

SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR RETIREMENT LIVING

THE CLARE AT WATER TOWER

BY NATALIE DILLON

If you're under the impression that "retirement community" equals all the Bingo, meatloaf and boredom you can handle, you haven't stepped foot anywhere near The Clare. From the outside, The Clare (located on Loyola University's Water Tower campus at East Pearson Street and Rush Street) seems like any 50-something-story luxury high-rise full of beautiful living spaces, five-star dining, active residents and spectacular vantage points. From the inside, well, it does too.

The world's first high-rise continuing care retirement community constructed in the center of a major city, The Clare boasts more than 600,000 square feet, 248 one-, two- and three-bedroom independent living apartments, and more than 35,000 square feet of commons areas.

Executive Director Michel Desjardins asserts that The Clare is ahead of the curve. "No one has taken this leap before," he says. From the specs alone, it's no surprise builders from as far as Australia and Japan have toured the building, looking for the inspiration and know-how to attempt their own.

Any lasting doubts about retirement communities can be checked at the door, as residents are greeted with dramatic architecture and walls adorned with the kind of art you'd more likely expect to see in a gallery. "We're appealing to a sophisticated, worldly clientele, and they appreciate it," explains Michel. "We want to meet their high expectations."

Vast, floor-to-ceiling windows invite the happy glow of natural light into commons areas and private rooms alike while opening them up to breathtaking views of Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline.

The building is sprinkled with amenities including social lounges, meeting rooms, a day spa and five-star dining facilities serving up breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. The ninth-floor garden terrace features walking paths and spots to relax, providing a quiet escape from the city below. Sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago, The Clare also offers four sacred spaces, including three chapels and one multi-faith meditation room.

Jennifer Ayers, director of Life Enrichment at The Clare, notes that the aquatic and fitness centers have a significant draw. "We're proud to say 80 percent of our residents are engaged in some sort of fitness program," she says, well above average for similar communities. "Our goal is to help them age



The Clare at Water Tower
55 East Pearson Street, Chicago

successfully by staying socially, spiritually and physically active."

With all this, it's a wonder residents even feel the need to leave campus, but they're an active group, says Michel, and all the city has to offer is literally out their front door. Groups of residents regularly attend the theater, symphony, art exhibits and concerts; many volunteer at local schools or charities, and some still work. "We engage them to take control of their own lives," Jennifer explains.

Kathryn Miller moved to The Clare with her husband a year and a half ago and was excited about its accessibility to cultural aspects of the city. "We thought to ourselves, 'What a perfect place for us to be,'" she remembers.

In addition to the thriving surroundings that would complement her lifestyle, Kathryn, whose husband passed away earlier this year, says she felt comforted by the different levels of care offered. "We knew if one of us had to move to assisted living, we'd only be an elevator away," she explains.

Michel says The Clare is a place for people who want to plan for their futures. "They want to take control and not be on somebody else's whim," he observes. The Clare offers a continuum of care including assisted living, memory support and skilled nursing, and it's easy to transition from one to the other if it becomes necessary.

The assisted living and memory support floors are separate, but each resident has access to the same five-star kitchen offered in independent living, a skilled staff and a private living space they can personalize with their own art and furniture.

While The Clare has prime amenities, location and services, residents and staff say the community of people is the true lifeblood of the building. Monthly town hall meetings are crowded affairs, and a Resident Advisory Board is active in campus life.

Betty Bergstrom, president of the Resident Advisory Board, was among the first residents at The Clare. After the sudden loss of her husband following the move, she said the community was a great support. "There isn't a single night I go down to dinner when somebody doesn't ask me to join them," she says. "It's a remarkable group of people."

And whether you're sourcing your next residence or that of your parent, the guarantee of a fulfilling and comfortable lifestyle is a reassuring thought, indeed. ■