

Grandparents Are Returning to College, to Retire

by Karen Alexander
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MOST retirement communities are loaded with recreational and social activities. But what if retirees long for some intellectual invigoration? Some of these people are returning to college — or, rather, choosing to live in a growing number of developments built for older people and situated on or near campuses.

College-linked retirement communities, as they are called, are available at 60 campuses nationwide, including the **University of Michigan**, the Ivy League members Cornell and Dartmouth, and even smaller schools like Lasell College, in the Boston suburb of Newton. Experts say these communities, where residents can buy or rent their homes, will become more commonplace over the next two decades, as many of the nation's estimated 76 million baby boomers reach retirement age.

At best, they will satisfy the baby boomers' increasing appetite for lifelong education, said Marc Freedman, author of "Prime Time: How the Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America" (Public Affairs, 2002). "At the very least, it could just turn out to be a revenue generator for universities and a pleasant way for older people to while away their waning days," he said.

In some cases, the retirement communities are run by large developers. One is the Kendal Corporation, a nonprofit charitable organization in Kennett Square, Pa., that operates units near Dartmouth, Oberlin College, and near the campuses of Washington and Lee University and the Virginia Military Institute. A Kendal project under development in Granville, Ohio, will have ties to Denison University, and a planned development in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y., is exploring a possible link to a local college.

The Hyatt Corporation plans to break ground in late spring on the Classic Residence by Hyatt, on 22 acres near Stanford in Palo Alto, Calif.; already, 307 of the 388 units, which cost \$600,000 to \$3.9 million, plus monthly fees, are spoken for. The development will offer various levels of care, including 44 suites with an around-the-clock nursing staff.

The retirement communities usually have an affiliation with the school, and the residents often include alumni and former faculty members. Some retirement communities have informal ties, while others offer their residents access to university health care services and gerontology experts, the opportunity to attend classes and cultural events on campus and the chance to learn and live practically side by side with energetic college students.

"It's an affinity group," Ronald J. Manheimer, the executive director of the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, said of the residents. "They are people who hold lifelong education in high esteem; the life of the mind is important to them," added Mr. Manheimer, who has studied college-linked retirement communities.

But the campuses also benefit. At the 92-unit University Commons at the **University of Michigan**,

residents attend football games together and often entertain dinner speakers from the university. Graduate students from the School of Music often perform their required concerts and recitals in front of an audience of University Commons retirees.

"They like an audience and we can always provide one," said Robben W. Fleming, a resident and a former president of the university, from 1968 to 1979, and on an interim basis in 1988.

Students, too, enjoy the interaction. When Jennifer Edwards, 21, graduates from Lasell College this spring, she said, she will miss her job as a dining hall manager at Lasell Village, the retirement community. Ms. Edwards, a fashion design major, said she had received support and advice on her senior project from her retiree friends, including a former fashion designer.

"You come to college expecting to be with your peers for four years, but when they threw in the village, it turned out to be so much fun," she said. "They love us; we love them. They know when things are wrong, and they tell you: 'Look, you'll be fine. Look at how I made it.'"

Prices vary for college-linked retirement homes, and so may the residency requirements. Some developments also place restrictions on resales. (At the Hyatt community in Palo Alto, for instance, the developer buys back the property after the residents leave. They or their estates receive 90 percent of the price they paid.)

Leslie Marks, the executive director of the National Council on Seniors Housing of the National Association of Home Builders, said consumers are likely to pay more for housing that offers access to a university, just as it might cost more to live next to a golf course, "Whether it's on a college campus or a gated golf community, what they are buying is lifestyle," she said. "The active adult consumer is very knowledgeable and will pay for what they want and knows what they want."

Homes at University Commons, developed by O'Neal Construction of Ann Arbor, Mich., range from about \$300,000 for a 1,270-square-foot, two-bedroom apartment to about \$600,000 for a 3,000-square-foot, three-bedroom house with a den. Monthly maintenance fees are \$250 to \$500. A tie to the university — as an alumnus, for example, or a former faculty or staff member or as a relative of someone who works at or attends the university — is a prerequisite.

At the Longview Retirement Community in Ithaca, N.Y., which is affiliated with Ithaca College and its Gerontology Institute, some of the 161 units are reserved for low-income residents. The all-rental community offers a continuum of care, from independent-living apartments to a comprehensive assisted-living facility with sliding fees. Apartments for independent living are \$1,340 to \$2,478 a month.

Residents of Lasell Village, where housing costs \$300,000 to \$750,000, plus monthly fees of \$2,500 to \$3,000, are required under a zoning agreement with the city to attend at least 450 hours of classes a year, or a combination of classes, physical fitness activities and volunteer work. They can meet the requirement by attending regular college

classes (although they do not receive credit towards a degree) or through the 30 or so classes that are taught on site only for Lasell residents.

"The hardest class I took was an advanced writing class on American musical theater," said Betty Campbell, 82, a mathematician who directed a computer facility for the Laboratory for Nuclear Science at M.I.T. before she retired in 1982. She moved to Lasell Village about eight years ago. For a group project in her musical theater class, she joined with two college students and one other retiree to attend a show in Boston, prepared a presentation and wrote a paper.

To register for summer classes, which begin on Monday, Ms. Campbell said she waited in line at 7 a.m. — three hours before registration began — so she would have her pick of the schedule. As the fourth person in line, she got into both of the Lasell Village classes she wanted: one on bioethics and one on the history of ethics.

DALE R. CORSON, 89, a physicist who was the president of Cornell from 1969 to 1977, helped establish the Kendal retirement community at Ithaca in 1995. The community is also affiliated with Ithaca College. Mr. Corson likes to joke that Cornell has the second-best physics department in the country — and that the best is at Kendal.

Among Mr. Corson's neighbors at the retirement community are a host of intellectual standouts, he said, including his friend Hans Albrecht Bethe, who won the Nobel prize for physics in 1967 for his work on the theory of nuclear reactions. And when some other residents signed up recently for a beginning physics class, they had plenty of places to turn for help with their homework.

"It's like being at a university, except we're not as busy anymore," said Mr. Corson, who lives in an apartment at Kendal with his wife Nellie, 89. "Sometimes we eat with physicists, sometimes we eat with poets, and sometimes we eat with lawyers."