



The SRES® Professional

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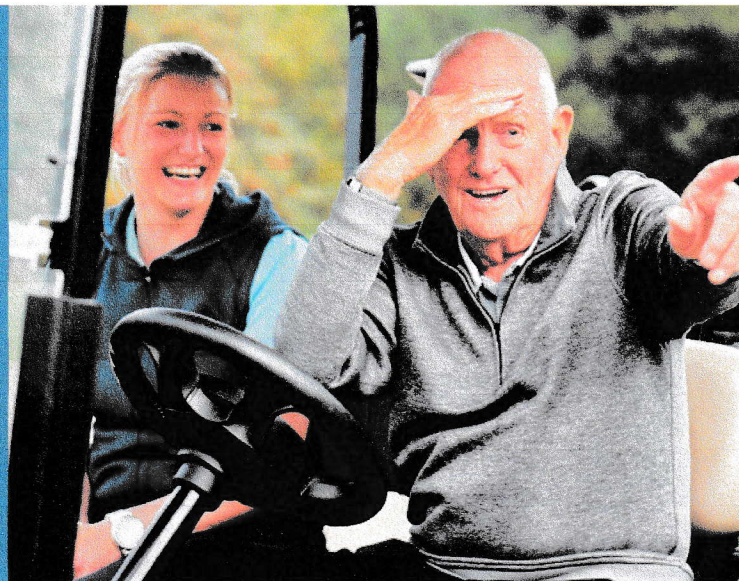
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The Evolving Landscape of Senior Communities



The more common types of living arrangements for seniors are well-known: independent and assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, and continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs). Less well-known are alternative and affinity—or niche—communities and the growth of sustainable housing for seniors.

Many seniors wish to age in place or stay independent for as long as possible. Doing so can necessitate extra support, and two alternative senior community models are designed to help. The “villages” model provides support from neighbors near the home where the senior currently lives. While “cohousing”—also relying

on members of the community for support—is purpose-built, independent living designed to provide for the common needs of senior residents.

Niche retirement communities have been around since the late 1980s. Among the earliest to open was Air Force Village West, a retirement community for retired U.S. military officers, opened in Riverside, California, in 1989. At that time, it was the third-largest senior living community in the country. However, shifts in the population makeup of Southern California eventually led to financial troubles, and in 2015, it was forced to abandon its affinity model.

While that community faced challenges, hundreds of others have sprung up, creating unique offerings that take advantage of seniors’ varied interests and differentiate them from more common offerings.

Fueled by factors such as energy efficiency, cost savings, increased environmental awareness and positive health impacts, green senior living communities are experiencing significant growth. The evolving landscape of green housing is being transformed by technology, allowing homeowners and developers to reduce their environmental footprint while creating comfortable and modern living spaces. 🏡

FAST FACTS

NUMBER OF RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

IN 2013: **16,565** TODAY: **19,000+**

[statista.com](https://www.statista.com)

56 OF THE 200 LARGEST CONTINUING-CARE COMMUNITIES

are faith-based
affinity communities

[nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)

The size of Mirabella at ASU in Tempe, AZ, the largest university-based retirement community:

298 UNITS

[caminoassociates.com](https://www.caminoassociates.com)

The number of properties the Cohousing Association of America currently lists:

307 PROPERTIES ACROSS **43 STATES**

[cohousing.org](https://www.cohousing.org)

80% OF THE **175-ACRE** ECO-VILLAGE IN ITHACA, NY

is dedicated to farming, recreational trails and wildlife habitats.

[nextavenue.org](https://www.nextavenue.org)



Alternatives To Traditional Senior Communities



COHOUSING COMMUNITIES

Cohousing communities are designed neighborhoods with private homes arranged around a shared common area, often with a common house where meals and other activities take place.

Cohousing communities differ from many other senior communities in that they are self-managed. Members make decisions, maintain infrastructure and organize through committees for meals, activities, budgeting and maintenance. This self-management approach saves money while fostering connection and mutual care among residents.

Cohousing also differs from other shared housing or communal living models, such as communes and co-ops. While these other models may share some similarities, cohousing communities are designed to foster a strong sense of connection and collaboration among residents while also respecting individual privacy.

A defining feature of cohousing communities is the practice of regularly sharing meals together in a common house, a practice that strengthens bonds and cultivates a sense of belonging. For many cohousing communities, sustainability and affordability are key benefits as private homes are typically more compact, with energy consumption reduced and shared landscaping that lowers costs.

Many also find that the cost and need for external care or support services, such as social services or in-home care, decrease with community engagement. When neighbors care for each other, they can often offer support that might otherwise require outside intervention.

VILLAGES

Villages are membership-driven, grassroots organizations that coordinate and deliver programs and services that make it easier for their members to stay in their homes as they grow older. These neighborhood organizations can be an alternative to a senior community or assisted living facility by connecting older adults who want to stay in their home to services, support and social engagement that can help them remain active, healthy and vital. Acting as support networks for their members, Villages often provide services such as transportation, technology assistance, running errands to the pharmacy and grocery store as well as community engagement activities and resources for aging interdependently.

Existing Villages can be identified by geography through the Village to Village Network [website](#).

SPECIAL-INTEREST SENIOR COMMUNITIES: Like-Minded Neighbors



From fitness enthusiasts to music fans to amateur astronomers, there's a niche retirement community for almost everyone. While niche offerings—also known as affinity retirement communities—currently account for a small percentage of the nation's 50,000 or so senior communities and facilities, as the market grows, more entities will seek differentiation and value by catering to specific audiences.

In 2017, Jimmy Buffett introduced the Latitude Margaritaville retirement community in Daytona Beach, which saw 150+ fans camp overnight for initial sales. That 7,000-resident community sold out, and additional locations are now open in the Florida Panhandle's Watersound and Hilton Head, South Carolina.

When Kendal Corp. announced Enso Village, a Zen-inspired retirement community in Northern California, 1,194 people made \$1,000 priority reservations. When introduced in 2020, all 275 units sold within four months. A second Southern California location is planned for 2027.

Even Disney has recognized the potential for affinity retirement. With its Longtable Park Residences of the Cotino Community in Rancho Mirage, California, senior residents can enjoy what Disney calls "Storyliving," with grounds and amenities designed by Disney Imagineers.

Other special-interest senior communities that have growing bases include:

UNIVERSITY-BASED RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES (URCS)

The over 100 university-based senior communities fall into three categories: communities built, owned and operated by the university; retirement communities built on land owned by the university; and universities that partner with senior communities located close by. Depending on the university, URCs offer multiple types of housing arrangements, including apartment-style living, single-family homes, duplexes and townhomes. Communities with skilled nursing facilities may provide individual rooms in a hospital-type setting.

Through the university, URCs often offer fitness centers, recreation centers, pools, sports venues, sports teams, access to performing arts and cultural communities, music venues, theater performances, art galleries, a first-class library and the opportunity to enroll in non-credit college courses to provide intellectual stimulation. Plus, the potential for interactions with college-age students, professors and university staff.

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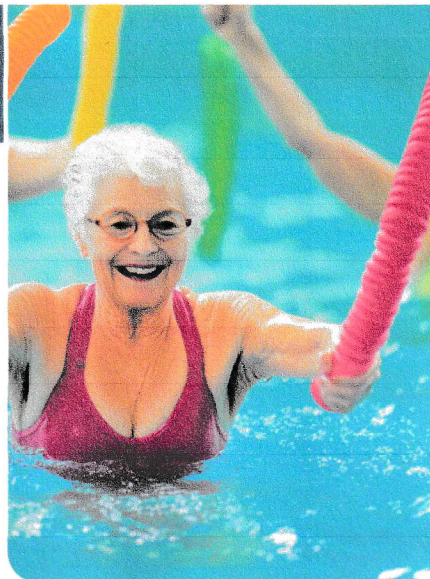
FAITH-BASED SENIOR COMMUNITIES

When leaving their private homes to move to a retirement community, seniors often face a sense of disconnection from familiar surroundings and those they love. Faith-based communities can help fill this gap, providing meaningful connections with others who share their faith and honor the traditions that go with it.

Often affiliated with specific denominations like Presbyterianism, Catholicism, Christianity or Judaism, these communities offer seniors a place to live with others who share similar values and beliefs. They often provide opportunities for religious services, prayer groups, Bible studies, worship services and other faith-centered activities, fostering a strong sense of community and purpose.

RECREATION-FOCUSED SENIOR COMMUNITIES

Almost every retirement community offers things such as fitness equipment or basic activities. For others, it is the focus of the community. Many communities are built around golf courses, but others offer a host of facilities, activities and events to help seniors stay active and engaged. Recreational activities are often climate-dependent, with communities in warmer areas offering more outdoor recreation. A community in Arizona has 13 recreation centers and six fitness centers with an indoor pool, outdoor pool, aerobics & dance studio, hobby & game room, ceramics studio, arts & crafts studio,



lapidary studio, woodworking shop, billiards, walking & biking trails, tennis courts, pickleball courts, bocce ball courts, shuffleboard courts, horseshoe pits, basketball court, volleyball court, table tennis, racquetball courts, picnic area and photography studio available.

Before deciding on a specific recreation-focused retirement community, it's important to understand which recreational offerings are included in regular monthly costs and which incur an extra fee.

NUTRITION-FOCUSED SENIOR COMMUNITIES

Nutrition-focused retirement communities prioritize the dietary needs of residents, offering balanced meals, diverse menus and personalized meal plans to support overall health and well-being. While many communities offer meals or have restaurants on-site, nutrition-focused retirement communities make this their focus, offering a variety of healthy and appealing food choices and signature chefs, and engaging dietitians and nutritionists to assess resident requirements, tailor menus to meet individual needs and preferences and provide nutrition education and counseling services.

HOW TO SELECT A NICHE COMMUNITY

Seniors should conduct a self-inventory to understand what they want and need in retirement, including any medical support that might be needed.

Consider the cost. Niche communities are on the expensive side. Many follow the entry fee model, where residents pay between \$100,000 and \$1 million or more, depending on the location and size of the home or apartment.

And fees. There can be fees for maintenance, activities, meals and other services, which can add up quickly.

Go on tours. Not just once, multiple times, at different times of the day and different days of the week. Talk to the staff and the administrators.

Try the food. Not just the special of the day, everything.

See what's of interest. Attend a few sessions of an activity or interest. Is it what's desired? Are there others who participate in those activities?

Learn how the community is managed. Make sure the property is economically viable. Ask what kind of financial reserves the community has. Is there a board of directors? Who is responsible for the community's finances? Is it non-profit? If not, who are the owners? 



The Growth of Green in Senior Housing

BUILDING DESIGN

One of the most notable trends in eco-friendly senior communities is sustainable building design that lowers utility bills and reduces environmental footprints. Features of sustainable design include smart-home technology, energy-efficient appliances, solar panels, rainwater harvesting systems, common green areas and low-flow faucets and toilets.

REDUCED UTILITY COSTS

Some communities lessen seniors' monthly bills by using solar heating and cooling, LED lighting, smart thermostats, energy-efficient appliances, rainwater harvesting systems and low-flow faucets and toilets that also reduce environmental impact.

WASTE MINIMIZATION

Many green senior communities implement easy-to-use recycling programs and composting to help reduce waste.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

Green senior communities often feature electric vehicle charging stations, bike paths and hybrid shuttles that transport seniors to places of need.

GARDENING INITIATIVES

Community gardens provide fresh produce and social opportunities, boosting morale and well-being. One study found older adults who participated in a therapeutic gardening program maintained healthy sleep patterns and mental health, including reduced anxiety and improved brain function.

MORE BREATHABLE AIR

In addition to using renewable and recyclable materials, such as cork, stone and wood, in construction to promote healthier indoor air for residents, many sustainably planned communities include significant green space that also benefits air quality. 🌿

Many older adults move because of rising home maintenance costs. Annual upkeep can cost anywhere between 1% and 4% of the total cost of a residence. To reduce those expenses and provide a healthier lifestyle, senior communities are beginning to focus on more sustainable facilities.

