

Tribune January 21, 2012

Affordable rental buildings filling gap in senior housing



Thomas Place Glenview, with indoor parking, a washer and dryer in the apartment... (Keri Wiginton/ Chicago Tribune photo) January 21, 2012|By Jane Adler, Special to the Tribune

At a vulnerable point in life, many seniors must find an affordable place to live.

Sylvia Krasner was 86 when she found herself in need of a reasonably priced apartment. She had lived comfortably for 53 years in her Glenview house where she had raised her children. But after her husband died, her monthly income was cut in half without his pension and Social Security checks.

[Housing](#) Get Online info, prices, & options View pictures and floor plans today
[tsPlace.com](#)

Expenses loomed to maintain her home, including repairing the roof, painting the exterior and replacing the water heater.

"My house was draining me," said Krasner, now 91.

Searching for a nice place that she could afford was a daunting process. Krasner looked at retirement communities, the kind that require big entry fees and monthly fees. But the cost was more than she could handle. Krasner also looked at apartments, but the rents in Glenview where she wanted to stay were too steep.

"It was very important to stay within my means," she said.

Krasner discovered a new building under construction, Thomas Place Glenview, an affordable apartment project for seniors in Glenview. The building satisfied her wish list, with indoor parking, a washer and dryer in the apartment and a full-size kitchen where she could do her own cooking. Best of all, the rent was about a third of her monthly income, a sum she could easily afford.

"There are no surprises here," said Krasner, who has lived at Thomas Place for five years.

Often living on fixed incomes, many seniors need an affordable apartment. But the demand for decent, low-cost places far exceeds the supply.

The recent housing slump has boosted the demand for apartments for seniors. More than one out of every five renters is 55 or older, according to a recent study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. Thirteen percent are over 65, a total of more than 5 million in 2009. As baby boomers age, the number of renters over 65 will increase in the next 10 years by nearly 2 million, the study says.

The need for low-cost apartments for seniors is growing. Government programs that help to finance the projects are under stress because of the economic downturn. Affordable projects are difficult to build too. Developers must assemble a complex assortment of subsidies and tax credits. Some towns object to affordable senior housing, fearing it could hurt property values or strain city services.

But affordable apartments for seniors can be found. It just takes patience and persistence.

In 2010, the city of Chicago completed its five-year plan for 4,000 new low-cost apartments for seniors. The city led the effort with about \$400 million in tax credits, loans and other funds.

Another round of city projects has been approved. Several of the new affordable apartments for seniors include the Edward Marx Apartments, 5801 N. Pulaski Road; Goldblatt's Senior Living, 4700 S. Ashland Ave.; All Saints Residence, 11701 S. State St.; and the Naomi and Sylvester Smith Senior Living Center, 8031 S. Halsted St.

Also, several years ago, the Chicago Housing Authority finished renovating its 58 seniors-only affordable buildings. A remodeled CHA apartment building at 5650 N. Kenmore Ave. opened in September amid rave reviews for its design and environmentally-friendly features.

[Using Compare Pricing & Services on Top 5 Senior Living Communities by City. BestSeniorCareOnline.com](#)
Onsite Laundry, Cleaning & Care. Search for a Facility Near You. [SeniorHousingNet.com/Senior-Housing](#)

Competition can be fierce for affordable spots in age-restricted buildings. Waiting lists can stretch for years. But wait times are fluid because applicants can quickly change their plans, apartment managers say. They recommend filling out applications at several locations.

Sometimes it's a matter of being at the right place at the right time.

Westly McGee, 63, was hunting for an apartment while a \$10 million renovation was being completed at Thornwood House Apartments in University Park.

"I checked out a few places," said McGee, who wanted his own place after living with his sister. "The apartment at Thornwood House was several hundred dollars a month cheaper than the others, and it was all new."

Nancy Astromsky recently rented an apartment at an affordable building in Wilmette.

"I didn't even know this building was here," said Astromsky. She admits the application involved a lot of paperwork, a common complaint among seniors. "But it's nothing you can't handle. It wasn't overwhelming," she said.

Astromsky's apartment overlooks the small playground of a preschool, and a church is next door. "This isn't like government-sponsored housing," she said.

Seniors who want an affordable place must meet income and age guidelines, which vary depending on the type of subsidy or financing used to construct the building. Some buildings require residents to be age 55 or older. Others use the minimum age of 62.

Income caps vary too. A common limit is about \$32,000 a year. Applicants with higher income usually won't qualify, though some buildings have higher limits.

Monthly rents range from as low as around \$300 to as much as about \$900, depending on the building and the senior's income.

[Find The Perfect Apartment Today. Price & Location & Find Your Home! HouseRadar.com](#)
Independent and Assisted Living in Greater Chicago. Contact Us Today. [www.HorizonBayChicago.com](#)

MORE:

- [Senior Living Apartments](#)Seniors, Live In Style! Check Out These Senior Apartments. [seniorfacts.com](#)
- [Find Senior Housing](#)Free assistance finding senior living in your area. [www.aplaceformom.com](#)
- [Senior Apts Santa Maria](#)The Cottages at Hummel Village New Senior Housing Community [www.hummelcottages.com](#)
- [Senior Apts. For Rent](#)Studio, One And Two Bedrooms In Lehigh Acres Florida [www.FountainCrestRetirement.com](#)

Related Articles

- [Affordable rental buildings are up or on the way](#)
August 1, 2004
- [YMCA may become senior housing site](#)
August 16, 2006
- [Tax Dollars At Work](#)
May 1, 1999
- [Campus for seniors wins award for livability](#)
March 28, 2010
- [Melrose project mixes market, affordable homes](#)
July 13, 2003

Find More Stories About

• [Real Estate](#)

- Some services are available at the buildings. Many offer transportation, usually to nearby grocery stores and shopping centers. Most buildings also have activities, such as outings and recreation.
- At Thomas Place Glenview, Krasner moderates a book club. "There's a lot of camaraderie here," she said.
- Many affordable apartment buildings for seniors don't offer meals. But dinner is available five days a week at the Senior Suites buildings. Residents must pay for

the meal. There are 19 Senior Suites in Chicago and two in the suburbs. Monthly [rents](#) range from about \$660 to \$890.

Several new Senior Suites are being planned, including one near Midway Airport and another on Chicago's Northwest Side. Projects in Bellwood and Elgin are also in the works.

Other suburban projects are under way. Thomas Place Gurnee is expected to open in the spring with 100 affordable [apartments](#). The project is under development by Ryan Companies US Inc., which will have four affordable Thomas Place buildings in the greater Chicago area. Thomas Place Orland Park will be completed in February 2013. Thomas Place Fox Lake opened in 2010.

Meanwhile, at Thomas Place Glenview, Krasner feels lucky because she has made so many friends.

"After your children are grown and you don't have a dog anymore, it's hard to connect with people," she said. "But here, we all gather and talk. It makes it really nice. People are comfortable with each other."

Rental resources

Social service and local government agencies typically keep lists of affordable apartments for seniors.

For starters, try ilhousingsearch.org, a project of several state agencies, including the Illinois Department on [Aging](#). Use the "advanced search" button to find seniors-only buildings.

Another resource is cityofchicago.org. Search for "Affordable [Rental](#) Housing Resource List." It gives details on rental buildings, including those just for seniors.

For suburban Cook County, visit ageoptions.org. The website has a resource page with the names and contact information for social service agencies in the suburbs that can refer you to [apartment](#) projects.