



Senior Living
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Seniors have retirement living options in the Upstate



The Willows of Easley born of personal experience

By Ginny White-Johnson
Staff Writer

Sometimes smaller means better. Much is the case at The Willows of Easley, founded in 1997 by Kevin Kay and family, the Willows is family owned and operated.

“Because we’re smaller, we do a lot of things ourselves,” Kay said. “Which helps keep costs down and helps us respond quicker when the need arises.”

Without some distant corporate entity in the background, Kay and his staff feel they are better able to fulfill the changing needs of their residents and take an individual approach to assistance.

“We keep a very personal touch on things,” Kay said. “We

don’t have an 800 number to call.”

Activities Director Violet Sewell makes every senior feel involved by scheduling easy activities and trips that most of the 48 residents can take advantage of.

“She’s always got things going on, a great sense of humor. They enjoy her quirkiness,” Kay said. She even dresses up for Mardi Gras.

“Last week went to Silver Bay to eat. We had 20 go,” Kay said. “That’s a big portion. When nearly half of them get out to eat, that tells you we’ve got an active group.”

For Mothers’ Day, the Willows hosts a big cookout which attracts some 250 family and friends. At



Christmastime, a large holiday party brings everyone closer together.

“Some things we do regularly is to take trips, going out for rides,” Kay said. While out for rides, Sewell will often take

detours for ice cream and other treats.

“If Krispy Kreme’s ‘Hot Now’ sign is lit, we’re pulling in,” Kay said, laughing.

And size matters when it

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Photos by Jimmy Burnette

Willows Valentine Queen Zona Ladd’s coronation is news around the world. One friend of Ladd’s living in Germany told Willow’s owner Kevin Kay that she’d already heard about it before he had the chance to tell her.

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Locally owned and operated

Independent living can be fun at The Commons

By Ginny White-Johnson
Staff Writer

The Commons at the Willows fulfills the unique needs of active seniors giving them the lifestyle they want while providing the security they need.

A state-of-the-art independent living community, The Commons is unlike most in its classification because it offers more than just a private room, bathroom and mailing address.

Owner operator Kevin Kay wanted to leave some decisions up to the individual residents to make living their lives more enjoyable.

"The Commons offers a choice — if you want to cook, you can. If you don't, we'll do the cooking for you. You've got choices," Kay said.

Located next to the original

Willows facility on Robert P. Jeanes Road just north of Palmetto Health Baptist Easley, there are 40 one-bedroom apartments and the 12 two-bedroom apartments is generously appointed, including a full kitchen.

But eating isn't the only decision residents have.

"We've got a growing list of activities going on and they have a ball," Kay said, citing a recent trip to see the Nutcracker at the Peace Center in Greenville.

"They're really having a good time, whether they're talking while working a puzzle or sitting around the fireplace talking about different things... they tend to laugh with and at each other depending, on what the situation is," Kay said.

The sense of camaraderie among residents of The Commons

is surprising in that it's expected of a younger crowd living in similar conditions.

"We were just kidding about

this that it's sort of like being back in college, living in the dorm with that tight-knit sense of commu-

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Photo by Jimmy Burnette

The Commons activity director Louise Barbrey, right, keeps these active seniors busy with a variety of activities every day of the week. Helen Chastaine, left, and Nell Hamilton take advantage of many of the activities, including Bingo Night.

Can you stop and smell the flowers without sneezing?

For most of us, Spring is a glorious time of the year, with the entire world around us experiencing rebirth. But for those who have allergies, Spring can be one of the most frustrating times of the year. In our April edition of Healthy Living, we'll take a look at the most common allergies people suffer from, and what treatments are available.

Plus, we'll have a preview of the Pickens County Chapter of the March of Dimes' WalkAmerica.

All coming in the April edition of ...

Healthy Living



COMMONS

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nity,” Kay said. “Take your fun years in college, add about 60 years and that’s what you’ve got. They’re very close.”

One resident wanted a directory made up of everyone living at The Commons because if anyone was sick, feeling down or had lost a loved one, the others wanted to be able to keep in touch with cards, flowers or visits to their apartment.

“It’s a sweet community. The people are very friendly and are forging great friendships,” Kay said. “Some have gone through tough times since moving in and they’re very supportive of each other.”

Kay said The Commons is a great place to live for active seniors is that the owner is only a phone call away.

“One of the things that we do think is a strong selling point is that we’re locally owned and operated,” Kay said, adding there’s no “800” number to call or a faceless corporation to deal with.

Besides, Kay said, the point is freedom, not being tied down.

“They just want to give up some of the hassle of living in a house,” Kay said. “You’re giving up property tax and insurance, their utility and cable TV, it’s all taken care of. When you add up what that stuff costs in a year, it’s a pretty even trade.”

Adjusting to the smaller space may take time, but so far no one is complaining.

“It’s a big change to go from a house to an apartment, but this generation has made that decision on their own, it makes life easier for them, more secure for them and it makes their families feel better that if something happens, there’s somebody there,” Kay said.

Still, it’s not a decision taken lightly.

“The response has been very

positive, most people come in and look and it might be two or three months before they commit,” Kay said. “We’re still in the phase where folks come back and look, come back and look, and when they come with a tape measure, we know something’s going on.”

The design of The Commons comes from years of experience and detailed fact-finding on the part of Kay and his staff.

“When we were doing research, we found most independent apartments you either had to eat with everybody else or you had to eat alone. We did it where you have a choice,” Kay said.

Unlike other independent facilities that only provide a sink and a microwave, The Commons leaves the decision to cook or not to cook up to the individual.

“A gourmet who moves in still has a full-sized kitchen at his disposal, but everyone can eat in the dining hall,” Kay said.

Choice is so important to the concept behind The Commons, it’s built into the slogan, “You’ve earned your freedom, now it’s time to enjoy it.”

“The folks are still really independent — they visit their kids, go to the beach for a week, they’re still going and doing,” Kay said. “They’re not stuck in the apartment.”

No lease agreement is required and residents can pay only one bill month-to-month. No endowment is necessary and prices start at \$1,700 monthly.

“They can move in and have their own living space but don’t have to worry about the yard or housekeeping,” Kay said. “Our dream was to create a comfortable environment with flexible living arrangements.”

Every apartment has walk-in closets, nine-foot tall ceilings, individual air conditioning units and controls, optional balconies and porches, and cable television

included.

Weekly top-to-bottom house-keeping (they even change the sheets), linen service including fresh bath towels each week, multiple on-site laundry facilities, a common fitness center, activities room with card tables and a big-screen TV, and a full-time activities director are available to each resident.

Private dining accommodations for entertaining larger groups, a library, piano and fireplaces are to be available for all. A beauty salon/barber shop is already slated for inside The Commons.

For older adults, safety and security are always a concern. With 24-hour staffing, emergency call system with connections in

each room of every apartment, a video surveillance system, top-of-the-line sprinkler system and an intercom buzz-in entry system — The Commons has everything covered, even the mail.

“The post office has been very good to us, nobody has to worry about walking out in the rain to get their mail,” Kay said, adding that he is thankful for the tremendous cooperation from the Easley branch post office. “Everyone can get their packages delivered.”

For more information about the Willows or The Commons, log onto www.willowsofeasley.com or call Kay at 855-9800.

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WILLOWS

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comes to caring for aging and ailing adults.

“The Willows is the perfect size for assisted living,” Kay said. “I would never ever want to build an assisted living bigger than this.”

“Everybody knows each other. It’s not so big that you’re faceless. Everyone knows their names, when someone is at the hospital they send cards to them. If somebody is missing from the table, everyone wants to know if they’re feeling okay,” Kay said. “Because we’re not huge and gigantic it makes a difference.

The idea for the Willows grew out of the frustrating experiences Kay and others had trying to care for aging grandparents.

“Suddenly, we were faced with becoming their full-time caregivers,” Kay said.

At first, like many others, Kay and family tried to maintain their sanity while keeping their grandparents at home. They landed in a situation that was incredibly expensive and increasingly difficult to manage.

But out of the stress the family realized assisted living was the only answer. It was these experiences in and out of these facilities with various family members that spurred Kay to open his own assisted living home.



Photo by Ben Robinson

Miss Easley Teen visits Willows

Libby Boerger, Miss Easley Teen 2005, stopped by The Willows Saturday, Feb. 19, to visit the residents. Boerger performed her clogging routine that she will use for her talent presentation in the Miss South Carolina Teen Pageant in June. Above, she visits with, from left, Jo Humphrey, Zona Ladd and Mary Bowie.

“That’s how we got started,” Kay said. “From this frustrating experience came our vision for The Willows of Easley.”

For more information about the Willows or the Commons, log onto www.willowsofeasley.com or call Kevin Kay at 855-9800.

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