

Using Your Five Senses When Touring a Retirement Community

MOVING TO A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY IS A BIG DECISION. YOUR SENSES CAN HELP YOU TO DETERMINE IF YOU ARE MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOURSELF OR FOR A LOVED ONE.

Imagine awakening to the morning sunlight beaming in your window and walking to the nearby dining room to meet friends for a light breakfast. After breakfast, you go back to your room and sit in your comfortable chair and pick up where you left off last night in a book you borrowed from the library. You decide to take a walk outdoors and are greeted by the smell of fresh flowers and the sweet sounds of birds singing in the trees.

Before you know it, you see that it's approaching lunch time and you go back inside to meet your friends for yet another tasty, homemade meal. After lunch, you are invited to participate in tending to the vegetable garden. You pick some mint leaves and go back inside to make yourself some fresh mint tea.

While you are sipping your tea, you decide to participate in one of your favorite games, pinochle. Afterward, you sit down to watch an hour or two of television and then rejoin your friends for the evening meal. Once dinner is over, you decide to go back to your room to let your food settle and read some more of your book. Soon, the smell of fresh-popped popcorn fills the hallways and you join others headed to the gathering room to watch a Judy Garland movie. You sit back on the sofa with others and laugh and cry your way through the movie. Big yawn! It's approaching 10 o'clock and you decide it's time for bed. You walk back to your room and climb under the blankets for another good night's sleep. Tomorrow you'll spend another relaxing, but fun-filled day with people you've come to cherish.

Does this sound like an enjoyable day to you? Can you imagine yourself living such a lifestyle? Not only do you get to enjoy sharing a day with friends, but your meals are prepared, your housekeeping is taken care of and your laundry is finished, folded and placed back in your drawers for you. You're probably thinking, "Sign me up." There's a hitch – you have to be 65 years of age or older. What was just described to you is a community that services seniors.

There are more than 60 communities in Lancaster County that serve seniors, and each community is unique in regard to its location, size, cost, amenities, programs and services. These communities include Continuing Care Retirement (CCRCs), Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing (detailed descriptions of these communities were included in my January column). Whether you are considering moving to a retirement community or are researching the possibility for a loved one, it is important to visit several so that you can compare one to another. While the décor may look attractive, it is important that you take a much deeper look – go prepared with a list of questions.

There is a lot to see and remember when touring a community. Use your senses to determine if the communities you visit will meet your needs and desires. What follows

are a few steps you can take to determine whether or not a community fits your idea of "home."

Visualize

- Do you like the décor?
- Is this community a place that could look like a "home" for you?
- Do residents appear to be enjoying themselves?
- Do residents look like they are well taken care of?
- Is it apparent that a housekeeping staff takes care of dusting, vacuuming and cleaning residents' rooms, as well as main areas?
- Is the staff interacting with residents or do you see quite a few of them sitting around twiddling their thumbs?
- Do the activities seem unique and stimulating?
- What do the exterior of the building and the grounds look like? Do they look institutional or inviting?
- Does the community have outdoor premises or walking trails?

Hear

- How is the staff communicating with the residents? Do they do it loudly or quietly?
- Are residents and staff enjoying themselves?
- Do residents sound happy or do you hear a lot of them conveying frustrations or concerns? (Ask a few of the residents whether or not they enjoy living at that community.)
- Is the staff introducing themselves to you?

Taste

- Ask if you can tour the community over the lunch hour and have lunch (typically the big meal of the day) there.
- Does the community accommodate special diets (i.e., diabetic, no added salt, etc.)?
- Are there options to choose from at each meal?
- Who monitors residents' diets?

Smell

- Do you smell any strange odors?
- Does the community allow indoor or outdoor smoking?

Feel

- Sit on the bed. Are you comfortable?
- Is this community a place you could live comfortably?
- Would you feel safe in this community?
- Are the doors locked at a certain time?
- What measures of security does the community take?

Before you leave, make sure you have a few items in your hand: A package of materials (rate sheet, description of services, etc.), a sample menu, an activity schedule and any notes that you made while you were on the tour. Do not make a decision right on the spot when touring a community. Take a day or two to think about it. It's important that you go home and reassess everything you saw that day. ♡