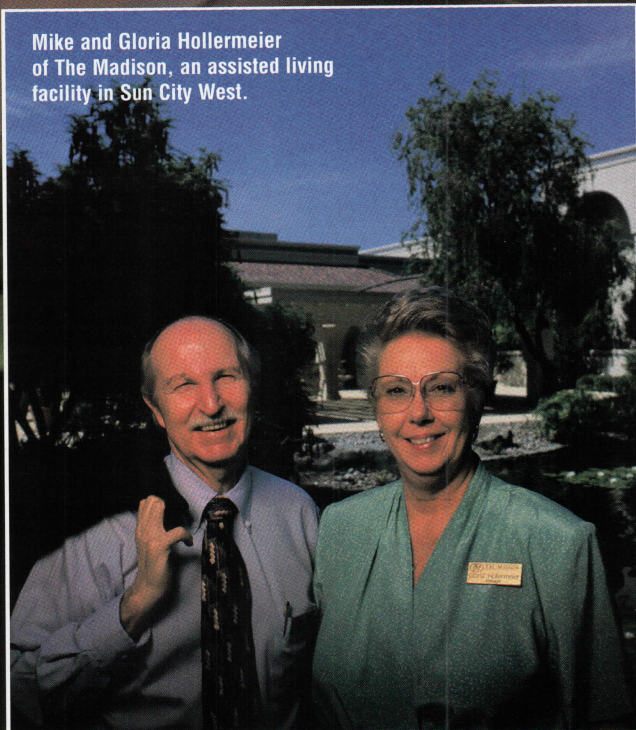


by Cynthia Scanlon
photography by Jim Marshall

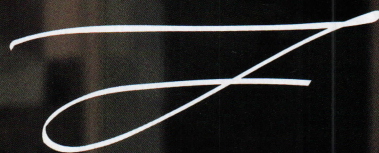
Deena Neste Martin, regional
director of operations at
Alterra Healthcare Corporation

Mike and Gloria Hollermeier
of The Madison, an assisted living
facility in Sun City West.



Helping Hands

Assisted living eases aging process



Whether planning your parents' retirement or thinking about your own, you may want to give some thought to what the Valley's assisted living residences have to offer. Don't mistake these affordable, quality living quarters for run-down nursing homes for the sick. Today's assisted living residences have much to offer when it comes to successful living.

"Education of the market is the key component to helping people initially over the hump of what options are out there," says Deena Neste Martin, regional director of operations at Alterra Healthcare Corporation, the nation's largest operator of assisted-living health care residencies. "Most assisted-living residencies are as far away from an institution as you can imagine."

In fact, says Mike Hollermeier, manager of The Madison, an assisted-living facility located in Sun City West, assisted-living residences today are modern, comfortable, even elegant, with a lifestyle to match. "Years ago, a nursing home had a bad name: rest home or sanitarium," he says. "This is independent, gracious retirement living."

The reasons for deciding to live in an assisted-living residence are as varied as the residents themselves: freedom from some responsibilities, the desire to go places in safety, the need for companionship, all with built-in health care if need be. "Residents don't have the upkeep of a home, they can travel, they can do what they want when they want," says Opal Paden, director of sales for Classic Residence, Senior Living by Hyatt and The Plaza Companies, located in the Grayhawk master-planned community in Scottsdale. "It's really a wonderful lifestyle."

As would be expected, the cost for such living varies, depending on the kind of lifestyle, need of care, and size of accommodations. But most assisted-living residences can accommodate just about any desired need. In fact, many of these facilities offer amenities that retirees of the past could only dream about.

And, where once retirement communities were perceived as a place to warehouse the elderly, nothing could be further from the truth today. Most assisted-living facilities not only accept people at age 55, but actively encourage it.

"We are marketing to anyone who wants to take advantage of this type of lifestyle," says Paden, but she says people don't generally start looking into this type of lifestyle until their 60s.

Neste Martin agrees. "You don't start researching these options until you have a need," she says. "People in their 30s and 40s are not thinking, 'Gee, I wonder what's out there just in case.'"

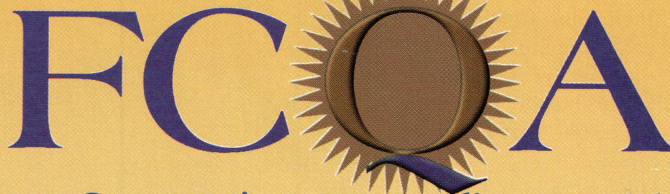


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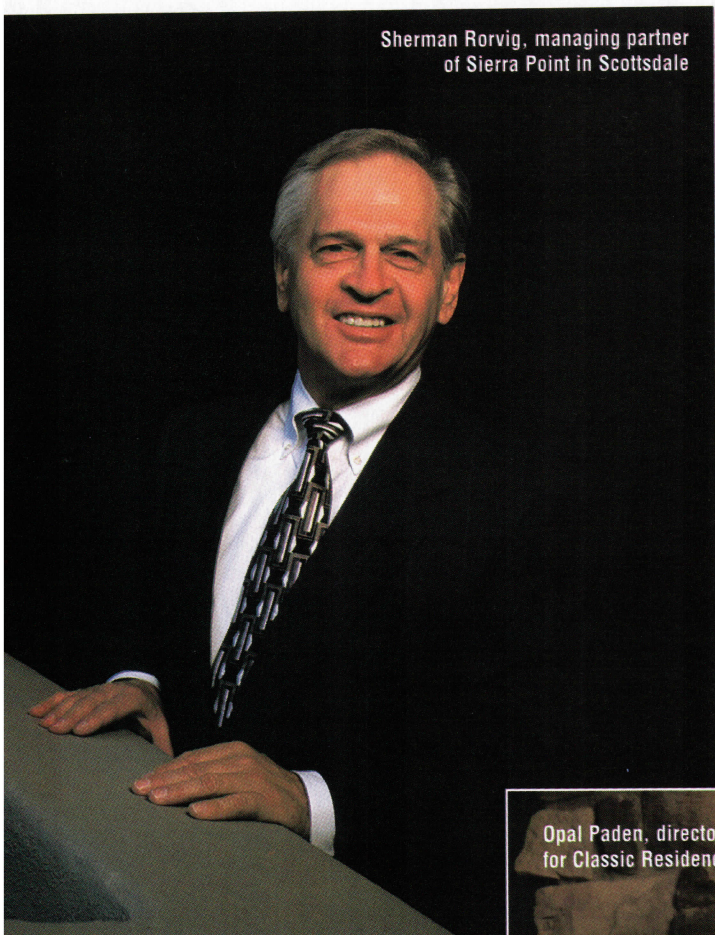
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Sherman Rorvig, managing partner
of Sierra Point in Scottsdale



congruent care units and a catered living program.

The Madison provides meals in the dining room, housekeeping once a week, laundry, utilities, cable television, transportation within a 10-mile radius and plenty of activities. The one and two bedroom apartments include everything but a telephone.

"It's a nice place to live if you can't live at home anymore," says Neste Martin. "Most of the folks that do live with us are moving because they no longer are capable of living alone for either physical or mental reasons."

Neste Martin adds that assisted-living is really about promoting independence and supporting the areas where there is need while adding things to life that might be missing. "We are not here to create dependence," she says. "We are focused on creating quality in their life as opposed to playing bingo."

To fully understand what qualities

Opal Paden, director of sales
for Classic Residence



According to Hollermeier, many of The Madison's residents come to him after selling their Sun City homes, which have become more than they can manage. But, he says young retirees and couples are also showing up to live the fun, active lifestyle that assisted-living residences offer.

Classic Residence, which has 260 accommodations, comes with all the amenities of a full retirement facility including two pools (indoor and outdoor), a spa, salon, fitness center, and massage area. Residents also have the use of a library, computer center and mail room. There is a restaurant with Hyatt-trained staff and Northern Trust Bank right on the premises to provide complete banking services.

At Sierra Point, which will be completed in November of this year at a cost of \$30 million, there are 36 assisted-living and 180 independent living accommodations. The company also has a facility in Sun City with

are important to their resident's life, Neste Martin says Alterra does a complete life history to unearth likes and dislikes, transportation needs, desired hobbies and activities and the level of independence sought. "Our social history and profile will ask them what they want to continue doing, what they have stopped doing because they can't and what they want to do but never have," she says.

You might think the cost of receiving quality care and enjoyment might break the bank, but that is also a notion without basis. The horror stories of seedy nursing homes milking the elderly until all the funds have vanished is as antiquated as the idea of nursing homes themselves.

In fact, a recent *Business Week* article reports that nursing homes, once the Wall Street darlings of the 1990s, are now on a sick list. The article states that the seven leading publicly-owned nursing-home companies had a market capitalization of \$35 billion. That has now dropped to \$5 billion, with some of the companies not expected to survive. Because of their cost structure and amenities, the new retirement residences of the future look to be assisted living.

Prices at Classic Residence, Senior Living by Hyatt and The Plaza Companies begin at \$128,000 and run to more than \$500,000, depending on the size of apartment or casita. Classic Residence requires their tenants to buy into the plan, but will refund 80 percent upon departure to either the tenant or the tenant's estate. "There is no real estate transaction," says Paden. "The property reverts back to us."

Alterra, which operates 369 assisted living residencies, begins at \$1,800 a month here in the Valley, with no buy-in, just the monthly rental. Costs can rise from there depending on the amount of personal care needed and the size of the apartment. Neste Martin says Alterra can create customized service plans as well. "Thirty to 40 percent of our residents are on a basic service plan," she says. "Sixty percent have an additional \$100 to \$500 a month payment [for increased care]."

Alterra has also formed a pharmacy company with Omnicare, Inc. to provide a full range of pharmacy services for its assisted living residents and other providers throughout the U.S. And in 1998, Alterra established Alterra Essentials, a medical equipment supply company, which provides wheelchairs, walkers and disposable supplies.

At The Madison, a one bedroom, including everything but telephone runs

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\$1,855 a month, with \$350 extra tacked on for a second person. There are no buy-in fees and no leases. The Madison does require first month rental and a refundable deposit of \$1,500 up front.

Costs at Sierra Point run between \$1,500 and \$3,300 a month. This includes one meal, activities, transportation for shopping, medical, and banking. Sierra Point also requires a deposit of \$2,500, which is refundable.

Despite the almost luxurious lifestyle offered by many of these facilities, Neste Martin says guilt can still be involved when children think of moving their parents into assisted-living quarters. "In the past, families always took care of each other unless skilled nursing was needed," she says. "But that's not always physically possible or the best choice now."

And with baby boomers still very much involved in their careers, Neste Martin says assisted living has stepped in to give families a helping hand. "How do you care for an aging parent in the home if you're not there?" she asks.

Neste Martin says baby boomers have had a huge influence on the assisted-living market right now. "Baby boomers are involved in making the decision at least 80 percent of the time," she says. "They usually get up-front information, then they will bring mom or dad around to choose the place."

Sherman Rorvig, managing partner of Sierra Point in Scottsdale, agrees. "We find sons and daughters have moved to the Valley and they have parents living in the Midwest or East," he says. "In many situations, they are looking for family members to retire in a facility such as ours."

Moving into assisted living quarters is not just a trend in the U.S. According to Hollermeier, many foreign countries are also interested in setting up such facilities. Hollermeier says his company, which owns 240 facilities, will be opening 30 more within the next year in such places as Hawaii, Canada, England, and France.

For seniors wanting a freer, more fun way of life, assisted living may well open up a whole new second and third lifestyle. Says Rorvig, "By us providing meals, housing and transportation, our residents are free to do the things they enjoy."

Hollermeier couldn't agree more: "It's not a nursing home or dead end," he says. "It's gracious living."

AB

Cynthia Scanlon is a Phoenix free-lance writer.