-term care beds in Wake County.

In the final analysis, our experts agreed that the time to start investigating senior living communities is now. As Rebecca Smith of Brookdale Senior Living says, "When it comes to any senior living situation, you should plan for it before you need it."

