

# KENDALL GAZETTE

## Ask Helen



### Start Planning Early To Avoid Reacting To Seniors' Changing Needs

BY HELEN SHAHAM

**Q.** *My widowed 85-year-old uncle recently had a health scare and we've decided that a senior living community may be in his best interest. We seem to be reacting rather than researching his housing options. What could we have done differently?*

**A.** Selecting the right senior living community is one of the most important housing decisions a senior and their loved ones will ever make. Planning and operating in 'crisis mode' makes the process significantly more stressful.

Many factors may precipitate a move to a senior living community including the death of a spouse or an illness. The key to minimizing the tension, should you be faced with one of these scenarios, is to begin researching in advance; before the need arises.

A conversation with your uncle about his preferences such as where he'd like to live, services he requires and activities he enjoys is also critical. By asking the right questions, you can quickly narrow down your list of prospective communities.

Adult children should also remember that a common fear among seniors as they age is the

loss of control. It's imperative to involve them in the decision as much as possible so they still feel involved and know it's their decision.

The next step is to narrow the list of prospective communities. You may want to work from a checklist, matching your loved one's preferences and needs to what is being offered by the community.

When the checklist is complete, begin visiting the communities. Remember the frailer seniors become, the more they will find these tours tiring. It's best to visit on your own to eliminate places they wouldn't like to live before visiting together. And don't forget that many senior living communities have informative web sites with photos, activity calendars and/or sample menus.

Be sure to ask the following questions before finalizing the decision:

- Will the community's transportation department take mom and dad to special appointments, dialysis or therapy? Is there private car service available to take them to visit friends?
- What do residents need to provide (linens, dishes, microwave, etc.)?
- Who will help them get settled (from hanging pictures and arranging knick knacks to grocery shopping)?

To help a parent or elderly family member get acclimated to their new home, have them visit for lunch or dinner. The residents at most senior living communities, not unlike The Palace Suites, are empathetic and look forward to welcoming their new neighbors. Staff members will also try to ease anxiety by introducing them to a resident who may share a similar interest or hobby.

Also, review the community's daily calendar to see if there are any activities that pique the interest of your loved ones. At our community, the entertainment director plans over 300 monthly classes and activities ranging from sitting aerobics to Happy Hour with nightly entertainment.

The transition may be stressful and it's wise to plan to stay a few days to help seniors get comfortable. If you live out of town, check-in more often, especially during the initial few days. Be prepared to hear complaints during the first few weeks following the move as they transition to their new lifestyle.

To avoid reacting to future senior housing decisions, be proactive in your research. You'll find that by following these steps, you and your elderly relative will enjoy the peace of mind knowing that the best senior living community was selected.

*Helen Shaham and her husband Jacob have been operating retirement communities for nearly 30 years. The Palace Suites in Kendall is a luxury Independent Living Community for active seniors. In addition, The Palace at Kendall campus is home to two Assisted Living Residences and a Nursing & Rehab Center. They also operate The Palace Gardens Assisted Living Community in Homestead, Homestead Manor Nursing Home and The Palace @ Home, a Medicare Certified Home Health Agency. Their two newest projects are The Palace at Weston – luxury living for those 55 and over, and The Palace Tel-Aviv, a continuing care retirement community in Israel. They have two communities under development – The Palace at Weston Senior Living and The Palace at Coral Gables. More information can be found on the company website, [www.thepalace.org](http://www.thepalace.org) or by calling 305-270-7000.*