

# LOCALNews

## Building a community for seniors



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A few months ago, Aegis Living CEO Dwayne Clark sent a memo to his employees that got pretty personal.

It was about his mother's struggle with Alzheimer's.

He wrote of her 82nd birthday and how her responses to their hugs and kisses "connected her to the here and now."

At one point, Clark wrote, his sister suggested his mother go to bed. She refused, saying it would be rude.

It was something all Aegis staffers could learn from when caring for their Alzheimer's patients.

"You have to wonder how often we are promoting the downward spiral of our residents," Clark wrote, "by capping their abilities with our own preconceived notions of what they can and can't do."

His "heightened sensitivity," as he called it, may well be one of the best features of the new Aegis at Shoreline facility, which opened last Sunday. Residents started moving in last week; more than half of the 102 independent-living apartments have been leased.

The units in the independent-living area range from \$1,700 to \$3,800 a month and include meals in an open

kitchen, use of the fitness and business centers, a ballroom, movie theater, lounge (with a no-host bar) and library.

There also is an area called "Life's Neighborhood," devoted to patients with Alzheimer's and other kinds of dementia. It includes 24-hour staffing, full-time nurse, meals, housekeeping and utilities. The units cost \$3,695 to \$4,195 a month.

But all those fancy features may not be enough. Moving older people from their homes is all but impossible.

More than 90 percent of those aged 60 and over have no plans to move from their homes into a retirement community, according to a 2001 survey done by the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing and Care Industries.

"People ask who is our biggest competitor, and it's that," said Karen Lucas, Aegis' vice president of strategic marketing. "So we are giving people an option that is appealing. It is not the nursing-home paradigm, it is a community that you want to be in."

I walked around the place with all our parents in mind; once-vibrant people whose health, minds and memories have started to escape them, and whose homes have turned to hardships. Family members can only worry.

Clark and his siblings just traveled that road, he told me. Colleen Clark now lives in Aegis' Issaquah facility.

Putting her there has made his business very personal.

"Get our residents out and have them engage with life," Clark wrote in his memo. "Remind the family members of the huge impact they can have

with their parents.

"The continued health of the resident hinges on the amount of love, affection and touch that they get from the people around them."

I hope to witness that, to spend time with Aegis' residents and staffers, and chronicle the future many of us face.

"We're not making widgets," Clark told me. "We're taking care of human beings in the last years of their lives. That's a real honorable work."