

# NEWS Release



## Touchmark at Coffee Creek

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### **IS YOUR HOUSE STILL THE RIGHT HOME? MAKING CHOICES — LIFESTYLE PLANNING FOR SENIORS**

EDMOND, Okla. — Suzanne Hebert's husband died in January. She is four hours away from her Edmond daughter and family, and a continent away from her oldest daughter.

A World War II war bride from France, Hebert had been married for 57 years.

"All of a sudden, there was sort of a void," she said. "Now I am alone. I do not have my precious husband with me any more. ... We were OK as long as it was the two of us," said Hebert, who has also lost close friends — to death or to moves themselves, back to Paris or to other parts of the country where their own children live.

Hebert doesn't play dominoes or bridge, and she's not a big social person.

Her 42-year-old house was becoming a burden. What turned the tide for Hebert and her daughters was a wake-up call of a recent breast biopsy. Although the results were benign, it got her thinking about future options.

Last month, Hebert's daughter and son-in-law Mary Joan and Greg Johnston encouraged a quick "look-see" at homes in an Edmond retirement community — Touchmark at Coffee Creek — under construction in north Edmond.

"I fell in love with the place," said Hebert, who has decided to move from four hours away in Arlington, Texas, to four miles away from her daughter. Obviously, living near her other

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daughter, Mary Lynn Bryant, in Mexico City isn't an option because of the distance.

Hebert will be moving into Touchmark's retirement neighborhood at Coffee Creek.

The first home is to open this fall, and the three-story Grandview retirement apartments are open early next year.

"I thought, 'I don't want to leave my house. My house is something precious,'" she said. "But I realized the proximity to my daughter and son-in-law is more important."

### **Waiting too long**

Geriatric-care advocates say Hebert's situation is a best-case scenario of when it is time to consider, "Is your house still the right home?" She wasn't forced by a crisis to make the move.

"The average person waits way too long" to make the decision to move, said Rachel Boggess, a 16-year specialist in geriatric care for the community services division of Integris Health/Third Age Life Center.

"A lot of people move too late. They can't stay at home. They may be vision impaired, so they can't see to drive. It diminishes the enjoyment of when they are not able to 'see people.'"

Boggess, who lives in Edmond, works with private clients who need an advocate for their care plans. She oversees and monitors clients' care and progress, most often for a daughter or son who lives out of state. She is a resource for options in retirement communities — what would suit the client's needs best — and helps with the transition. She then commits to communicate weekly with the client and spend a minimum of one hour a month in face-to-face time.

"I look for suitable activities, not just bingo and ashtrays," she said. "Are there book clubs, computers, theater, and intellectual stimulation? There's way too much bingo in the world."

### **How NOT to do it**

Shelee Stewart's personal story is a "textbook case" of what happens when crisis forces a move for a retiring parent.

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The sales and marketing director for Touchmark, Stewart has more than a decade of experience in the senior field, spanning independent living, assisted living and Alzheimer's care.

So she knew what would be best for her mother in her future choices of residence. Instead, her mother's independence forced an untimely death, says the Edmond resident.

"That generation is so independent, for example, in protecting their assets," Stewart said. "Sometimes, those traits work against them."

She believes her mother, who passed away in the spring, would be alive today if she had been in an independent-living retirement community where her nutrition could have been monitored.

"She was good at covering up" about how sick she was, said Stewart. Even though mother and daughter talked daily, Stewart wouldn't have been so worried about her mother if she had been in a retirement community. "We were forced into a crisis. She was too sick to go into an independent-care situation."

She had been ill for months and had to have major surgery, "but you can't make a parent do something if they don't want to."

"She probably would be alive today. There would have been people around her on a daily basis to monitor how sick she was," she said. And by the time her mother had hired someone to repair the refrigerator, the oven and her 40-year-old home, she could have been living comfortably somewhere else, Stewart said.

### **Ready to consider options**

At 67, Marilyn Williams is ready for a smaller place. The longtime Edmond Senior Center director has lived alone for 19 years, and she's comfortable. She likes her old-fashioned neighborhood.

"I never felt it was too much home (at 2,400 square feet), but the yard was." She's always worked, and now that she is retired and working part time with hospice, Williams is able to travel more.

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Now she's thinking about downsizing. She's careful when she steps out of the shower. She has no "buddy," and there's always that nagging thought: "I could be here for a week (on the floor after a fall) without my kids finding me."

**"Mom hasn't played bridge in 10 years"**

Edmond is an attractive place to live, Williams said, as people have moved here to be closer to their adult children. Retirees transition very well.

"The attitude about retirement living is much different than before. It's so much better when you move into the kind of facilities now where you can adjust a lot better. Most people are looking forward to moving."

A big part of that is the socialization.

Stewart agrees. "It's amazing how their personality pops out after living by themselves for years." Some children will comment, "Mom hasn't played bridge in 10 years."

## HOW AND WHEN TO CHOOSE A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Shelee Stewart with Touchmark at Coffee Creek and Rachel Boggess with Integris Health advise the following when considering options for active retirees and when to downsize from their current home:

- **WHEN TO LOOK:** Don't wait until there is a crisis. Plan ahead and visit one or two communities under future consideration. Ask how long the waitlist is and does it cost anything to be on one. It's OK to be on a waitlist, because when your name comes up, you have a choice. And by being on a list, you usually get the first option on an apartment. Or if you need a short-term stay following surgery, the waitlist option is helpful.
- **PHYSICAL LOCATION:** Assess the lifestyle of the community. How far is it from shopping and medical resources? Some communities are located in undeveloped areas, far from social amenities.
- **COSTS:** How much is it really costing you to stay in your home? What are the costs of the community? Are the costs and worry of maintaining your current home significant enough to contribute greatly to the costs of your new home? Considerations of maintaining your current home include taxes, insurance, utilities, landscaping, new paint and roof, kitchen appliances, and heat and air maintenance, among others. Take the test. (See page xx for "How do you know you're ready to move?").
- **SELF ASSESSMENT:** What's the most important amenity to you? Is it close to the kids? In my neighborhood? Close to church?
- **ASK QUESTIONS:** Ask every question you can think of.
- **TALK TO OTHER RESIDENTS** or their families: Personal references about a community are critically important.
- **STAFFING:** Is there turnover in the administration? Is the staff caring?

- **ACTIVITIES/AMENITIES:** Are they suitable? Are there book clubs? Computer access?  
Activities for mental stimulation? The theatre? Transportation provided, and does it cost extra?  
Is the food good?
- **MATCH THE PERSONALITY:** The “personality” of the community needs to match the retiree.