

Wellings of Picton opens doors to residents, community

Atrium living space becomes key attraction in development

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SOCIAL SETTING Wellings of Picton residents and guests enjoy Tuesday's wine-and-cheese gathering in the atrium at the adult lifestyle building. The room is envisioned as a hub of activity. (Adam Bramburger/Gazette staff)

Some members of the public had a chance Tuesday to see inside the adult-lifestyle building at the heart of the County's age-in-place concept.

The Wellings of Picton was staging the first in a series of wine-and-cheese socials for its residents and its management decided to invite community leaders and prospective tenants to join them to see what the site has to offer.

"We wanted them to get a sense of what the building is all about and what we're trying to create from an environmental perspective — just to share the overall socialization aspect of the building," said Kevin Pidgeon, the chief operating officer of Nautical Lands Group, the building's developer.

Walking in the door, guests are greeted by a concierge and then they're able to walk into a large atrium space with a four-storey-high ceiling, plants, stone work, and lamps that give the appearance of a park-like setting. There's also a big screen for movies, comfortable furniture, a bar, and games like pool or shuffleboard.

Pidgeon said the concept is a first for the company in Ontario.

"Traditionally, we've built more traditional buildings with simple living accommodations, hallways and a small dining room," he said. "Originally, we proposed that building for here, but we were so excited about this concept, we said 'Why wait? We'll bring it to the county first.'"

Pidgeon said the idea is to give the atrium a clubhouse-type feel. It is there residents can go to have a cooked dinner each day and there where they can meet others in the community and their guests.

"There's a number of amenities in one vast space that's engineered to maintain a home-warm feel," he said. "We want to engage residents within the building and also use the atrium for outreach opportunities."

Pidgeon said the facility has already discussed allowing community organizations to use the atrium space for meetings and events.

With a switch in plans to include the atrium Pidgeon said Wellings of Picton was completed at a higher budget than originally anticipated and it was also completed a bit later than planned. He said they hoped the first residents would move in Dec. 1, but instead, they arrived Dec. 16.

As of Tuesday, there were just over 30 tenants living at the Wellings and Pidgeon said by March, he hopes to be above 50 per cent capacity in the 88 one- and two-bedroom units. By Jan. 2018, the company is planning to be at full capacity.

Pidgeon said the majority of

the residents who have committed to living at the Wellings have come from Prince Edward County, but added interest from communities in Northumberland and Durham has been steady in recent weeks.

He said many visitors find the atrium to be a major selling feature and he recalled a story of one woman who broke down and cried when she saw it, then decided to lease.

"They're not all that as dramatic, but there's often been a similar response about the atrium," he said. "Before general manager Rachel Henry even starts the tour, they're so preoccupied with the atrium area, they're already committed to making this their home."

Visitor Maureen Finnegan agreed she was impressed by that feature of the design.

"This is quite a building. I was almost blown away when I walked in here," she said.

To accommodate its community, Pidgeon said in peak hours, the building could have between 30-50 people working. He estimates between 15-20 people working in food and beverage, another couple health providers, and members of the 24-hour concierge staff. Services in the building are contracted out, with the Marquise Group — a division of Compass Foods — handling the culinary duties and Paramed handling health.

"What we did when we put this concept together is we went and reached out to the best in class for each service," Pidgeon

said. "We tried to engage these partners to try to provide the best of everything to our residents."

Verna Wightman is one of the first residents at the Wellings. She was already living in the county when she moved in. She said she felt the convenience of the facility made sense for her.

Wightman likes that she can have a meal cooked for her each day, she enjoys staying active by walking in a climate-controlled environment — she's already learned that seven laps on her floor around the outside of the atrium equals a kilometre — and she likes that she doesn't have to

take her garbage too far from her apartment.

"I'm very happy here," she said. "I think in my circumstance it makes a lot of sense."

Wightman said she feels as more Baby Boomers retire, buildings like the Wellings will become popular alternatives as they allow seniors to keep their independence and not have the same level of responsibilities.

"I think around the start of April when the snowbirds come home from Florida, you're going to see a lot of purchases," she said.

While Wightman said she's not meeting a lot of neighbours because the community is so small now, the ones she has met have been "delightful," and have been quite willing to socialize.

Pidgeon said he's pleased to see the Wellings of Picton operational and said he feels the Nautical Lands Group couldn't have asked for a better community to be a part of.

"We're super excited about the reception we've been given in the county, from the residents who decided to live here to Mayor Quaiff, who has been incredibly facilitative and a pleasure to work with — I can't wait for our residents to experience a summer here. I think they're going to absolutely fall in love over again with Prince Edward County."

More than 100 people visited for Tuesday's event. Residents' families and development professionals were also on hand.