

## **Section 5**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

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After an analysis of the survey data, it is clear that Sunnyside Retirement Communities can develop a successful marketing plan to attract residents to a new gated retirement community. Through the research, each objective was addressed and carefully analyzed to determine which groups should be marketed to and what they desire in a gated retirement community. The following sections will focus on the individual research objectives and give Sunnyside management a strategy for marketing a complimentary gated retirement community.

#### **5.1 Profile of Respondents**

The participants of the survey were aged 50 to 70 and live in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County area. The mean age of respondents was 58. Slightly over half (55%) were female, and the majority of respondents in the sample were married (84%). This means that the average prospect for Sunnyside from the Harrisonburg area is likely to be younger than 60 and married. To accommodate for this younger, active crowd, Sunnyside may want to provide more activities geared toward these people. For example, social activities centered around a hike would likely catch the attention of this group. Further, housing should be large enough to accommodate 2 people, whether it is a house or an apartment. Plenty of storage area would be useful for residents to store bikes or other leisure equipment they may have.

Yearly incomes were divided relatively evenly with the largest two groups being those making 25,001-50,000 and 125,001+. The variety of incomes provides several opportunities for Sunnyside. First, it may be profitable to target people in the higher income brackets because they can afford the luxury and services that will be provided. There is a large enough group of Harrisonburg residents in the higher income brackets to make this possible and fill the new homes. Secondly, Sunnyside may want to provide two different types of housing accommodations so that they could bring in a greater variety of residents. A more spacious residence could be targeted toward the more wealthy consumers while a more economical version could be marketed to people making lower incomes.

#### **5.2 Perceptions of Retirement**

It was evident that the survey respondents had an overall positive outlook on retirement. The majority of respondents were looking forward to retirement and viewed it as an enjoyable time of life. Further, most people did not expect to change their lifestyle when they retired, but instead viewed retirement as a very active time of life. Family time, pursuing hobbies, volunteering, and traveling are popular ways to spend free time for these respondents. When asked what came to mind when they heard the word retirement,

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respondents often said not working, freedom, less stress, and time to relax. These responses indicate an optimistic view of the retirement years.

Although survey participants had positive feelings about retiring, most were still concerned about their financial security during these years. Almost half of those responding expected to continue some sort of work activity during retirement to relieve financial worries or boredom.

When marketing to potential customers, highlighting the positive aspects of retirement and addressing solutions to aid in alleviating the negative aspects will help Sunnyside position its gated retirement community. By showing people that this community will make it more convenient to do the things they value during retirement, they will have more of a desire to move in. For example, creating work opportunities within the community or providing transportation to their work could entice people to choose Sunnyside. Additionally, finding ways to clearly demonstrate that Sunnyside is an affordable place to retire may help alleviate financial worries and increase a person's likelihood of considering a retirement community.

#### **5.3 Awareness of Retirement Communities in the Harrisonburg Area**

Retirement communities in Harrisonburg have very high awareness levels. On a top of minded (unaided) basis, Virginia Mennonite had the highest awareness (69%) when respondents were asked to name the retirement communities they knew of. However, when respondents were provided with a list of all of the local retirement communities, most were immediately recognized. Overall, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community has 95% awareness, Bridgewater has 93%, and Sunnyside has 92% awareness.

Although Sunnyside has a high overall awareness, its unaided awareness was the lowest compared to its two competitors. Further, many respondents referred to it in relation to its location (“the one in Massanutten”) instead of the company name. An important focus of future marketing campaigns may be the reinforcement of the Sunnyside community name. Repeating it throughout television or radio advertisements could help imprint it in the minds of potential residents.

#### **5.4 Amenities of Interest in Retirement Communities**

The respondents were not only aware of the area's retirement communities, but also felt that retirement communities provide a pleasant living experience. Amenities that would be important to them if living in a retirement community include exercise rooms, walking trails, grounds maintenance service, and Internet access. Golf and tennis courts would not be widely used and therefore would not need to be included in a new community. The desire for computer training was not very high, largely because of a lack of interest or the feeling that one already had enough knowledge to get by.

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When Sunnyside builds its new gated community, it would be beneficial to include walking trails throughout the property. Placing benches alongside the trails would likely appeal to both residents who would be exercising or just out to enjoy the view. Additionally, lighting the trails would help instill a sense of security and also accommodate those who were active at night. For those who prefer to exercise indoors or have a physical condition that prevents them from outdoor activities, an exercise facility within the gated community would make it convenient for residents to remain active. Golf and tennis were not important to survey respondents and therefore do not need to be included in the construction of the new community. This can be viewed as a positive finding since these types of amenities, especially the golf course, can be quite expensive to build and maintain. Additionally, these amenities are widely available in the local area and are relatively inexpensive. Instead, attention should be given to the grounds maintenance. Services such as lawn mowing and landscaping cut down on chores for the residents and allow them to spend more time engaging in the activities that they enjoy.

Internet and email access were very important to respondents, especially those who are younger. Sunnyside could wire each house for Internet access or provide Internet workstations at central locations within the community. This could be beneficial because additional equipment such as printers or scanners could be hooked up and be available to those who do not own a computer.

#### **5.5 Perceptions of Gated Communities**

Gated communities were largely seen as safe, quiet, prestigious living areas. For these reasons, survey participants felt that they would be expensive places to live, and were not viewed as affordable to some. Responses were mixed with regard to the inconvenience living in a gated community might cause visitors, although most people did agree that residents would receive special benefits for living there. Additionally, respondents thought that living in a gated community would allow them to get to know their neighbors. The rules enforced upon the homeowners were perceived to be the greatest disadvantage of living in a gated community. Not surprisingly, the feeling of a gated community being a safe place to live was seen as most advantageous.

A gated retirement community will be most widely accepted among people aged 60 and younger who have enough income to find it affordable. Many respondents remained neutral on the questions pertaining to gated communities, implying that they did not feel they had enough knowledge about gated communities to respond. This may be due to the lack of gated communities in Harrisonburg. A lack of experience with or awareness of gated communities, however, presents an opportunity for Sunnyside. By promoting the advantages of gated communities more people could be persuaded that this option is right for them. An important focus could be the affordability of a home in a gated retirement community. Demonstrating that an all inclusive living arrangement provides financial benefits that might appeal to those who are worried they do not have the financial resources to live in a place they perceive as very prestigious. Other marketing efforts

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could be directed towards lessening or eliminating the negative views of gated communities by showing how their benefits outweigh any potential limitations.

#### **5.6 Housing Preferences**

The majority of survey respondents said they planned to live in a rural area when they retire, and over half plan to stay in their current home. Married respondents under 61 are the most likely to move into a new home or a retirement community. When asked what type of home would be preferred in retirement communities, the most popular response was a cottage. Among respondents under 61, cottages, villas, and apartments were most preferred while patio homes were most desirable to those 61 and older.

Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and extending a warm view of the Massanutten Mountain Resort, Sunnyside has a perfect rural location for a gated retirement communities. When advertising through television or print, it would be beneficial to provide views of the surrounding areas to give potential customers an idea of where they would be moving. Additionally, it could be helpful to emphasize the fact that moving into a retirement community can be just as beneficial as staying in one's current home. New residents can have the privacy of a home if desired and would be relieved of the burdensome house maintenance that they currently incur. Once it is shown that living in a gated retirement community is no different from any other neighborhood except for the fact that its residents have more free time, it may be possible to sway people's decision to remain in their current home.

Sunnyside's focus on a younger residential group presents an opportunity for them to build a community consisting of cottages, villas, and some apartments. Further, because a younger group of retirees is more likely to migrate, many of the new residents could be from other areas of Virginia or out of state. Harrisonburg is a central location to many cities such as Washington DC, Richmond, and Charlottesville. The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia has a reputation for its stunning physical beauty and a good quality of life. Retiring at Sunnyside can provide access to a beautiful area and closeness to family and friends.

Because of potential interest from out-of-state residents, Sunnyside should consider promoting its new gated community outside of the local area. By ensuring awareness throughout areas through Virginia and surrounding states, Sunnyside may have a much easier time filling its gated retirement community with younger, more active retirees. Educating these potential residents on the benefits of the Harrisonburg area as well as of the community itself could help sell the community.

#### **5.7 Profile of a Sunnyside Resident**

A likely resident of Sunnyside's new gated retirement community is age 50 to 60, married, and has a relatively high level of income. This person values privacy and the quality appearance of their neighborhood. He or she is likely to live in Harrisonburg or

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surrounding areas and states, and likely has family or friends nearby. Activity is an important part of their lifestyle, and they will be engaged in social gatherings as well as physical fitness activities.

To accommodate this target resident, Sunnyside can do a variety of things. As mentioned earlier, designing the housing to be comfortable for two people will be an important part of attracting customers. Closet and storage space should be plentiful as well as ensuring there is sufficient space between houses. Since the typical resident views gated communities as a quiet place to live, efforts need to be taken to ensure this remains true. For apartments, quality soundproofing can be implemented so that neighbors are not interrupted by the activities of those around them. Yard work should be done in a timely, quality manner, as the appearance of the neighborhood will be important to the residents. Additional attention should be given to the entrance of the neighborhood so that it looks like an attractive place to live. Gardens and shrubbery could be planted, a gazebo or sitting area might be a focal spot, or the architecture of the main building could be eye catching.

Family and friends will play a large part in the lives of Sunnyside's new residents and should be taken into account when building the community. Plenty of convenient parking should be provided as well as areas that are open to visitors. For example, picnic benches on a lawn can be a fun place to gather during nice weather. A small play area away from the main housing could be provided for small children who visit. Sitting areas inside apartment lobbies or the main building will be a convenient place to meet visitors and gather for events.

The importance of activity in the lives of retirees should be catered to when designing programs in Sunnyside's new community. Physical education classes such as yoga and aerobics will appeal to those who like group workouts. Planned hikes or excursions into nearby areas will provide a physical activity combined with the chance to get to know and socialize with other residents. It may be helpful to have weekly bulletin boards with information on area attractions or community activities. That way, residents would not have to search out things to do. Holiday parties could be arranged to provide activities for those who do not have family to go to or could bring their family and friends to meet other residents. Volunteer activities around the community will help the residents feel like they are helping to upkeep and improve the community they have chosen to live in as well as provide an opportunity to get to know others with similar interests.

Overall, JMU Consulting believes that Sunnyside can successfully introduce a gated community to the Harrisonburg area. Through marketing efforts, Sunnyside can overcome any doubts, fears or misconceptions about gated communities. If properly developed, Sunnyside's residents can live in a unique community and enjoy the best lifestyle benefits, prestige, amenities, and housing options available in the retirement industry.