

Second innings

New age retirement homes are giving senior citizens the luxury of comfort coupled with practical solutions that ensure that life becomes enriching and meaningful

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Kanakavalli Chari is a sprightly and a creative 78-year-old woman who had a hectic and monotonous work life. When not creating art, she attends Carnatic music concerts and other community events. Lakshmanan Murugesan, 70, makes planters out of discarded material for his garden, which serves as a platform for his creativity and brings him great happiness and joy. Age is certainly no barrier for these enthusiastic persons who are residents at Columbia Pacific Communities, India's largest and most experienced senior living community operator. Retirement homes are changing the dynamics of how people are choosing to live the retired lives.

Making the difference

Twenty years ago, India was not ready for its children and parents to live separately. However, things have changed rapidly in just a few years, and more and more children are moving to other cities or countries for their careers, and parents end up staying alone. That is when the concept of retirement communities came in. The difference between an old age home and a retirement community is not just a semantic one.

"A retirement community includes enhanced technological features, like CCTV surveillance and emergency response system (ERS) that are designed to make life easy and comfortable for seniors. These communities are built with utmost attention to detail—from anti-skid tiles to chamfered wall edges, the whole space is optimised to

avoid any sort of injuries. Most importantly, seniors are kept busy and active with several communal activities, like cinema screenings, group exercises, games, all with seniors their age. This kind of community living ensures that seniors do not suffer from alienation or loneliness, and their self-esteem is intact, as they do not have to depend on their children," says Kewal Kapoor, director and creative strategist, CHAI Kreative and Return of Million Smile.

Contemporary cues

Retirement homes located at destinations that have a healing aura and weather facilitates happiness and productivity. A retirement home cannot be sold the same way a house is, and the branding needs to be more emotional and passionate. Retirement home developers should involve senior citizens as consultants at the planning stage to get a more cohesive view of their needs and demands. Mohit Nirula, CEO, Columbia Pacific Communities avers: "Within residential real estate sales, the only two sub-segments that are showing a positive trend are senior living and co-housing. In fact, education and jobs in cities away from 'home' are the drivers for both these segments. As the millennials seek better opportunities in India and abroad, their parents, now free from their family responsibilities do not wish to relocate, wish to remain independent, relieve themselves from the worry of the day to day chores while remaining physically active, mentally alert and intellectually



engaged with like-minded neighbours, hence the buoyancy in senior living communities.” These communities are also designed in a way that they keep the residents’ calendar busy and improve their quality of life with well-designed activities, organised outings and holidays. A far more wholesome experience with end-to-end services are becoming the order of the day when it comes to Senior Living Residences and technology is playing a major role.

Vineet Verma, executive director and CEO, Brigade Hospitality says: “We firmly believe that the term ‘retirement homes’ needs to get replaced with ‘independent living for seniors’ and this is what we at Brigade have done. A lot many solutions are available today (and the list is growing) where living in a senior living project is becoming a lot more convenient and enjoyable. Several start-ups in India have started looking at Elder Care as the next big bet.”

Health matters

A key issue as one ages is health, and these homes are ensuring there is a special emphasis on both the right care and top-notch facilities. “In terms of healthcare, the elderly folks are regularly administered to depending on their diagnosis. From healthcare professionals available around the clock to specialists who arrive during any time of need, to an in-house nutritionist to plan out meals, the care given to the elderly is remarkable,” says Kavya, CEO, Athulya Assisted Living, a Chennai based start-up providing a well-fashioned premium living space made solely for the elderly. While assisted living was initially launched with the aim of long-term care for seniors, respite care or short-term care for recovery aimed at nursing and rejuvenating seniors from an illness or surgery at retirement homes is also becoming an option. “This short-stay will enable seniors to overcome the aftermath of the health condition they had been suf-

fering from. There is another short-stay motive that is becoming popular. This sojourn is intended to take a break and as a short refreshing move from regular life or a break given to the caregivers or family members while they may be away on vacation or are preoccupied,” says Kavya.

In fact, at Eden Retirement in North India, integrative medicine is combined into the facility for the holistic health and wellness of the residents. Deepak Gupta, founder and managing director, Eden Retirement Living Pvt Ltd, says: “Conventional medicine does not address improving all the aspects of the holistic and overall health of people. Till now, much of conventional medicine has been about contributing to increasing life expectancy, but not the quality of life. Addressing this and including other forms of traditional and alternative healthcare in an integrated manner is what integrative medicine is all about. People can now look forward to living a better quality of life with

holistic and preventive wellness. There are features like grab bars in bathrooms, anti-skid and anti-bacterial vitrified tile flooring in all rooms, ramps for wheelchair access, bigger lifts, wide passages and large flush doors to accommodate wheelchairs, zero VOC (volatile organic compounds)/non-toxic, washable and bacteria resistant paint.”

Tech savvy

Retirement communities are better equipped than individual homes, thanks to technological innovations like smart devices for continuous monitoring, and round-the-clock medical services that make such spaces inviting and safe. The introduction of safety switches, emergency call buttons have already found its way into senior living. Further advancements of portable medical equipment in the form of wearables are being developed to empower these spaces to offer the best care. “Technology will have a presence by way of the

intelligent building management system, wearable tags by residents with integration of data for records (EHR, electronic record-keeping) and home automation with the help of IoT,” says Gupta. Nibhrant Shah, founder and CEO, Isprava, says: “Sustainability is by far the most conducive trend in retirement homes. Installing eco-friendly and restorative appliances and tools as well as using such materials in the house is not only trending but it also adds to the satisfaction in of the buyer, by means of contributing to the protection of the environment. Besides this, building homes amidst greenery, where they can relax, hear the birds chirp every morning and be one with nature.”

Future perfect

From a study conducted by CII, it is observed that the elderly population is set to touch about 300 million by 2050, accounting for 18 per cent of the overall population. Delhi-based NGO,

Agewell Foundation, reported that 23 per cent of elders from a sample of 10,000 seniors lives alone without their spouse or children. This calls for attention towards better welfare measures for the elderly. In the same survey, 88.5 per cent of the respondents said they needed healthcare assistance to be independent. The survey was conducted across 20 states in India during May-June 2018. Likewise, as per a report by JLL, the retirement home industry in India is all set to grow in the coming years. New players from the real estate market are entering the segment to meet the growing demand. The current housing demand for seniors in India is around seven lakh units. By 2025, the number of senior citizens in the country is expected to increase to 250 million. Of the 110 million senior citizens living in the country today, over 27 million of them need special assistance of some kind with their daily activities, and this number is also set to grow. □