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## A new place to age

### Jewish senior living facility, 899 Charleston, already recruiting residents

by Molly Tanenbaum, Palo Alto Weekly

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Irma and Israel Diamond are ready to make the next big move.

The active, elderly New York couple is thinking about moving out of their “bucolic” house in Westchester County to be closer to family in California.

That is why they attended a meeting at Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills Tuesday to learn more about 899 Charleston, a new senior living facility scheduled to open in Palo Alto in 2009.

“It’s a different concept,” Irma, 81, said. “We particularly like the fact that it’s a community-based facility.”

The 182 independent and assisted-living apartments for seniors, to be located at Charleston and San Antonio roads, will be a part of the 8.5-acre Taube-Koret Campus for Jewish Life.

The campus will also house performing arts facilities and the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center, which will include a fitness center, preschool, teen center and cafe.

Irma said she liked the idea that the activities would draw people of all ages.

“That’s very appealing,” she said. At other senior apartments the couple visited, “you may not see a young person for two weeks at a time.”

Israel, 90, called 899 Charleston “the best prospect we have seen so far.”

Carol Diamond, Irma and Israel’s daughter-in-law, said she also liked the number of activities accessible to the residents for the sake of her in-laws’ health and well-being.

“It keeps your mind going; it keeps your feet going. That’s how you stay young,” she said.

The Diamonds joined about 20 other seniors and children of seniors at the meeting Tuesday.

The entire Campus for Jewish Life received approval from the City of Palo Alto last September, and now representatives of 899 Charleston are fully in sales mode, hosting information sessions and pitching the center as a “progressive continuing care retirement community completely integrated into a thriving campus environment.”

“We will help you age in place,” said Carolyn Daly, whose title is “senior living sales counselor.” She described the services the facility will offer: dining options, customizable apartments, recreation, entertainment and social opportunities.

“It’d be fun to live on a campus. There’d be lots going on,” said one Palo Alto widow, who did not want her name used because of an extenuating legal circumstance. “I love the idea of seeing preschoolers running around and teens. That’s life.”

Though she currently lives in a town home and does not want to give up her garden, she said she is warming to the idea of moving into a senior retirement community.

“Three weeks ago, if you had suggested a senior facility I would have said, ‘Are you crazy? I’m too young for this,’” she exclaimed.

The amenities of 899 Charleston may be changing her mind.

But living at 899 Charleston will not be cheap.

Residents must pay a hefty entrance fee —from \$469,000 to \$1 million, — and a monthly fee between \$2,590 and \$6,060, depending on the apartment's square footage and whether it houses one or two people.

That fee includes building maintenance, a food stipend, utilities, Jewish Community Center membership and van transportation within a 10-mile radius of the campus.

Valet parking and assisted-living services cost extra.

One elderly woman said she liked the multigenerational environment at the Campus for Jewish Life, but was put off by the price tag.

"I'm not ready to put my name down yet unless a money tree drops on me," she said.

However, 90 percent of the entrance fee would go back to the residents or their heirs upon their departure, Daly said.

The apartment complex will also have a "healing center and wellness clinic" and an emergency response system to cater to the needs of the aging residents.

"It's peace of mind and not being a burden to your children or your family," Daly told the audience.

When residents of 899 Charleston become too infirm and in need of a skilled nursing facility, they would have priority to move to the affiliated Jewish Home of San Francisco, she said.

Daly said 44 of the 182 apartments have already been reserved, and the goal is to have 70 percent spoken for by the summer ground breaking.

While some seniors are drawn to the thought of a lower-maintenance lifestyle with no house in need of repairs and a convenient social life, others do not see the need to move to a retirement community.

Lawrence and Elaine Weinberg liked the look of 899 Charleston but said they are happy in their condo in Mountain View.

"You have to be ready to move into a very structured life," Elaine said.

"I'm just not ready to make that move. Maybe when I'm 100," Lawrence joked.

With construction expected to start this summer and last two years, some seniors considering 899 Charleston think two years may be too far in the future.

"I don't know if I'll still be around," one elderly Cupertino woman said matter-of-factly.

To qualify to live in 899 Charleston, applicants submit both medical and financial information to prove they are healthy enough and can afford the fees.

As a nonagenarian, the upbeat Israel doesn't know if he will be able to meet 899 Charleston's qualifications for independent living by the time the apartments become available in 2009.

"I may not be able to pass the memory test, who knows," he said, while adding, "At the present rate, count me in."

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