

Seniors in cyberspace

Social networking sites catching on

Tech-savvy seniors now have a place in cyberspace to call home.

Geared toward younger generations, most social networking sites like Myspace and Facebook weren't designed with seniors in mind, but more Web site creators now are developing sites for older adults.

For example, certain life care communities like The Clare at Water Tower soon will launch its social networking site called Clarity.

Expected to open in downtown Chicago in early October, The Clare at Water Tower will have 258 independent living units that will accommodate 500 residents. The continuing care retirement community will incorporate an innovative networking Web site as well.

"Essentially it's a Myspace page for seniors in which they can put up their own profile," says Julie Secviar, senior vice president of strategic resources for Franciscan Sisters of Chicago Service Corporation, the parent organization of The Clare.

Slated to launch at the end of March, Clarity will be ready for residents before they move in so they can create profiles, share photos and get to know their neighbors.

"It's really going to help enrich their ability to socialize with each other and build relationships," Secviar says.

If they have extra tickets to the symphony or want to find a friend to play golf, residents will be able to post on the site's bulletin board.

"As urban residents, as city dwellers, they really want to keep that access up," Secviar says, adding that the site also will notify residents of city happenings.

Opportunities to join clubs are enhanced as the site will make residents aware of different groups in the community and their meeting times.

Also, menus from The Clare's six different dining venues will be featured on the site so seniors can get a look at what's for dinner.

Another feature on the site called "my concierge," is where residents can find a maintenance request form if they need a picture installed, a light bulb replaced or need to arrange transportation, Secviar says.

The caregiving support link allows caregivers and residents to find out information on The Clare.

"It is really a social networking Web site for seniors, but it's also a great way for the staff to stay in touch with the residents, and it also increases operational efficiencies," says Janel Wait, interactive

marketing director for GlynnDevins, an advertising and marketing agency that developed Clarity.

Wait says when visitors log on, a welcome screen will feature local and national news, local weather and access to games like solitaire and checkers.

Designed with seniors in mind, Clarity also features a text increase tool so users easily can read the computer screen.

The staff as well as the residents also get hands-on training for the site, Wait notes.

However, Wait anticipates many seniors moving into The Clare will be Internet savvy. Sites like Clarity are going to become the wave of the future, she adds.

Along with life care communities, worldwide senior sites like Seniorocity.com are growing in popularity.

Targeted to adults 40 years old or older, Seniorocity acts as a townsquare for seniors from the United States, Europe, Asia and Australia.

Robert Friedman, Seniorocity co-founder, says members have their own Web page to post profiles, write blogs, share photos and participate in groups.

When the site went live in December of last year, it had 1,000 members signed up within the first month. Since the launch, nearly 10,000 members are registered.

"People are having such a great time on the site that they are sending out e-mails to friends to sign up," Friedman says. "Everybody loves it. It's better than what I expected."

Many different clubs can be created at Seniorocity that gives instant connection with local members or people from around the world. Whether wanting to share recipes or learn about computers, members can join based on their interests.

"There are groups for every aspect of seniors' or Baby Boomers' lives," Friedman says.

Features like chat rooms or photo of the week contests help members share their hobbies. Friedman says Seniorocity also can become a dating site for seniors looking to find a significant other.

Whether looking for love, friendship or advice, senior social networking sites definitely are gaining in popularity and are arriving at the right time because computer confidence also is growing in the senior population.

"It's amazing how active the community is and how friendly and helpful people are. It builds on itself; they all support one another," Friedman says. "It's just now people over 50 can have a place to call their home."