

BUSINESS ::

Retirees putting focus on families More boomers relocating to be near children

April 6, 2008

By David Sharos Special to The Sun

These days, baby boomers represent one of the largest segments of the population who will no doubt exert a tremendous amount of influence on society for decades to come.

Thanks to the '80s and '90s stock market boom and that many of those boomers earned college degrees and maximized their earning potential, many have lots of disposable income available. One of the places they will spend it is on retirement.

Years ago, Midwesterners headed for the various sun-belts in search of golf, water and freedom from shoveling snow. But a renewed trend in today's housing market seems to suggest that more of those downsizing are moving to be near their families.



Retiring baby boomers are looking for more from retirement, including a sense of community and time with family. Area retirement homes are seeing a new trend also, parents moving closer to grown children or grandchildren. *Stephanie Dowell / Post-Tribune*

The Web site seniorresource.com notes that 70 percent of those 65 years and older live within one hour of a child. And a year ago, writers Sharon Graham Niederhaus and John L. Graham noted in an article in USA Today that "some 6 million American grandparents are living under one roof with their grandchildren" - part of what has become, at times, three-generational housing.

Noticeable shift

Dee McHale, admissions and marketing director for Tabor Hills Retirement Community in Naperville, said she and other officials at Tabor began to observe a shift in seniors' focus during the last three to five years.

"We have seen more seniors looking to live by their children - a development that's probably driven by three factors: companionship, money and health issues," McHale said. "Here in Naperville, we've traditionally been a bedroom community with people moving an average of every three years, but that has changed. People are staying longer, and those who are older need to be by children."

Economic pressures are increasing, McHale said, as people are living longer and often depleting their resources with many years of life remaining.

Mark Blau, executive director of Sunrise Assisted Living in Naperville agrees that the migration by seniors back to their adult children has been increasing during the past five years, but that it also is motivated by guilt.

"There's no question that adult children feel having their parents near them is an obligation they should meet, and they'll feel guilty if they don't," Blau said. "Economics is probably the main reason for moving back, but the guilt issue is very close to it."

Susan Fienberb, director of communications for the Boston-based HouseWorks, a private-pay home-care company agrees that "adult children feel responsible for their parents" and that not having long distances between them makes care-giving easier.

Family time

Here in Naperville, seniors coming into the area say the desire to be near family is largely driven by recognizing their limitations as well as wanting to be part of a larger family dynamic, while still maintaining their independence.

"I've lived in Winfield for years, but at 73, I want to be closer to my children and grandchildren," said Bev Tulio, a retired Realtor who plans to move in 2010 to a new property being developed in Elmhurst. "I still want my independence, and I want my kids to have theirs. But unlike a lot of my friends my age, at least I have a plan."

Don Engelsman, vice president of marketing for Chicago's Rest Haven Christian Services, who are overseeing the development of the Elmhurst property where Tulio plans to move, believes seniors regard any family time as precious.

"Many seniors want to interact and be a part of their children's and grandchildren's lives," Engelsman said. "That may be a very small or limited interaction, but one that is held dear by many seniors."

Tabor Hills plans to open a new assisted living facility with 95 units by the end of March, and a dozen of those residents have indicated they are moving there to be near family. Jeanne Zepelak of Sugar Grove is looking forward to having her 95-year-old father and 92-year-old mother move in to the new Naperville property from New Mexico.

"This has been a mutual decision between my parents and me," Zepelak said. "My folks were living in independent and assisted-living situations, but they have more health issues now. ... The move is going to make things better for them and all of us here."

http://www.suburbanchicagonews.com/napervillesun/business/879751,6_3_NA06_FAMILY_S1.article