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The Laconia Daily Sun

Briarcrest marks 25 years of providing quality, affordable retirement living

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LACONIA — When Mark and Ruth Mooney broke ground for Briarcrest Estates 25 years ago their goal was to create a community which would provide a retirement experience for its residents that offered both quality and affordability.

"We wanted it to be affordable, so that's why it's a manufactured home community. And we wanted to offer a quality of life that would allow people some elbow room and give them something to look at besides other homes. So we left a lot of trees, put in fewer sites than we could have, and landscaped it so that there would be plenty of green spaces," says Mark.

But the Mooneys commitment to the future residents of Briarcrest went beyond the scenic setting of the 183-acre site, which now has 241 homes and is located just off from Rte. 106 on the Laconia-Belmont town line.

One of their key considerations was maintaining the quality of life that they had promised to residents. They wanted Briarcrest to be a friendly, welcoming community, where people could get to know their neighbors, create new friendships and enjoy retirement living to the fullest.

To help bring people together they built a large two-story community center which features a meeting room on the top level which seats over 100 people and has a full-service kitchen. The first floor has a post office and library, where the latest in books are available for free to Briarcrest residents.

Today the community center serves as a focal point of the activities at Briarcrest. Weekly events such as bingo, card games and quilting classes are held at the center. There are also monthly luncheons, where residents gather to enjoy a meal and each other's company. Special programs at the center help mark the holiday season.

The luncheons are popular with residents like Harvey Beetle, who along with his wife, Evelyn, have been Briarcrest residents for the last year and a half.

"We enjoy the luncheons. We've got to meet most of the people who live here at them," says Harvey.

He says he and his wife enjoy the Lakes Region lifestyle and living near their sons, Jeff and Alan Beetle, who run the award-winning Patrick's Pub & Eatery in Gilford, where Harvey sometimes entertains with his fellow Barbershop Quartet singers.

Originally from Braintree, Mass., the Beetles have longtime ties to New Hampshire's Lakes Region and moved to a family property on Lake Winnisquam after Harvey retired from a career in the insurance industry in 1990.

When they were looking to downsize, they heard about the Briarcrest from a friend, Fran Guyer, whom Evelyn plays golf with and is a Briarcrest resident.

"We looked at other retirement communities, but they weren't for us. We're active people and like to get outside and enjoy ourselves. We found the right place here and have the most beautiful view of the mountains," says Evelyn.

Also important to the Mooneys is the way in which Briarcrest is managed and maintained.

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They play a hands-on role and personally see that the services they provide, such as lawn mowing, garbage pickup, snow removal and maintenance of the grounds and its five miles of roads are up to their standards.

Ruth is the on-site manager and her office door is always open to residents, while Mark, who has hands-on experience with construction and the operation of heavy equipment, directs the activities of Briarcrest employees in maintaining the property.

"At Briarcrest we have made a commitment to the people who live here that we'll be there for them. We bend over backwards to find ways to help them and make life easier for them," says Ruth.

Those efforts don't go unnoticed.

"You feel safe here. It's comfortable and everything is well taken care of. They have a wonderful maintenance staff that is a big help to the people who live here," says Peg Castiglione, a resident along with her husband, Angelo, since 1993.

A retired aerospace engineer from Methuen, Mass., Angelo says he was drawn to Briarcrest by what he saw while it was being built and was still mostly woods.

"I liked the concept of the manufactured home retirement community and the way it was handled. We drove through a lot during the construction and saw it being developed and liked what we saw. We checked out other places, but chose Briarcrest because it was a perfect fit for us. It's a classy place," says Castiglione.

Angelo, incidentally, is a big Boston Red Sox fan and enjoys watching the games on television as well as tuning them in on the radio and listening to his cousin, Red Sox radio announcer Joe Castiglione.

Pat and Hugh Baird moved up from Guilford, Conn., nine years ago to live in Briarcrest so that they could live near their children, a son in Pembroke and a daughter in Alton.

"This is the nicest place around," says Pat, who says that the one thing that she still misses from her days in the Nutmeg State is the smell of the ocean.

Other than that, she's glad to have found Briarcrest. "It's wonderful here. We have a lot of nice friends who live in the park. And the people who work here do just a wonderful job. They're here for all of us," she says.

Hugh, who worked with the Southern New England Telephone Group, says that he has no hesitation about telling his former co-workers about the retirement haven he and his wife found and inviting them to come visit and see for themselves.

"It's a great place to live. We're really happy here," he says.