GREENWOOD RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

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Compassionate Living with an Independent Spirit
The natural progression of life dictates that a time comes when many people reach a point when it is no longer in their best interests to maintain an independent home. Throughout every stage of life, humans yearn to have their house to feel like a home and for that reason it is essential for those moving into a retirement living community that they find an environment that makes them feel comfortable as they move onto the next chapter of their life.

IN LESS THAN a decade Greenwood Retirement Communities has earned itself an outstanding reputation throughout southern Ontario for being a preeminent leader in providing a positive, vibrant and caring community for citizens who require that extra special care and compassion. The Canadian Business Journal recently spoke with Greenwood Retirement Communities President Miri Hadas Koller about her company’s tremendous success as it enters its ninth year in operation. Hadas Koller has been with the organization since its inception and is personally equipped with more than 20 years of first-hand experience in the management and marketing of residential communities, condominium and commercial properties, and retirement communities.

Greenwood is a non-age-restricted retirement community, which opened its first residence in 2008. Ironically, the path taken by the company was not one that was originally intended. “We started out not planning to be retirement residence operators. The owners expected us to be investing in real estate but we found ourselves investing in retirement homes. We believe in a hands-on approach and the more we got engaged the more it became apparent to us that if we do our own management we will do better than any third party and that’s how Greenwood was formed to manage our own retirement home portfolio,” begins Hadas Koller.

Greenwood currently owns eight residences in six different cities: Lindsay, Peterborough, Brampton and Oshawa with two each in Toronto and Hamilton. A second residence is now in the works for Oshawa with construction slated to begin in about a year and be open for housing tenants in two years.

Each location is headed by an executive director, with the exception of Hamilton where the ED runs both residences, which are just five minutes apart by car. Each executive director has a group of managers working with them including the chef, the director of care, activities manager and a marketing director.
In addition to providing the very best in residential care, Greenwood takes great pride in being a company that people enjoy working with. “We give the Executive Directors a lot of room to do things their own way,” adds Hadas Koller. “We trust that they know their market, their clients, their team and their building better than we do, and that they will make the right choices.”

The more open business approach attracts independent thinkers, who thrive on the implementation of creative ideas. It also brings with it the responsibility to be accountable for the decisions that are made.

Currently there are about 450 staff members, many of whom are part-time employees who will typically come in for a three-hour shift serving in the dining room or assisting other staff with their core responsibilities. Staffing requirements at an individual residence can range from 50 to 70 employees depending on the size of the residence. Currently, the smallest residence has 92 suites and the largest has 206, with an expansion now in the works.

During the overnight hours there are always at least two staff members working to ensure the needs of the residents are met. “It is much busier during the day with all the managers, nurses, servers, housekeepers and maintenance personnel. The staffing can fluctuate from a high of about 15 during the day, down to two overnight,” notes Hadas Koller.
unique characteristics are due to a number of factors including the population of the marketplace as well as the setup of the residence that fosters either more or less independence.

“We have two residences in Hamilton. One of them has bigger suites with full kitchens and the residents are much more independent with meals that are served buffet style. It’s very different in our other Hamilton residence just five minutes away, which has smaller suites, and not all of them have kitchenettes – and so it attracts a different segment of the population,” says Hadas Koller.

At Greenwood there is a firm commitment to providing the types of social activities that are most popular with the residents, with numerous interactive activities available on a daily basis. Some residents like to mingle, while others prefer to spend the bulk of their time alone. “There are exercise classes, games classes and art classes and we bring in entertainment. Sometimes we take residents out to the mall, a show or a baseball game,” says Hadas Koller.

Oftentimes retirees only have the chance to see family members once a week or perhaps once a month but at Greenwood they have the option of being around friendly people whenever they so choose. There is no minimum age requirement but moving into a retirement residence is most often borne out of necessity. As example, a person may find they can no longer adequately cook, shop or clear the snow from their sidewalks and driveways. From the residents’ perspective they are immersed in a wonderful culture that is exceptionally caring and compassionate. It also provides an excellent outlet to make new friends at the age of 90 and beyond.

Appreciation for the Team
The Greenwood Education Fund was initiated several years ago and provides up to $2,500 to 10 to 15 employees or their family members towards college or university education. “We really believe in investing in the team and there is nothing like education to get you further in life. We love spending our money on furthering people’s opportunities in life,” says Hadas Koller.

Upon the advent of summer, Greenwood
always has something special on the calendar for the employees and their family members – such as an all-expense paid visit to the Toronto Zoo or Canada’s Wonderland. The initiative began when the company was much smaller but Hadas Koller says it’s important to keep it going because it boosts the moral of employees, who are so integral to the success of the retirement communities. Many of the staff members have been loyal workers for a number of years and the cost of taking an entire family to a place such as Canada’s Wonderland is often prohibitive for some of them to do on their own.

“The fact we can arrange a day for them to spend with their families is a great way to show our appreciation of them,” says Hadas Koller. “I love my job and I love Greenwood. When you work for a company where the managers and employees love their jobs then they pay you back by doing the best job they can.”

In addition to the new residence in Oshawa, Greenwood has other projects in the pipeline, including the expansion of current locations. One thing Hadas Koller is very mindful about is not to grow so quickly that there is a loss of that personal touch.

Greenwood is always looking for great people to join their dedicated and loyal staff. Employees must be caring and nurturing individuals, which is what Hadas Koller looks for in all new hires. “It is not age – it is attitude. We put them through the interview process and then there are a lot of information tutorials we feed into them and teach them.”

“It’s not me – it’s the great people who work alongside me,” concludes Hadas Koller. CBJ

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