

# RETIREMENT LIVING WITH A TWIST

Active 55-plus adults find community at Carp-based company's Wellings developments

LAURA BYRNE PAQUET

When Kevin Pidgeon walks through Wellings of Stittsville, one of his company's adult lifestyle communities, he chats with every person he meets. From the concierge at the front desk to three residents waiting for the elevator, he seems to know everyone. He's like the King of Kensington.

(If you don't get the King of Kensington reference, you're probably not in the Wellings target demographic. The King of Kensington was a character in a 1970s CBC sitcom, who knew everyone in his neighbourhood.)

Pidgeon is the president and chief operating officer of Nautical Lands Group. The Carp-based developer builds and runs rental developments called Wellings, aimed at active adults 55 and over.

The typical Wellings resident, Pidgeon says, wants to get away from the responsibilities of home ownership, such as maintenance and snow shovelling. However, they don't want or need the health care services a traditional retirement home provides. "It's truly a different demographic," he notes.

Currently, Nautical Lands has 12 communities in Ontario and Alberta that are fully open, partly complete or in development. Intriguingly, the design and amenities of each project vary by location.

For instance, like urban Wellings properties in Whitby and Calgary, Wellings of Stittsville is a highrise complex. The first phase, with 180 apartments, opened in late 2019 and is completely occupied. Demand is strong enough that Nautical Lands is building phases 2 and 3 simultaneously. When they are finished, the property will have 525 units.

In Stittsville, each unit has a full kitchen, and a full-sized washer and dryer. Most also have a balcony. Bathrooms feature step-in shower enclosures that were custom designed for Wellings, with built-in shelves and ramp-friendly edges.

Even though every unit has a kitchen, all residents receive a monthly \$450 food and beverage credit to use in the on-site dining room, pub and coffee shop. The building also has a fitness room, a 24-hour concierge, underground parking and other services. Units range from 484 to 1,054 square feet of interior space, and monthly rents start at \$2,830.

An airy ground-floor atrium is the heart of the building. Light pouring through huge windows illuminates the dining areas and other common spaces, such as a cluster of comfortable chairs facing a big-screen TV. Creating inviting spaces for resi-



Carp-based Nautical Lands Group builds and runs developments called Wellings in Ontario and Alberta, aimed at active adults 55 and over.



The light-filled ground-floor atrium is the heart of this luxe rental building, which features comfortable common areas with plush seating.



In Stittsville, each unit has a full kitchen, and a full-sized washer and dryer along with step-in showers. Most also have a balcony.

dents to gather — whether they're eating dinner, taking a yoga class or watching the Stanley Cup — is a key part of the Wellings concept, says Pidgeon.

"Socialization is the underpinning of everything that we do," he says, citing research showing that interacting with others is critical to maintaining mental and physical health as people age. "The longer we can keep you coming out for dinner, the more social you'll stay."

In some smaller towns and cities, Nautical Lands constructs low-rise buildings of 75 to 132 apartments, with amenities similar to the bigger urban properties. For instance, in Prince Edward County, Wellings of Picton is a four-storey complex with a smaller atrium, but it still

offers on-site dining, a 24-hour concierge and other perks similar to Stittsville. Rents start at \$2,948.

The company also builds a third configuration that appeals to people looking for a more house-like living space, fewer amenities and a lower price. At Wellings communities in Winchester and Brockville, for instance, the units are bungalow townhouses. Pidgeon says these appeal to rural residents looking to downsize.

"One of the things we learned very quickly was, when you grow up on a farm, you don't want to go upstairs or up an elevator," he explains, adding that these communities have also drawn retirees from Ottawa.

Neither Winchester nor Brock-

ville has on-site dining facilities, underground parking or concierge services. Instead, each community has a well-appointed clubhouse, with a big-screen TV, fitness facilities, games tables and other communal amenities. At each location, the interior floor space of the bungalows ranges from 706 to 965 square feet, and current rents start at \$1,995.

Nautical Lands appears to have hit on a winning concept. All 63 units in Phase 1 of the Winchester property were leased before the project broke ground. That phase is open and construction is continuing. The community will have 440 units when it is complete.

Pidgeon says Nautical Lands chooses its locations based on a

variety of factors, including the demographics of the nearby population, the availability of affordable land and the proximity of shops and services, such as grocery stores and banks.

So why would a downsizer choose to rent an apartment rather than buy a condo? Pidgeon offers a hypothetical but plausible scenario. If a couple sold their house for \$750,000 and invested that money at a five per cent annual rate of return, they could pay \$3,125 a month in rent without touching their principal. They'd also avoid the expenses of maintenance and property taxes. And when Super Bowl Sunday rolled around, a big-screen TV and fellow fans would be just steps away.