



Streator: Evergreen Place provides independent living in an aging world

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Evergreen Place, a supportive living community, is a safe haven for people moving into their golden years. Tastefully decorated in warm earth tones, it almost feels like an upscale hotel.

Evergreen Place Director Amy Missel says many visitors are surprised at the facility's appearance.

"When the building was near completion, all of us were so amazed at how beautiful and comfortable everything is. Everyone here wanted to hurry up to get to age 65 so we could move in," she said with a laugh. "A son of one of our residents told me that he knew this would be a nice place for his parents but he had no idea how nice everything really was."

Missel is a registered nurse who spent 12 years at St. Mary's Hospital on the third floor working with babies.

"It was a big step to leave the hospital and come here," she said. "It is a lot of work to create a welcoming place for our seniors but it's worth it. We get so much back from the residents, their families and relatives. This job is very worthwhile."

Heritage Enterprises of Bloomington has been involved with many aspects of residential and health care services for senior citizens. And since 1962, every assisted or supportive home it built has been improved upon. Evergreen Place, 1529 E. Main St., has 53 apartments have everything a senior needs: a kitchenette, a bath with a shower and large windows.

"All of the windows are bigger than normal so that the sun shines in," Missel said, "and we have a lot of windows throughout the building. Everything is handicapped-accessible, including wider doorways. We have two elevators, one larger than the other for moving in furniture. Our residents can bring anything they had at their old home here. It's just another way to make their life here as easy as possible."

Currently there are 43 residents, including four couples, that occupy 36 apartments.

"We have one-bedroom and studio apartments that are smaller with an open floor plan and firewalls between every one," Missel continued. "One thing you will notice everywhere are call buttons. In each apartment there is a call light next to the bed and another one in the bath. The apartments do not have stoves because of safety issues."

Past the lobby, the first main destination is the dining room.

"Food service is the hardest part of this job," Missel said. But our residents are very happy with how the food tastes."

Three meals a day are served restaurant-style and snacks are available around the clock..

Missel's favorite room is the sunroom.

"It's so warm and inviting here. This room is used for visiting or just finding some time alone. Residents and visitors use the room for reading or to make phone calls."

But what do the residents do all day? Helen Strauss is the residential service coordinator. Outside her office door is a monthly schedule filled with activities both inside and outside of Evergreen Place.

"We have cookie and baking schedules in our kitchen," Missel said. "There's a three-day-a-week exercise program and we have a stylist, Carrie Truchon, that works in our salon on Thursdays and Fridays. There's a central family room with tables for playing cards. We have a weekly movie night with popcorn. There are a lot of indoor activities that our residents can walk to and that's important. Walking is necessary for good muscles and we do have chairs located throughout the hallways for our residents that may need to take a little rest."

Strauss provides another service for residents.

"When she's out shopping and she finds things she thinks our residents will like, she buys them, then displays them in her office. People can stop by and purchase anything she has on display on a cabinet at no additional charge."

Missel said that some residents went on the Bethlehem Walk at Central Church of Christ, to the Peoria Festival of lights and a lot of other outside activities.

"Our staff will take our residents shopping or to doctor appointments."

Evergreen Place employs 27 people ranging from food service workers to certified nurses aides such as Betty Bishop and Sheri Stasko, who are on call 24 hours a day.

"Deb Clayton is our wellness coordinator and there are some health requirements we have for our residents," Missel said. "They have to be able to toilet themselves and have no history of mental illness."

Debbie Oliver is the first voice you hear when you call Evergreen Place. She is also the first person visitors see as they step into the building.

"I absolutely love my job," she said. "Believe it or not, I really look forward to coming into work every day."

Oliver home-schooled all four of her children and found herself ready for a job. Her enthusiasm shows in her face.

"I look forward to talking to people, whether it's on the phone or in person. I'm very lucky and happy to be here."

Missel said the job of running a supportive living home can be stressful and that's the way it is for most jobs.

"Especially when trying to get everything ready for our residents. But it really is a wonderful job. And when I hear our staff and residents say 'Thank you,' I know I'm in the right job."

A Growing Trend

There are more than 100 supportive living facilities operating in Illinois that give about 6,900 people a living arrangement that enables them to retain their independence while having constant access to health service.

Through the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services' Supportive Living Program, people 65 years or older have an alternative to nursing home care — apartment-style housing combined with personal care and other services so residents can live independent lives. In October, HFS Director Barry Maram said through "this Medicaid-model of assisted living, we are saving the state money by providing an alternative to costly nursing home care, and more importantly, the residents can retain their dignity ztand at the same time receive the compassionate care they deserve."

HFS has obtained a Home and Community Based services "waiver" (under federal law) to allow payment for services that are not routinely covered by Medicaid, including personal care, homemaking, laundry, medication supervision and 24-hour staff to meet residents' scheduled and unscheduled needs. The resident is responsible for paying the cost of room and board at the facility. Each SLF must also regularly assess each resident's health status and consult with the resident on an ongoing service plan that promotes health and wellness.

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Evergreen Place: Married couple love their new home

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Rollie and Rita Marshall were feeling the effects of age. Originally from Wenona, the Marshalls had owned a six-acre farm.

"About 10 years ago, our boys didn't want Rollie to get on the tractor anymore. They were worried," Rita said.

"Yes," Rollie said with a twinkle in his eyes. "They started taking all my toys away."

The Marshalls moved to Streator and led a good life until "Rollie started falling down and having spells," Rita said. "We had wonderful neighbors who offered to help us but it was hard. I was very uneasy all the time, worrying about Rollie's health."

Rollie and Rita decided to make the move to Evergreen Place.

"We've been here since Dec. 7 and we absolutely love it," she said. We have a nurse on call for Rollie and the food is wonderful. We don't miss our home at all. We miss our neighbors, of course, but we don't miss our old home."

"My son and daughter-in-law live in Bloomington and came for a visit once we moved in," Rita continued. "He told me 'I thought this would be nice, but not this nice!' He's right," she said with a laugh. "This is a wonderful beautiful place with people watching over you."

Rita has advice for senior citizens wondering whether or not to make the move to a supportive living home.

"Just do it. It will make your children feel better because they won't be worried and it will be easier on you. You will feel better once you make this move. That's the most important thing."

PHOTOS



Photo: The Times/Tom Sistik
Rita and Rollie Marshall relax at their new apartment in Evergreen Place, a new supportive living community in Streator.