

Plenty to see and do in independent living

When it comes to activities for seniors in independent living, choice is a constant. Today's independent living communities schedule an enormous number of activities and events. And while no one could do it all, the breadth and number of choices means there's something for everyone.

"We like people to have options. The times (for activities) can overlap, and you have to choose. But that's a good thing," said Kelley Wallace, activities coordinator at Edenwald retirement community in Towson. "Some people actually still work and can only come in the evening, but many people come to the daytime activities."

Though Edenwald also offers assisted living, comprehensive nursing care and specialized memory care, which also have scheduled activities, Wallace focuses on the independent living community. She organizes events and activities for its approximately 300 residents and provides support to the 32 resident committees that organize even more activities and clubs.

At Fairhaven continuing care retirement community in Sykesville, those committees of residents are even more important because residents, rather than staff, are the organizers of most activities. Tiffany Heberton, director of therapeutic recreation and volunteer services, explained that Fairhaven's independent living committee thinks up and orchestrates the activities - except for staff-led fitness activities and activities for other groups such as assisted living.

"Someone will come up with an idea for something to do and then they'll get organizing," she explained.

At both places, as well as most other independent living communities, residents enjoy scheduled activities and events both in the community and outside. Whether on campus or off campus, there are special events and regularly scheduled activities (for instance, occasional bus trips to attractions and museums as well as weekly classes on campus); entertainment, fitness or social goings-on (concerts at local churches, tai chi classes and Friday night happy hours in the lounge); and weekly religious programs and services (Mass as well as rosary and other prayer services).

While most events scheduled outside the community are day trips of a just few hours, some may be overnight as well; at Fairhaven, residents organized a weeklong cruise together.

Buses play an important role in getting folks out and about. Edenwald residents who have subscription ticket plans to the Lyric Opera House, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra or Everyman Theatre can count on a bus to transport them to and from shows. Likewise, the bus takes them shopping – both the more fun browsing at the mall and the everyday shopping at the pharmacy and food store.

In November, Edenwald residents can board buses to tour the battlefield at Antietam, National Cryptologic Museum near Fort Meade and Baltimore's Streetcar Museum; listen to brass holiday music at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland and Beethoven at a local church; or visit a local farm and produce stand just before Thanksgiving.

Not only do seniors go out to the entertainment, but it comes to them. The communities' auditoriums are filled with music. A rotation of professional musicians playing classical, Broadway and other popular tunes makes appearances at the communities. Plus, talented residents may perform as well. Lecturers visit as part of the communities' continuing education series, enlightening residents on subjects ranging from Mark Twain to Maryland's trade mission to Asia.

For seniors who like to do rather than just watch and listen, classes and clubs provide residents more participatory fun. At Fairhaven, classes on site range from ceramics to yoga to comparative religion. Activities might include anything from Wii bowling to a lesson on watch and jewelry repair. And while, of course, there is a bridge club, there are also women's and men's poker nights.

At Edenwald, residents can join the garden club and grow a rooftop planter, sing in the Glee Club, discuss current events in "The World We Live In" club or even act in the Edenwald Players.