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A Developer Goes Green for Seniors

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By Eric Veronikis

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Green construction designs support the health of seniors and cut costs for them too, said Dave Sheridan, executive director of the Green Building Association of Central Pennsylvania. And while environmentally friendly construction has popped up in office buildings, warehouses, public facilities and businesses throughout the region, developers have been slow to incorporate it in senior housing, Sheridan said. But a York County developer that builds private senior apartment complexes is convinced that green concepts make sense for seniors.

Springwood Real Estate Services just wrapped up a \$10 million environmentally friendly senior apartment complex in Springettsbury Township, York County, in late September.

Stony Brook Gardens includes 84 apartments, each outfitted with mechanically and electronically controlled dampers that draw in fresh air. The apartments also include environmentally sound carpets and paints and ground-source heat pumps. “The entire building is heated and cooled by energy of the earth,” said Dave Hogg Springwood’s chief executive officer. Springwood had to have 61 wells drilled near the complex to install the pumps. Ground-source heat pumps use the constant low- to mid-50-degree Fahrenheit ground temperature to heat and cool water. It’s an efficient way to heat, ventilate and air condition the complex, Sheridan said.

It cost Springwood a little more to go green at Stony Brook he said, but the extra 5 percent was so minimal he didn’t consider it a factor. “In the winter time, instead of trying to exchange heat with air temperatures in the 30s or lower, it will exchange heat with 52-degree water,” Hogg said. “For us it was purely an economic decision. It helped to go green. But it cuts the total electric use in half. Rent includes utilities. We’re the ones taking the risk on the utility costs.” Developers don’t have to spend more to build green, which is a common misconception, Sheridan said. Commercial, office, institutional and multifamily green facilities cost the same as nongreen structures, he said. “It’s because building teams have had five years or so to understand green-building technologies and how to build them in an integrated way,” Sheridan said. “The experience factor means a lot, and we have a lot more builders and architects that understand how to build green.” Stony Brook is a clone of Springwood Overlook, another green senior housing complex Springwood developed several years ago in York Township. Springwood developed a smaller version of the two complexes two years ago in Silver Spring Township, Cumberland County. Silver Spring Gardens features 59 green units. Stony Brook features carpets and paints that are free of volatile organic compounds, a feature that promotes healthier living for seniors, Sheridan said. The dampers make a lot of sense, too, in a senior housing complex, he said. They promote healthy air quality and allow seniors to control the air quality in their apartments, he said. “It’s hard to imagine why an elderly housing operator would not want to build a high-performance facility,” Sheridan said.

2351 Freedom Way

York, Pennsylvania 17402

(717) 741-0839 Phone

www.hoggconstruct.com

Offices in Pennsylvania and Maryland

