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River Landing gated community in Wallace offers a country-club atmosphere and is popular with retirees who want to remain active.

Changing with time

Elder-care options are expanding to keep pace with North Carolina's growing population of retirees, whose care needs and amenity requirements are varied.

Sidewalks wind through Carol Woods' tree-filled 120 acres. Its almost 500 residents follow them from cottages, town homes and apartments to the fitness center, pool, library, art studio and three-story health center. They also take part in any of 90 committees and special-interest groups or even the community's board of directors, where they have a voice in everything from fee changes to the social lounge's carpet color. Residents are encouraged to get involved, develop lasting friendships and share talents and experiences developed during their careers and past adventures. This isn't a place to slow down.

Its name derived from the forested campus, Carol Woods in Chapel Hill is a continuing care retirement com-

munity, where older adults transition from independent living to assisted living and then skilled nursing care as they age. "We were the first CCRC in our area," says President and CEO Patricia Sprigg, who has 40 years of elder-care experience. "We were the first who designed neighborhood skilled nursing and small houses. We were one of the first to introduce assisted living to our campus, and we were the first to introduce the option of remaining in your own home out in the larger community. We will never stop expanding our thinking or our innovation when it comes to serving older adults."

North Carolina is home to 15 CCRCs, which are mostly in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill and Southern Pines-Pinehurst regions. Residents pay an entrance fee — often



between \$200,000 and \$400,000 — and a monthly fee, usually between \$2,000 and \$4,000. The latter covers recreational and social amenities, utilities and even meals. But CCRCs are only one option for where older North Carolinians can spend their golden years. There are others ready to meet the diverse social, economic and care needs of this growing segment of the population.

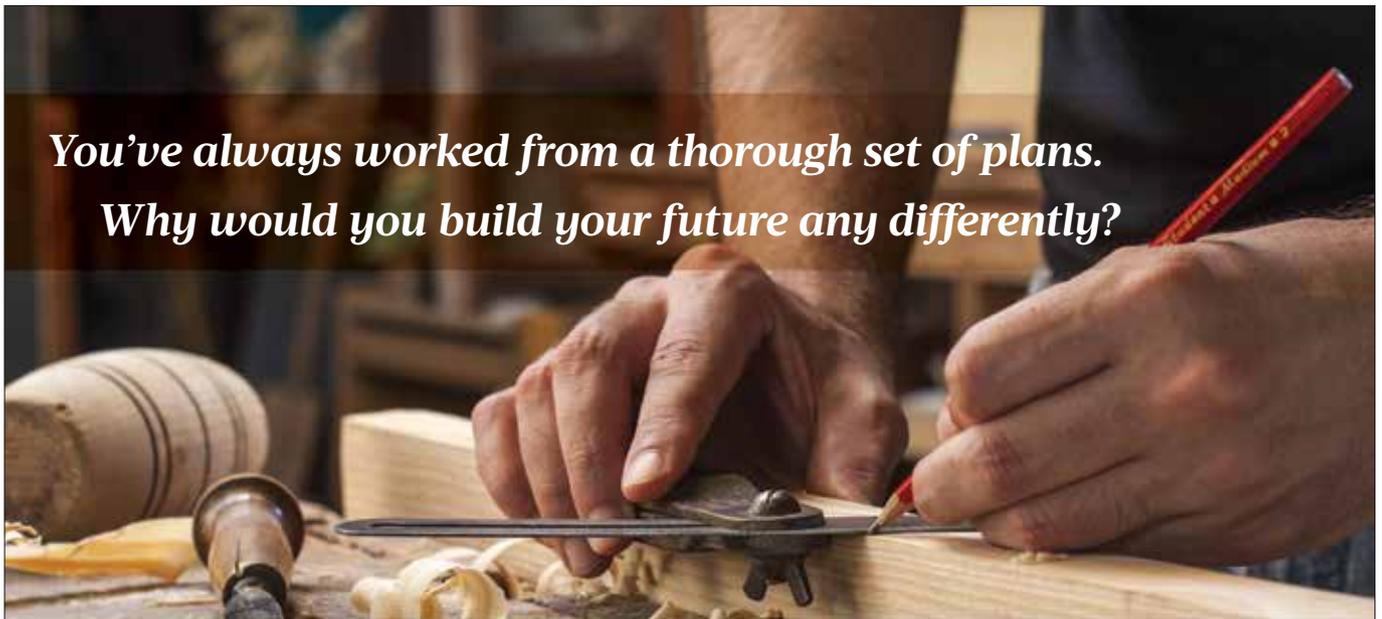
Carolina Demography, a consulting service of UNC Chapel Hill's Carolina Population Center, predicts more than one in five U.S. residents will be 65 or older by 2035. North Carolina will be home to 2.5 million of them, up from 1.4 million or 14.3% of the state's population in 2013. The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, a nonprofit focusing on national health issues, says 36,722 people in North Carolina lived in certified nursing facilities in 2015.

Megan Lamphere is section chief for adult-care licensure at the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. It licenses more than 1,400 adult care homes and nurs-

ing facilities and sets requirements for nutrition and food service, activity programs, building standards and safety. "We're one of the premier states for retirement living, and we hear about the cases of the baby boomer population. People are much more transient these days. They go to college, leave college and move away from where their parents are. We also have a lot more women in the workforce, and they're not home to care for their aging parents. And families are having fewer children, so there are less caregivers available, which creates more of a reliance on public and private industry and services."

N.C. Department of Health and Human Services fields numerous requests for elder care help, says Victor Orija, its long-term care ombudsman. "We get calls from people out of state, and they want to find out what's available. Or they're becoming more elderly, and they want to know what's available in North Carolina. The baby boomer workforce is beginning to dwindle down, and so you look at how many people will be coming

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Continuing care retirement communities, such as Twin Lakes Community in Burlington, allow retirees to transition from independent living to skilled nursing care as they age. They also offer a wide range of amenities.

into the market. You have to have the facilities to support these people. And if you have money, all is well and good. But then there also is Medicaid and insurance. You're looking at a lot of challenges."

CCRCs, home-health agencies, assisted living centers and nursing homes are witnessing the population growth and societal changes firsthand. "People are tending to move away [from where they grew up] more now, or the children have moved farther away, so they're not taking over the family business or taking care of the family," says Forrest Sanderson, executive director of the Visiting Angels franchise in Wilmington, which opened in January. It's a home health agency that assists with meal preparation, light housekeeping, medication reminders, bathing and dressing, and companionship. "You're either going to take mom and dad with

you when you move, or you have someone else take care of them."

When Sanderson relocated to the Port City from Waco, Texas, for the job, he knew that the franchisor, Bryn Mawr, Pa.-based Living Assistance Services Inc., had already received numerous requests for home health care help from southeastern North Carolina. "There's a lot of demand, as you can see by the number of [home health] providers there are in the area," he says. "We're not here to push anybody out, but there's a lot of business and a lot of people who need help, so we're here to serve those people. People want to retire to the beach, so the demographics are good for a lot of reasons."

Seattle-based A Place for Mom Inc., a referral service for assisted living needs, including housing, finances, moving and elder law, says Alaska's remote location means it has the country's highest median monthly

assisted living cost at \$6,000. Missouri's \$2,288 is the lowest. Independent living can run about \$2,600 per month in Charlotte, with assisted living almost \$4,000 and memory care units, designed for those with diseases such as Alzheimer's, about \$5,000.

River Landing in Wallace, a 1,600-acre gated community with 450 homes about 40 minutes from Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach, is popular with seniors who prefer to own their home and enjoy a socially active lifestyle. "We're not really classified as a retirement community, although a lot of the residents are retired," says Zelle Brown, marketing director and manager of its Custom Home Program. "We do have some professionals as well as singles, but most are 55-plus."

River Landing has two golf courses, swimming pools, tennis courts and a 60,000-square-foot clubhouse. There are

fitness classes and scheduled activities, too. “We are a country club environment, but we do a lot of community work, such as reach out to [Marines] at Camp Lejeune at Thanksgiving, who may not be able to be with family,” Brown says. “People open their homes to them. It really does feel like family here.”

Diversity is as important in care as it is amenities. Carol Woods’ Sprigg says one in eight older adults in the U.S. lives with dementia. “Our traditional approach has been to shun, segregate, hide and treat as if the person is no longer a person. There is not enough mortar and bricks — or staff — to continue to create what is known as special units or memory care units. Once a person is diagnosed, they lose their voice. Then, for many, once their perception of the environment changes to the degree that their reactions are no longer predictable to us, we tend to segregate. This is a costly and long-term ineffective way to deal.”

Carol Woods does not have a designated memory care unit. It maintains a restraint-free environment that encourages community participation. That’s counter to what’s happening off the property. “We live in an ageist society. ... We continually look at the older population in terms of deficits and the burden they might place,” says Sprigg, who is a former member of North Carolina Study Commission on Aging, served on the American Association of Homes Services for the Aging’s board of directors and is the former chairwoman of the North Carolina Association of Non-Profit Homes for the Aging, which is now LeadingAgeNCBoard. “Yet they represent the greatest number of the population with the majority of discretionary spending. I tend to see this time as an opportunity to embrace and maximize the contribution this population is able to make if given proper support. They have the time and the talent combined with rich life experiences.”

Sprigg, who works with the Orange County Master Aging Plan committee to maximize resources for seniors and break negative attitudes toward aging, envisions a future when older adults have even more options to remain involved and active decision-makers in their communities.

“Carol Woods is at the forefront of the planning, not because it will directly benefit the residents who live in our community, but rather it strengthens the community as a whole. We are interested in supporting successful aging beyond our walls. What is most important to an individual is choice, so the wider the variety of options people can have the better. We also believe it is important to provide an option to allow residents to remain in their own home in the

larger community, if that is their choice. So 100 of our residents [in an early acceptance program] do not live on our campus. In the future I believe we will see housing types and options that are not even designed yet that take advantage of community living, shared housing, neighborhood clustering. As far as Carl Woods’ expansion, we are always expanding out thinking.” ■

— *Kathry Blake is a freelance wrtier who lives in eastern North Carolina.*



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