

Inquiries flood Aptos assisted-living home

Development will house 100 seniors, including some Alzheimer's patients

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APTOS — A new assisted-living development for seniors in Aptos has yet to be built, but close to 200 inquiries have already come in from interested families.

It is seen as a sign of need, a sign of an aging population in the community.

In Santa Cruz County, the senior population was projected at about 34,100 residents last year. More than 9 percent of that figure is 85 and older, slightly higher than the 7 percent figure for the state.

"We've never seen a population live this long," said Glenn Hammel, a psychologist specializing in geriatrics. He serves on the advisory board of Aegis, which is building the Aptos development.

Aegis will house about 100 seniors, including those with Alzheimer's disease.

Aptos was selected because of the age of the population and the existing needs, company officials said.

A ground-breaking ceremony for the \$10 million complex was held Tuesday. Officials hope it will be ready for occupants in February.

Helen Bonnell, 83, a longtime county resident, attended to learn more about the center.

She was intrigued by a sign on So-

quel Drive announcing the coming of Aegis. It's getting to be time, she said, to start thinking about leaving her home.

There will be several levels of care, for fairly independent residents to 35 units for seniors with Alzheimer's disease.

Administrators stressed that the center will try to break the stereotype of a senior center with elderly residents sitting on the porch.

Video conferencing will be available for residents to stay in touch with family outside the area. Aromatherapy and massages will be offered.

For Alzheimer's sufferers, there will be life-skill stations such as a mock bus stop, a clothes line, a desk. These will serve as familiar surroundings where residents can spend time, as they did when they were younger.

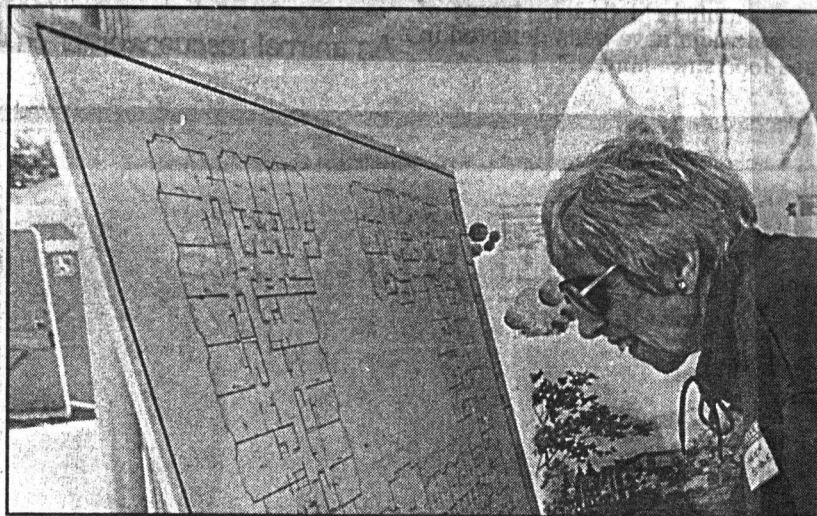
There will also be "wandering areas" for people to walk to reduce agitation. These areas have water available about every 30 feet so no one will become dehydrated, explained Dwayne Clark, president and chief executive officer of the for-profit company.

"Historically, many have had to go out of the county to find a suitable place for relatives with Alzheimer's," said Lucille Des Jardins, president of the local Alzheimer's Association.

The cost of staying at Aegis is expected to be about \$1,900 a month for a room, meals and basic care, according to Clark.

Some units will be made available for low-income residents.

Aegis has four other centers in California under construction, but none in operation.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Helen Bonnell, a retiree living in Corralitos, looks at plans for the Aegis development in Aptos at the groundbreaking.