

Metroland - Toronto Division

Developer, non-profit seniors centre team up in Scarborough

Thursday, October 16, 2008

Page: 01

Section: Toronto Business Times - News

Column: 1

A developer and a trusted non-profit seniors centre in Scarborough have combined to build retirement condominiums with services and luxuries they say a new generation of seniors want.

Boasting a resort lifestyle and aiming for the highest standards in green living, Harmony Village "should change the way people build seniors' communities" in Canada, predicts Jack Pong, president of City Core Developments Inc.

Besides private amenities for its 661 apartments and 34 assisted living units, the development at Warden and Sheppard avenues includes a public community centre for seniors in a part of the city where recreation and social services are in short supply.

Typically, seniors' communities are built without many services, with an emphasis on housing that is easy to maintain, said Pong, arguing these homes turn out to be less desirable places to live.

But aging baby boomers are looking for more out of life in a retirement home, Pong said.

"They've had more all their lives and they will expect more when they come to retire."

To attract this new market, City Core chose to partner with Scarborough's St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre, which opened its first homes for seniors on Finch Avenue in 1978. The non-profit group's second building, St. Paul's Terrace, opened in 2000 with 91 "life lease" units sold like condos without a title transfer.

Harmony Village, true condos scheduled for completion in December 2011 (with an Oct. 4 opening sales date) a half-mile away from the original St. Paul's location, will share in the litany of services provided by the group's 35 employees and 450 volunteers.

Many of these - from wellness clinics and Tai Chi to cooking and computer classes - will operate from a new 60,000-square-foot community centre next door.

Serving 12,000 to 15,000 seniors a year, the building will have an entire floor of medical offices and an interior "streetscape" promenade where seniors can walk and socialize instead of seeking out the local mall.

As well, Harmony Village will also have some of the usual condo amenities - theatre, putting green, gym - just for its own residents.

The new community's green credentials alone should

be remarkable. Harmony Village is seeking a Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification, which would include extremely efficient water and energy management, geothermal heat and solar power.

"We will, through no fossil fuels, deliver heating and cooling to this building," Pong said.

A dialogue between City Core and St. Paul's started after Pong, seeking out options when his mother was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, came to recognize the local centre's reputation for providing first-class services to seniors. "They are trusted," he said.

The unusual partnership is now a selling feature, a good combination for "aging in place" more people will want when they see it in Harmony Village, said Larry Burke, St. Paul's executive director.

"It's going to be, hopefully, a lifelong place to live."

The development may also be in an advantageous part of Toronto, as the Steeles-L'Amoreaux area covering much of Agincourt in northwest Scarborough is recognized as an area that lacks community services and convenient places to put them.

According to census data, the neighbourhood has the fastest growing seniors population in Toronto. From 1996 to 2006, the number of residents age 75 and up grew by 65 per cent.

The population of residents 65 and up rose by 27 per cent, compared to only 12 per cent in the rest of Scarborough. That's because people who moved into the new subdivisions of Agincourt in their 20s and 30s are now 60- and 70-somethings, Burke said.

© 2008 Metroland Printing, Publishing & Distributing