

23 May 2009

Edmonton Journal

JANE CARDILLO Special EDMONTON

## **Facility an alternative to nursing home**

### **Christenson creates the latest in aging-in-place communities**

Greg Christenson is passionate about helping seniors maintain full, independent lives.

Devonshire Village offers a lifestyle you'd expect to find on a luxury cruise ship.

The president of Christenson Developments — a company known for its award-winning condominium projects — is a pioneer in the move to keep older people in residential settings where they have access to services and social activities.

His aging-in-place communities, like Devonshire Village in the city's southwest, offer a lifestyle you'd expect to find on a luxury cruise ship.

Residents in the sumptuous condo style apartments of Devonshire Mews can have their laundry and housekeeping taken care of, dine out in a full-service restaurant or meet friends at an English-style pub, without ever leaving their building.

They have access to a fitness facility, theatre room, carpentry shop and wine-making room.

While Devonshire Mews is geared to active independent retirees, Christenson was adamant about creating a space for people who wanted to live on their own, but needed help to do so.

Enter Devonshire Manor, an assisted-living facility with executive condo apartments, ranging in size from 520 to 1,135 square feet. The units come with six appliances, air conditioning and window coverings.

The building, located at 1718 Rabbit Hill Rd., is open for viewing.

“The idea is to have condominium independent living and assisted living all on one campus,” Christenson says.

But the manor offers more than just support to daily living. Several floors in the building are devoted to designated assisted living (DAL) suites for people who need a higher level of care, but still want to remain in their own home.

“DAL really is ‘nursing home lite,’ ” says Christenson, of the program which is partially funded by the province.

“Alberta Health pays for two hours of supportive services for residents to allow them to stay in their home as opposed to going into a nursing home or long-term care.”

Christenson calls Devonshire Manor the company’s first practical working model for long-term care.

“The middle link in the whole chain is the assisted living and the designated assisted living, so that’s quite exciting.”

A similar facility is scheduled to open in another Christenson project, Citadel Village in St. Albert, next month.

“We’ve got 71 (DAL) beds going in to Citadel,” says Christenson.

The DAL suites, which include studios and one bedroom-plus den, are about as far from nursing home quarters as you can get.

“They’re exactly the same as a Christenson estate condo,” says Christenson, who lists big balconies, glass-top appliances and space-saver microwaves among their amenities.

“A nursing home looks like a hospital. In our situation you get a washer, dryer, you get a kitchen.”

And residents pay no more than they would in a long-term care facility.

“Right now, you can get a brand new unit in the Devonshire or Citadel for the same price you’d get in a 30-year-old nursing home.”

To celebrate the building’s grand opening, Christenson Developments is offering the first 20 people who sign on a \$1,000-reduction on their monthly rent for two years.

If people want to experience life in one of the DAL apartments, Christenson has set up three guest suites.

“They’re fully furnished so that people can come in and try the lifestyle,” he says.

Couples can stay together

A home setting versus a hospital setting has another advantage, says Christenson. Couples who might have been separated by illness can continue to live together under one roof.

“How much better could it be if they could actually cohabitate in the same unit, but one could still get care?”

The DAL units as well as the assisted-living apartments are available to rent or as a life-lease purchase.

People are waiting longer to move from the family home and that's increasing the need for facilities like this, says Christenson.

"It used to be when people reached retirement age, they'd move. But what we've experienced over the last couple of years is people just kind of put those decisions on hold."

Until, he says, their hand is forced by illness or injury.

"If somebody falls and they end up in an acute-care hospital, the coordinator says, 'You've got to go somewhere' and gives them names of nursing homes or DAL operations."

Christenson has taken steps to ensure there's no shortage of good health-care attendants ready to respond to the needs of residents 24 hours a day.

He has purchased three duplexes within walking distance of Devonshire Village for use by staff.

As well, a YMCA-operated daycare is scheduled to open at Devonshire Village in September. Devonshire workers will get first dibs at enrolling their children, says Christenson.

"We're trying to include a worker component to housing," he says. "They (workers) want to be walkable and near transit and near support and near family and friends."

Visitors can tour Devonshire Manor Saturday and Sunday between 1 and 5 p.m.

Printed and distributed by NewspaperDirect | [www.newspaperdirect.com](http://www.newspaperdirect.com), US/Can:  
1.877.980.4040, Intern: 800.6364.6364 | Copyright and protected by applicable law.