



Aging Gracefully in Aurora

Senior community expands with resort-style independent living, memory care center

By Jeanne Bluffstone | Photos by Scott Pease

Natural light streams throughout the Atrium at Anna Maria in Aurora, inviting residents and visitors into the space. Large windows and clear glass doors provide a view of the wooded surroundings just beyond, and in the pool area, three large translucent gable skylights filter sunlight over the water and the surrounding patio areas.

Originally built as a Sheraton hotel in the 1970s, the newly renovated Atrium at Anna Maria expresses the vision of brothers George and Robert Norton, owners of the Campus of Anna Maria, a senior living community situated across Rt. 43 in Aurora, who wanted to enhance and expand their property by adding resort-style independent living for active seniors and a separate and distinct assisted living memory care center called Reflections™.

The Atrium and Reflections Memory Care additions are nestled comfortably together within the wooded, 70-acre Campus of Anna Maria of Aurora, a continuing care community that includes independent and assisted

living, skilled nursing, rehabilitation services, and home care services.

The origin of the plan

What was the genesis of the plan? Ask Robert Norton. "One day I was standing in the Anna Maria campus looking across the street at the vacant building and wondering what it looked like inside," he says. "I didn't know what we wanted to do at the time, but the building had been empty for four years and it was becoming a blight. I could see that there were two floors and the building seemed to have a residential flavor. I thought George and I should get in there and see what it looks like inside."

After visiting the property and discussing its possibilities, Robert and George began to consider what they would do with the building. "We thought about this in a different way and brought in Christopher Lachman of CSL Consulting to act as our owner's representative," Robert says.

"There was a very long due diligence period before the Nortons bought the property so they could do their pro forma and find out how many rooms could be included in the project," Lachman says. "That was major to them."

After some time and numerous discussions, Robert and George Norton decided to buy the former hotel. It



COMMUNITY BUILDING In the pool area of the newly opened Atrium at Anna Maria, three large translucent gable skylights filter sunlight over the water and the surrounding patio areas. Resident rooms include balconies that overlook the inviting space.

took a referendum to make the project happen since a zoning change was required. The referendum passed easily and the approximately \$15 million construction multi-phased project was underway.

"We broke ground in 2012 and the new building adjacent to the hotel, Reflections Memory Center, opened first in January of 2014," says George.

A project built in phases

There were three phases to the building and renovating process.

The first phase was designing and building Reflections, a 22,000-square-foot, single-floor memory center with 31 assisted living memory care private suites – which soon will also include 24 additional, larger assisted living private suite com-

ponents. The plan was to connect the memory center to what would become the Atrium.

The second phase was to purge the old building, clean and remove debris

"We were able to benefit from what was in the building. We enhanced the bones that were already there to give them a new life."

David P. DiFrancesco

Herman Gibans Fodor, Inc.

and furniture, and then demo the space to ready it for the construction and the renovation yet to come.

The final phase of the plan was planning and transforming the vacant building

into the two-story, 107,969-square-foot Atrium at Anna Maria.

Early on, the Nortons were working with Ken Martin Architects and it was Martin who originally created the footprint for the memory care building and Atrium. Martin decided how the buildings would be laid out and how they would be joined together, and also did preliminary work in configuring the number of room. Ultimately, however, the project became too big for him, the Nortons explain, and a larger firm was hired – Herman Gibans Fodor, Inc. Architects (HGF).

"Once the project was switched to HGF, we figured out how the rooms would be laid out and how to create the bathrooms and the closets and overall design," Lachman says.



GOING WITH THE FLOW A dramatic serpentine and wood slat ceiling gives a richness and openness to the entry lobby.

"The Nortons had a real clear vision for the Atrium, which was to bring the outdoors inside and create a year-round outdoor space that the residents could use and enjoy," says David P. DiFrancesco, HGF principal.

"We would never have done this from the ground up," George explains. "It would have been too expensive. We

never would have been able to create this type of environment with new construction."

Reflections Memory Care

The original plan for the memory center was to construct 31 units, but another 24 have since been added to the project, which is scheduled to be completed soon.

Design and construction of the memory center is state of the art and reflects updated ways of dealing with early stage dementia. There are "life stations," memory stations and memory pods, and a walking path. The center was designed through a group effort, with input from the staff. Courtyard gardens and patios offer some sense of

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freedom while being monitored by staff and cameras.

"The colors and textures within the memory center contribute to what the unit is and how it affects persons with cognitive issues," says Diane Barben, director of marketing for The Campus of Anna Maria of Aurora. "There are life stations with skylights to divide the space, and a parlor that is a quiet room to give residents experiencing a sense of anxiety a place to relax as they try to understand what their hot buttons are and how to work with them without relying solely on medication."

The memory center is physically connected to the Atrium, which creates a natural flow from building to building, particularly if partners are living in the two different buildings.

The Atrium

Construction of the Atrium took 14 months to complete and was not without unusual challenges. While the hotel was built in the early 1970s, it had transformed many times. There was no information available on what specific modifications had taken place over the years, and the few drawings that were available didn't accurately reflect the building's changes, says DiFrancesco.

"The structure itself was challenging," he says. "We gutted almost everything non-structural, but we still had eight-inch-thick concrete masonry bearing walls spaced just 12 feet apart. There is also only eight feet of clear vertical space between floor slabs."

Hallways were long, dark and only five feet wide, he adds.

George was concerned about the long corridors, so Kristina Kosloff, director of interior design for HGF, used two different styles of carpeting to create visual breaks and added millwork along light-colored walls for a sense of openness.

"We added accent walls in a warm welcoming pink and used a wall covering on one side of the wall to make the corridors feel a little bigger," Kosloff says. "We didn't have a lot of ceiling space so instead of ceiling fixtures we used sconces."

HGF saw what was there and worked with it, Barben explains.

"Some of the building was reconfigured, while some stayed nearly the same," she says. "There was a lot of coordination



SERVING NEEDS The former hotel restaurant space (top) was renovated and embellished with updated lighting, millwork and acoustic baffling material. Elsewhere, a dining area (bottom) and adjacent library feature handsome woodwork and durable, warm-toned flooring.

and communication taking place during the construction and renovation."

Despite the challenges, there were positives to the building too. "In many ways we were able to benefit from what was in the building," says DiFrancesco. "We had the large skylight openings and the advantage of the way they were placed, and the glass front of the rooms on the balconies overlooking the pool area are a definite plus. We enhanced the bones that were already there to give them a new life."

The project was bid as a prime package. Town Center Construction (TCC) acted as the general contractor and was responsible for the oversight/coordination of all the trades on site.

"We had two superintendents and approximately 40 subcontractors/suppliers working for us and averaged 75 workers on site throughout most of the project," explains Michael Vitt, TCC president.

"Our biggest challenge was that there were a number of change orders taking place between the project and the corresponding subs during the construction," he says. "Navigating these modifications to the project drawings and related scopes of work was demanding to both TCC as well as all the trades. As each change was being incorporated into the project, the team sought offsetting changes, or valued engineering, in order to minimize the impact to the owners."



residential units at the facility overlook the Atrium, others (left) open to landscaped interior courtyards.

A secluded courtyard is off the workout area with a putting green and a fire pit.

Residents step outside of their units to an indoor balcony overlooking the pool where they have an unobstructed sightline to the natural surroundings and the shallow, four-and-a-half-foot deep saltwater pool that is kept at 86 degrees for activities such as aquatic exercise. All the skylight glass has been replaced and the pool beneath altered from its original nine-foot depth. There is also a cushioned walking path around the pool.

Even with the changes, the cost impact was minimal."

The finished product

One would never imagine that the Atrium was once vacant, now that it has been transformed into a bustling senior community offering a variety of educational programs, services and activities. Each space is different and adds to the resort ambiance.

Cross through the Atrium's natural stone entry and into an open lobby with dramatic serpentine and wood slat ceiling, which give a richness and openness to the space. Move on to the reception desk and concierge carefully tucked to the left, or take a short stroll

to the right to the Bistro, an informal dining area with granite countertop bar and flat screen TV. Behind the Bistro is the library with an interior windowed wall and around the corner a formal dining has been refurbished with new lighting and beam ceiling.

In addition to the pool, Bistro and formal dining room, there is a theater, a library and a salon with manicure and pedicure stations, plus a massage chair and private massage room. A wide hallway carpeted in muted natural shades flows from the reception area to the wellness office, as well as a workout room with woven vinyl floor and windowed alcove with pool table and large, comfortable leather chairs.

All of the residents' units were renovated and have new plumbing and individual HVAC systems.

"We have seven different floor plans that range from efficiency and studios to one-bedroom, two-bedroom and deluxe suites," Barben says. Suite sizes range from 761 square feet to 961 square feet. Some have a den, while others have two baths and include balconies overlooking the pool atrium area.

"It struck me that the renderings were spot on," Lachman says. "Diane [Barben] sold 30 units sight unseen, just from HGF's drawings. There was a vision and everybody stuck to it. To pre-sell, pre-lease from renderings and floor plans is really remarkable." **P**

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