

Nov 21 / 84

Sydenham seniors' surroundings super

SYDENHAM

There is something different about the Meadowbrook. It is Sydenham's new — and first — 25-unit senior citizen housing apartment.

It looks conventional only on the outside. Pass the front door and you sense much has been done to reduce the institutional look inside this apartment complex for 60s-and-over in Loughborough and Storrington townships.

The corridors don't run straight through the building and the zig-zag appearance effectively reduces any hospital-like feeling. On the practical side, it adds much-needed living space to each of the 25 kitchens and dining rooms, allowing often overlooked kitchen wall cupboards to be erected.

The size is important because, as anyone with experience knows, often the elderly's first complaint upon arrival in a seniors' home is that the units are so small, particularly if the new residents are moving in from their own houses.

There's one disadvantage that probably won't affect residents of the Sydenham home.

Housing Minister Claude Bennett — in town Monday morning to officially open the new unit — said urban seniors would complain that the staggered hall offers a hiding place for thieves.

The Loughborough Housing Corporation, which operates the building as a private non-profit corporation, tried to be as non-conformist about the building as possible and still remain within government guidelines.



HARRY KILFOYLE

They bought the land, erected the building and furnished it for \$969,590, all within government financial standards.

A lot of thought went into the building and in some cases government regulations were either bent or broken.

The government doesn't encourage second-floor laundry rooms, but Meadowbrook's builders decided that divided laundry facilities best suited the needs of the residents.

The province also frowns on outside clotheslines because, in its view, they're too unsightly. In Sydenham, the unit has its own clotheslines because the residents wanted it that way.

About the only disagreement that the government won turned out to be a hollow victory at best. It refused to budge on the size of the parking lot, believing less than half the building's occupants would driven their own cars. They insisted that only 11 spaces be provided — but it turns out 16 were needed.

The housing corporation will correct the oversight by enlarging the parking lot in the spring.

And the housing corporation added its own little touches. Colorful wall hangings by regional artists decorate the hallways. Benches built by village high-school students are located outside each apartment, affording the elderly a rest spot but also providing handy storage for grocery bags while unlocking the apartment door.

The residents also had a lot of say about the building. They devised their own security system — a combination Neighborhood Watch to prevent crime and a buddy system to report sudden illness — and they vetoed renting out a security job to a young person. That meant the apartment could be rented to an area resident seeking accommodation.

The Meadowbrook is operated by a private non-profit corporation, one 25,000 units in the province. It receives monthly grants of \$6,800 from the ministry of housing and \$3,000 from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

And if you think you have a large mortgage, think about this. Loughborough Housing Corporation pays \$10,000 a month in mortgage payments!

The Corporation rents 13 geared-to-income apartments. It rents the remainder for rent at the lower end of the private-sector rent scale.

It has 31 residents including seven couples and one pair of newly weds: A few months after he moved in to the complex, Ken Watchhorn got married — but he found new wife Margaret outside the residence.