

# 'Homelike' is the new standard for senior living



Rendering courtesy of Perkins Eastman

Two of the planned Jewish Senior Life Green House homes, along with the Jewish Home in the background, which will be renovated with Green House model features.

## Upgrades and new builds put residents' quality of life at the forefront

by LISA MARIA RICKMAN

**U**pgrades to local senior living communities as well as new projects are centering on a fresh model of care that strives to create a more home-like atmosphere for residents.

Two of the projects are coming from Rochester Regional Health and Jewish Senior Life. One is a \$23 million project to build a 111-bed assisted living community in Greece. It is due for completion in the fall.

The other is an \$83 million enterprise at Jewish Senior Life in Brighton that will break ground in April.

"This project that we're undertaking probably is going to be one of the largest projects that's going to be taking place in the senior living community in Rochester," says Mike King, president and CEO of JSL.

"And we're building actual homes."

The JSL build will be in partnership with the Green House Project, a national non-profit working to improve senior living facilities, lending its trademark to those that meet its standards. These standards include a home-style layout, small size and a low staff ratio. The idea behind Green Homes is to create living spaces that are more personal and home-like—where residents can build relationships with each other, their families and the staff on a more intimate level in familiarity and comfort.

These features are especially important as the number of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias increases. Improving the quality of life for all residents at senior living communities is a major factor in both new builds and upgrades. For many who are considering these communities, quality of care, although important, takes a backseat to nursing home quality of life.

"That's really what we're trying to do. We've always had a great reputation for delivering superior care in our organization," King says. "Now we're really making a major paradigm shift, where we're saying

that we're going to put the quality of life of our residents up there right alongside the quality of care that we're delivering."

JSL is going to build nine 9,000-square-foot homes; each will house 12 residents, who will have their own bedrooms with private, European-style showers. The shared central living space will feature a dining room, kitchen, living room and den.

"These are actual homes that we will be providing skilled nursing services in," King says. "I can tell you we're going to be one of the largest in the country when this project is completed."

The homes also are designed to make the natural environment a part of everyday life. JSL's Green House homes will have large garden spaces for residents to freely enjoy, and every house has a screened-in porch.

"It's like a three-season porch," says King, "so they can interact with the outdoors as much as you can in Rochester."

The homes will open in July 2017, with more renovation plans for JSL after that. The entire project is slated for completion at the end of 2018.

"We're going to transform the inside of the Jewish Home," King says. "We're going to bring new life to an old building."

The campus' signature tower building has marked the I-590 and Winton Road skyline since 1985 and hasn't seen much in the way of major renovations since. All the rooms in the tower will be turned into private rooms with showers in many of them, and small households will be created on each floor, mimicking the communal feeling of the Green House homes.

"We have 360 beds inside the Jewish Home," says King. "At the end of the project, we'll have approximately the same number of beds. We'll be dropping about 30 out of the total project. In essence, what we'll be doing is moving folks out into the Green Houses, start renovating the Jewish Home, and then we'll do it a wing at a time within the Jewish Home."

Current residents will be getting moved around but have a choice about where they want to go within the JSL community, be it the Green Houses, the





Photo courtesy of Rochester Regional Health

**The assisted living and memory care community atrium in the Village at Unity provides a comfortable space for residents to visit or relax.**

Tower or the Summit.

The Summit at Brighton is a 90-unit independent-living building that also houses a 60-unit assisted living community and an 18-unit memory care residence all in one campus. After listening to residents' feedback, the Summit began updating the apartments a couple of years ago.

"We actually have finished boards and new residents coming in get to choose from

three different sets of finishes, flooring, cabinetry, granite countertops," says Susan Bussey, senior vice president of senior housing. "It's a big hit. They get to customize their apartments, and they really love it."

Other recent construction at JSL includes the Lodge at Wolk Manor, which opened its doors in 2014. The Lodge is an assisted living memory care community that is

purposely small to "feel more like a community," Bussey says.

"There's only 18 residents there because we wanted to feel more like a community, a small interactive community," she says. "This meets the needs of the residents, and it's really working out well. We've seen improvements in behaviors because it feels like a house rather than like a foreign place."

A couple of Rochester Regional Health's senior living communities have undergone recent makeovers. Its new build, the Village at Mill Landing, is targeted to open in September. The \$23 million collaboration with Columbia/Wegman Acquisition II LLC will be approximately 93,000 square feet with 111 units: 54 studios, 26 one-bedrooms, eight two-bedrooms and 23 shared units.

"It's coming along very well—thank god for nice winter weather so far," says Don Felter, president of housing at Rochester Regional Health. "It will be a licensed assisted living and memory care facility. It's a secure unit where we provide additional assistance for folks with early onset dementia. They can function on their own, but we provide additional assistance for them."

Construction began at 45 Mill Road in Greece in July 2015. When complete, the community will have the home-like feel that is the new standard.

"Residents' wants and needs were starting to change, and we did our research on the generation and made our decisions based on that research," Felter says. "There will be patios, outdoor fireplaces. The indoor living areas will be spacious, with high ceilings. I think the residents will certainly enjoy it."



Photo courtesy of JSL

**Mike King**



File photo by Kimberly McKinzie

**The Summit at Brighton began renovating its living spaces a couple of years ago, allowing residents to customize features in their apartments.**





Photo courtesy of Rochester Regional Health

**Part of the Village at Unity expansion is a cinema that features movies for residents and their guests.**

“Things are definitely getting away from the institutional, hospital-like look,” he added. “Assisted living communities like ours are on the whole more of that home, that residential style and feel. We do provide (hospital) services, but we have nice living rooms, nice dining rooms, choices of meals, libraries, activities. It’s definitely not a sterile environment.”

Columbia/Wegman Acquisition II is a joint venture between Rochester-based Wegman Cos. Inc. and Columbia Pacific Senior Housing Fund II, a Seattle firm that is building assisted living communities across the country. RRH’s the Village at Unity, which



Photo courtesy of JSL

**Susan Bussey**

manages more than 300 independent living, assisted living and memory care units, will manage the Village at Mill Landing.

The Village at Unity, off Long Pond Road, itself recently completed a \$22 million expansion and renovation. The senior living community now has memory care in addition to independent living and assisted living.

“We had two independent communities about 800 feet apart on the campus, and we had a small assisted living community, but no memory care,” Felter says. “The expansion was doubling the size of the assisted living and building a brand new community of memory care. We went from 30 units of assisted living to a total of 60, and 20 of those are memory care.”

The memory care community has added security measures to prevent those with Alzheimer’s and other dementias from hurting themselves or getting lost, while providing areas for residents to freely and safely gather for dining or taking a walk.

“We also connected the communities with climate-controlled walkways and added a dining area and a park area for residents,” Felter says. The main socializing center even has a cinema.

And RRH’s Edna Tina Wilson Living Center, a 120-bed skilled nursing facility near the Route 390-Lake Ontario State Parkway interchange, celebrated the completion of a \$5.8 million renovation last November. Nearly 29,000 square feet of the center’s interior common space was overhauled in less than two years.

“It was a general upgrade to the entire facility to make it more homelike,” says Mark

Klyczek, vice president of the long-term care division at RRH. “We were actually able to make it into three ‘neighborhoods.’ Each neighborhood has 40 residents and its own nice large kitchen area with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. So in each neighborhood, you get the aromas of food cooking at mealtimes.

“The other nice thing is the residents can eat at the time of their choosing,” he adds. “Traditionally, food comes up in a nursing home first thing in the morning. This way, if a resident wants to sleep in, they can sleep in and if they want to get up early, they can. There is more freedom for them.”

Other cozy upgrades include fireplaces and quiet sitting areas. New flooring and lighting features were added, and the residents’ rooms were made more private. The bathrooms were updated as well.

“Each unit has large spa rooms with an area for two showers and a large tub, with new ceramic tiles and floors,” Klyczek says.

The bathrooms also now have tracking ceiling lifts, permanently affixed, for those who need extra assistance, he says. No additional equipment needs to be moved in or out by the staff, which means less consternation for residents.

The sum of the changes is a place that’s more relaxed—and more like a home.

“You can just see the reduced anxiety and lack of a need to rush through the day,” Klyczek says. “The residents can take their time, as well as the staff, and enjoy their time instead of feeling like they are in a medical institution on a schedule.”

*Lisa Maria Rickman is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*



Photo courtesy of Rochester Regional Health

**Don Felter**