

## A good mix | Generations come together under one roof

Intergenerational housing is growing in popularity. New developments mix the old and the young to the benefit of both groups. Young people enjoy the stabilizing influence of older people, and the stories they tell. Seniors like the energy young people bring to the environment.

Constance Hatchel lives at Nathalie Salmon House, a five-story intergenerational building in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood. She moved there five years ago with her husband Curtis. The building accommodates seniors and families with children. Resident assistants also live there to help out. "It's a plus to live with younger people," says Constance, who is retired from a long-time job with the Chicago Public Schools. "We like everything about it."

### Nothing new

The idea of different generations living together isn't that radical. After all, humans have long lived together in family units with a mix of ages. Most recently, multigenerational living became more common as young adults and families moved in together because of the pandemic amid health and financial concerns.

The percentage of multigenerational households nationwide increased from 7% in 2010 to 26% in 2020, according to estimates by Generations United, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization. Its mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for everyone's benefit.

There are different types of intergenerational housing. Some, like the Nathalie Salmon House, are built as intentional communities for several generations that offer shared common areas and activities. Generations United estimates that 200 of these sites operate across the country.

Informal multigenerational projects that attract people of all ages are more common. These might include a condominium complex or master-planned development with different type of housing designed for young families, singles and older adults.

The overarching idea is to mix age groups. Each age group can benefit from interactions with the other to enrich day-to-day life.

"Life doesn't segregate people by age, why should we?" asks Gail Schechter, executive director at H.O.M.E., the Chicago-based group that owns and manages Nathalie Salmon House and two other intergenerational projects. The organization has plans to build another project on Chicago's South Side at the corner of South Calumet Avenue and East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. It will include apartments for grandparents raising grandchildren.

H.O.M.E. buildings provide access for all older adult residents to social services and



Mercy Circle resident Sister Nancy Kennelly (center) meets with Mother McAuley High School student council members Grace Kearns (left) and Ayanna McClain (right) to make plans for an Easter service for Mercy Circle residents and the school's MACS with Mercy volunteers.



HOME Executive Director Gail Schechter (left) and Constance Hatchel plant flowers in planters at Salmon House.



Smith Village resident and Army veteran Gene Sablick (center) works side-by-side with St. Cajetan student council members Owen Butler (left) and Sean O'Sullivan (right) as they prepare Valentine's Day gifts for 45 veterans.



ClarkLindsey resident Tam Dang Wei (seated) and intern Anne Yuen set up a display at ClarkLindsey for Lunar New Year.

activities. Families with children and young adults live alongside older adults. Resident assistants, typically younger people, help out in exchange for reduced rent. "People watch out for one another," says Schechter.

Lia Crawford, 40, is a housing assistant at Nathalie Salmon House. She arranges events for residents and helps with the cooking. Residents often share meals. "I didn't have grandparents growing up," says Crawford, who recently finished writing a thriller novel. "Now I have several." She adds that she previously lived alone in an apartment but didn't know any of her neighbors. "Now I'm connected to others," she says.

### Getting together

Oak Park Commons is slated to break ground this spring. Located in Oak Park at Carpenter Avenue and Madison Street, the five-story project is an intergenerational cohousing condominium building with 24 units. Cohousing projects are intentional communities that couple private units and shared space.

The Oak Park Commons development is

eco-conscious with energy efficient features. Unit prices start at \$367,000. Residents share common areas, meal making and chores to help reduce monthly assessment fees. Residents help each other out with child care and elder care. Each resident is expected to contribute about 10 hours of work per month. "We are part of a community," says Susan Stall, a co-founder of the project.

Retirement communities connected to college campuses are a popular housing model. Seniors interact with the student population.

ClarkLindsey is a retirement community in Urbana, near the University of Illinois campus. Residents can take classes and enjoy campus events. The university also collaborates with ClarkLindsey on age-related research. For example, residents are participating in research on assistive robots. The community also has an internship program for students.

### Special programming

Recognizing the benefits of mixing age groups, local retirement communities

also feature intergenerational programs. Smith Village, a retirement community on Chicago's South Side teams up with St. Cajetan elementary school at this time every year to create Valentine's for recovering veterans. This year, the students and residents made origami hearts and cranes, along with cards. Army veteran and Smith Village resident Gene Sablick likes the energy the students bring to the project. "They have unbridled enthusiasm," he says.

Students from Mother McAuley High School visit Mercy Grde, a retirement community on the city's Southwest Side, once a month. The students meet with residents and complete projects for local nonprofit groups. Sometimes they get together just to have fun.

Sister Nancy Kennelly lives at Mercy Grde and enjoys talking with the students. She asks them what they like to do and about their future plans. Kennelly listens to their dreams and encourages them. "They encourage me too," says Kennelly. "We have a wonderful exchange."