

Active senior communities

Resort-style amenities attract retirees

Story by Anne Straub
Photography by Dave Potter

The nest is empty, retirement is near or has arrived, and now's the time to pursue activities that were put on hold for too long. For many Brevard County residents, they're all available right in their own community. Travel, outdoor sports, card games and fine dining are just some of the activities organized by and for seniors living in active adult developments. Note that the list of activities does not include yard work: Maintenance-free living has become a hallmark of the over-55 lifestyle.

The outdoor pool and lounge area at Indian River Colony Club is a rendezvous point for pool and clubhouse activities.

IRCC was founded in the early 1980s by a retired Air Force brigadier general with the goal of providing extensive amenities and a sense of community for former military officers. Today, the neighborhood includes non-military households as well.



Residents who’ve spent their lives maintaining a home can scratch all those chores off their to-do lists. That’s an aspect of life at Indian River Colony Club that attracted Garry and Lydia Boyer to the Viera 55-and-older community.

No more appliance repair, AC fixes, roof replacement, lawn care, pest control or pressure washing. All that and more is covered by the IRCC maintenance crew.

The extra time is quickly filled, thanks to IRCC’s extensive amenity center. The community includes a full-size, par 72 18-hole golf course, three Har-Tru tennis courts, a heated 3,000-square-foot swimming pool and a clubhouse with an executive chef serving casual to gourmet cuisine.

Amenities are free of debt and accompanying assessments, a major attraction to potential members, said John Robinson, IRCC general manager.

The clubhouse is known as the At Ease Club, a nod to the community’s military roots. IRCC was founded in the early 1980s by a retired Air Force brigadier general with the goal of providing extensive amenities and a sense of community for former military officers. Today, they’re the largest group of residents, but the neighborhood includes non-military households, as well. Boyer



Left: Time is filled quickly for IRCC residents whether on the par 72, 18-hole golf course or, meeting with one of several clubs in Colony Hall.

“We really knew better than we realized,” Judi Bickmore said of her decision with husband Duke to purchase a home at IRCC.

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Above: The At Ease Club is a hive of activity. There are bridge clubs, as well as mahjong groups, arts and crafts classes, piano nights and fashion shows.

The 19th Hole bar makes the perfect stop after a round of golf.

served in the Army, but didn't make it his career.

At Ease is a hive of activity. There are bridge clubs – casual and competitive – as well as mahjong groups, arts and crafts classes, piano nights, fashion shows and other scheduled events.

A separate room is called the Stained Glass room because of the décor: Residents have created stained glass scenes of Florida life, on display in the room. There also are contributions by the IRCC quilting group on display in the club. A former porch has been enclosed in glass, so residents can enjoy the air conditioning while taking in the view of the landscaped swimming pool and surrounding grounds.

The 19th Hole bar makes the perfect stop after a round of golf for golf stories and lies, as Boyer puts it.

More formal celebrations take place in the Colony Hall, used for balls marking annual anniversaries of military branches, as well as other occasions. Non-members can book the facility for weddings or other gatherings.

Colony Hall also serves as the venue for the Cart Barn, the thespian group at the community. The group is named after the original function of the hall. In the early days it housed IRCC's golf carts. Eventually, most residents bought their own, so the corporation had little need to keep a fleet. They put on a variety show – the Fogey Follies – each year, in addition to other performances.

There's also a fitness center, and water exercise classes available. Other outdoor activities include horseshoes, shuffleboard, and the latest addition, two bocce ball courts.

***Above top:** There is a private dining room called the Stained Glass room aptly-named because of the resident-created art displayed there. **Above:** The IRCC quilting club has some of their work on display in the clubhouse lounge above.*

Residents can check the events schedule anytime on the community's designated TV station, produced by the IRCC audio-visual club.



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Duke Bickmore, former Marine Corps officer and current IRCC resident, helped upgrade the AV club equipment recently. "I could be in Hong Kong with my laptop, and I could update the bulletin board here," Bickmore said.

Bickmore and his wife, Judi, moved to IRCC five years ago from New York because of the sense of community they found – and the opportunity for year-round golf. They worked from home for a while and have since retired.

"We really knew better than we realized," Judi Bickmore said of the couple's decision to purchase a home at IRCC. She participates in the residents' activity council, and started a New York connection club. "What we didn't realize was how involved you can be with whatever you want to do," she said.

Choosing to live in a senior community is a lifestyle that's growing increasingly popular. Though only a small portion of over-55 households live in communities dedicated to the age group, the percentage grew from 2 percent in 2001 to 3 percent in 2007, according to the National Association of Home Builders. Residents in such communities registered the highest level of satisfaction with their homes, compared with all over-55 households.

The trade group's research shows that over-55 commu-

Above top: Watersong in Viera opened in May 2009. The social gathering space within the community is the clubhouse area, which also is made open to the community for functions. **Above:** There's a living room complete with chess set and fireplace and a library happily organized by a resident retired librarian. **Above right:** Residents can dine in the large dining room, which evokes a ballroom feel with pillars, tray ceilings and sparkling chandeliers.

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Above: The 1854 Bar plays up the pub look, with wood flooring and a granite bar, a perfect spot for a drink with friends or an evening of karaoke.

nities are attracting younger buyers – those under 60 – and an increasing number with college education.

It's easy to see why the option is growing. "We're on a 48-acre cruise ship that never leaves port," said Shelly Lockhart, executive director of Watersong in Viera. That's how residents describe the all-inclusive, luxury community, she said, which includes single-family homes and villas, as well as an assisted living option. The sprawling clubhouse and



Above: An Internet café in the clubhouse offers computers with Internet access, and even how-to classes. Residents can use the clubhouse for entertaining or as a personal extension of their own homes.

pool area offers all the pampering and activity of a vacation, without the motion sickness patch.

Watersong in Viera opened in May 2009, one of 10 retirement communities operated by Charlotte, N.C.-based Senior Living Communities. The social gathering space within the community is the clubhouse area, which also is made open to the community for various functions.

"The clubhouse is a big piece of their home," said Sharon Larson, director of member services at Watersong. Residents can use the clubhouse for entertaining, or as a personal extension of their own homes. There's a living room complete with a chess set and fireplace, for example, and a library where they can donate or borrow a book, sit and read in an armchair, or work on a puzzle in progress.

Residents can dine in the large dining room, which evokes a ballroom feel with pillars, tray ceilings and sparkling chandeliers. Dining is often accompanied by live music, and sometimes dancing. Or, for a more intimate option, they can reserve a private dining room for a special event. They'll still enjoy the same personal service.



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Above and right: A central hallway in the Watersong clubhouse connects residents with various activity rooms, and dining and entertainment venues. The covered front porch offers space to sit and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine.



“We’re on a 48-acre cruise ship that never leaves port,” said Shelly Lockhart, executive director of Watersong in Viera. That’s how residents describe the all-inclusive, luxury community.

Food is prepared under the supervision of executive chef James Tsamoutales, former owner of Melbourne’s World Beat Café. Tsamoutales’ training includes a Walt Disney World culinary apprenticeship.

Activity rooms in the clubhouse include space for crafting, playing cards or watching movies. There’s a game room with poker tables, leather chairs and table-top shuffleboard. Many parties take on the dual function of fundraisers for various causes. Giving back is an aspect of senior living that Watersong residents readily embrace, Larson said.

The 1854 ar plays up the pub look, with wood flooring and a granite bar, a perfect spot for a drink with friends or to indulge in karaoke. Across the hall, an Internet café offers computers with Internet access.

An exercise center includes an indoor pool, used for free swimming or exercise classes. Fitness rooms are equipped with weight machines, as well as space for yoga, pilates and other classes. Watersong employs a full-time fitness instructor to offer classes and on-site help with training.

Both of these exclusive senior developments offer programs and facilities that appeal to active retirees, and we’re proud to have these offerings in our community. ■

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