Lenbrook

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A New Revolution in Senior Living Design: Enriching Communities Inside and Out

by Christopher M. Keysor, Chief Financial Officer, Lenbrook

For the better part of a century, sailors faced the elements donning thick yellow rubber suits called "foul weather gear." This gear was great at keeping water from coming in. But it had one major shortcoming: it didn't let any perspiration out.

In 1978 W.L. Gore & Associates developed Gore-Tex, the first "breathable" foul weather fabric that not only kept water from entering but also let out 1 to 1.5 pounds of perspiration a day.

We're seeing a similar revolution in the design of senior living projects – more "porous" communities that not only provide a fully secure and self supporting resident community inside, but also strong connections and easy access to the benefits of the broader community outside.

Located in the heart of Atlanta's prized Buckhead area, Lenbrook is a hub of constant activity.

New Design Trends

This "urban/community integration" is one of the emerging trends in senior housing identified in the 2012 Design for Aging Review, the national design competition cosponsored by the American Institute of Architects and LeadingAge, an industry group dedicated to empowering people to live fully as they age.

I had the honor of serving on the judging panel for the 2012 DFAR competition and witnessed these new trends firsthand as we meticulously reviewed nearly XX entries and concluded with onsite inspections. Lenbrook had garnered a 2010 DFAR award for its addition which nearly doubled its on-campus living space and amenities in 2009.

This judging experience got me to thinking: how do Lenbrook's design goals for its addition project, which began in 2006, compare to the design trends we're seeing today? Lenbrook's express goals for its expansion and renovation were to:

- To create a vibrant senior community that encourages interaction with its broader community
- To ensure Lenbrook's ability to also serve its residents as a stand-alone community
- To foster a strong sense of community and interaction within through easy access to each other and Lenbrook services

More Access, More Independence

I began with our lead architects of the project, Mark Kill and Bill Witte, and our development consultant Jim Bloomquist. They explained how a "regional vernacular" study and local “asset mapping” process served as the guiding foundation for Lenbrook's new design.

Lenbrook offers access to the best of Atlanta, all within a few mile radius.

The “regional vernacular” study primarily assessed the lifestyle of residents in the Buckhead community and identified components most important to them such as: their social and business relationships, access to shopping, involvement in religious and philanthropic pursuits, involvement with their social clubs and ability to maintain homes in both Buckhead and the North Georgia Mountains.

Extensive research was also performed to map the assets located in the broader community so that the “new” Lenbrook would enhance a resident’s existing resources and activities and create opportunities to expand their lifestyle. Given our location on Peachtree Road – where you can find virtually anything within three miles of us – the asset map became full quite quickly.

We wanted to capitalize on our location and provide residents with a maintenance-free environment that would actually increases their independence, not decrease it. That’s why designing a centralized entrance, with ample lighting, smooth flooring, automatic doors and free valet parking service was a key focal point of the new design. This makes it easy to catch a show at a nearby theater, visit with friends and family in the neighborhood or unload groceries and packages from shopping and take them by elevator to your apartment home easily.

This easy access in and out of Lenbrook -- yet secure with gated entry -- is essential for our residents, many of whom still actively volunteer in the community with such organizations as The Shepherd Center, The Atlanta History Center, the Center for Puppetry Arts, the Buckhead Coalition and much more.

Lenbrook’s own 5,000 square foot event center also allows Lenbrook to be a natural extension of the residents’ ongoing social activities by fostering visits from outside groups and organizations. The state-of-the-art banquet and event center regularly plays host to “Friends of the Arts” functions, concerts, dances, lectures and more.

Multiple recreation and music rooms at Lenbrook also foster more visits from friends and families as there is always a place to gather to play games, play the piano, host parties and reunions.

Safe Harbor in the Storm

Convenient dining options abound on the Lenbrook campus.

The asset mapping process also identified the core amenities and services that we would want to be sure and replicate within Lenbrook's walls in order for it to meet the residents' needs as a stand-alone community. A week-long ice storm in the winter of 2011 put Lenbrook to the test. Atlanta's limited ability to clear roads essentially shuts down this southern city by any inclement winter weather. But Lenbrook residents went unaffected by the icy roads as all of their immediate physical needs were met (reliable food, power and support). And, they were able to actively engage with their neighbors inside the community. While everyone else in Atlanta was stranded at home going stir crazy, Lenbrook residents continued to engage in wellness activities and social gatherings, including happy hour.

Lenbrook's ability to serve its residents as a self standing community is important not just in times of harsh weather but also in the everyday lives of residents who have limited mobility. The building's design works to keep residents independent and able to enjoy the views, the sun, the outdoors and social interaction in all seasons of life. For instance, our centrally located 48,000 square feet of Plaza Garden space allows residents to enjoy the outside environment including lush planting areas, a planted labyrinth, a fountain, outside dining, shaded walking and lounge areas and even an amphitheatre.

An Inclusive Culture

From a walk-in clinic to long-term skilled nursing care, Lenbrook residents have access to the full continuum of care.

As a continuing care retirement community, Lenbrook is home to a wide range of seniors – from residents in independent living and assisted listing to those requiring rehabilitative services and skilled nursing care. Under the leadership of Mark Kill, the design team worked purposefully to place the new healthcare residences in a central location within the community. This careful design with a centralized location for health care allows friends, family and residents to access all of Lenbrook's common amenities and services with just a quick elevator ride away. One of the greatest joys in my daily work life is to see our past Residents Association President continuing her social life even though she resides in a healthcare residence.

Of course, to not recognize that our healthcare residents have different abilities or needs would be naive. Therefore, the team's design also provided for an alternative access to the broader community through a separate health care entrance. Family and friends can choose to use either entrance. In addition, small "neighborhoods" were incorporated into the common areas of the health care residences for dining, social interaction or family gatherings -- to continue that warm sense of community within Lenbrook.

Comfort for All Seasons of Life

I must admit I'm pleased with the careful thought and research that went into the design of Lenbrook's major renovation and expansion after 25 years of operation. Now as we head into our 30th year, those design principles continue to enhance our resident's ability to remain independent and interact with the broader community. Just like a sailor on the midnight watch, this continual evolution and improvement allows our residents to remain comfortable and active throughout all seasons of life.

About the Author: A seasoned consultant to healthcare and senior living providers, Chris Keysor joined Lenbrook as Chief Financial Officer in 2010. He began his career in the healthcare and life sciences practice of KPMG Peat Marwick. He moved on to lead the senior living and healthcare advisory groups within several accounting firms, including LarsonAllen, a large national accounting firm serving the senior living sector. Prior to that, he held the position of vice president of business development for CareLink Management Inc., a post-acute care subsidiary of Orlando Regional Healthcare System, during its growth and expansion into senior living campuses and nursing facilities. And, as a managing director in BB&T Capital Markets healthcare group, he led multiple healthcare providers through large tax-exempt financings for major projects. He is a graduate of the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in accounting, and served as a certified public accountant in Florida.

Chris Keysor, Chief Financial Officer

About Lenbrook: Originally founded in 1983, Lenbrook is Atlanta's only nationally accredited continuing care retirement community and one of just three accredited CCRCs in the state of Georgia. The non-for-profit community's mission is to enable its residents to enjoy the gifts of independence, good health and personal fulfillment through engaging facilities, programs and services. Lenbrook's major renovation and expansion in 2008 brought the Buckhead senior living community to over 1 million total square feet of living space, amenities and healthcare services including: 363 independent residences, 60 skilled nursing beds, 16 personal care suites, a healthcare clinic, wellness center, all-season indoor pool, 48,000 square feet of plaza gardens, three unique restaurants, an event center, movie theater, library, computer classroom, recreation rooms and more. Visit www.lenbrook-atlanta.org or call 404-233-3000.