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NEWS AND TRENDS

Success of Rivers Run spurs growth at firm

By MARY STONE
Rochester Business Journal

Backed by a proven track record at Rivers Run active living development in Henrietta, Patrick Tobin has taken his college concept for active older adults beyond Rochester.

The basis for Tobin's developments relies on an ample mix of local art, culture, cuisine, community and an ongoing education component Tobin arranges with nearby universities: Colleges serve as essential anchors for Tobin's residential developments.

In the case of Rivers Run, it is Rochester Institute of Technology.

But with new projects in Penn Yan and Oneonta, Tobin's firm Living Communities LLC is collaborating with Keuka College, Hartwick College and the SUNY College at Oneonta.

Between these projects, Tobin estimates Living Communities has \$80 million worth of work in process.

Tobin's specialty has long been housing development. It was the reason why in 2001 he was recruited to Christa Development Corp. to establish a multitiered residential division at the company.

Tobin was made vice president of residential development at Christa to develop student, senior and market-rate housing. A year later, due to the rapid success of the senior market, Christa purchased a nursing home rehabilitation company called Living Communities of Rochester.

"The first project we did with them was Woodland Village at Park Ridge," Tobin recalled. "We did that as a developer, not as an owner. Then we said we need to come together to form Living Communities. I started running it half time. Now I do it full time."

Tobin left Christa Development last year to focus on the expanding work load at Living Communities, which he says is no longer a part of Christa Development. However, its CEO, David Christa, is a partner.

"Living Communities is affiliated with Christa. It is not legally tied to it," Tobin said. "It's not a subsidiary."

The company simply grew too fast for Tobin to manage it in addition to his duties at Christa. Last year, he became the full-time president of Living Communities. For some downtown projects, Tobin has continued to represent Christa.

"I'm on RDDC; I was on Duffy's transition team; I'm on the Midtown advisory committee for the Midtown redevelopment representing Christa, but Living Communities is an affiliated organization. We use Christa to build our projects," Tobin explained.

Headquartered at Rivers Run, Living Communities has eight employees and a staff of 20 to 30 at its communities, Tobin said, and it is expanding fast.

The Plains at Parish Homestead in Oneonta is 31 acres; it includes 39 patio homes for sale and 64 independent apartments for lease.

"Before they even came out of the ground, we had 32 of (the patio homes) sold," Tobin said. "Oneonta itself is in amazement because that's about \$7.5 million in real estate, and they haven't sold that much in real estate in two years, ever!"

Plans in Oneonta, roughly three-and-a-half hours southeast of Rochester, include 43 assisted-living and memory care apartments for lease. Living Communities will own and operate the facilities there as it does in Rochester at Rivers Run.

"I have had a number of people ask, 'Is there a market down there?' Obviously there is. How much more can it absorb? I don't think it can absorb any more. I think we just hit the market right," he added.

In Penn Yan, Yates County, St. Mark's Villa is a slightly different project. Designed for middle-income seniors, the project is led by St. Mark's Church and St. Mark's Terrace, an affordable-housing project in Penn Yan.

Living Communities was awarded the 31-acre project in 2006.

To be located on 31 acres of land in Benton, next to Penn Yan, the community will have 30 patio homes and 48 independent-living apartments for lease.

Already, the development has racked up 54 deposits for patio homes and apartments.

At Rivers Run, the 30-acre development, which is open to people 55 and over, includes 62 cottages for sale and 82 apartments for lease. Of the 62 cottages, so far 32 are built and 26 are sold.

For the apartments, Living Communities obtained its certificate of occupancy in October, opening the door to new tenants such as former RIT librarian Lois Goodman. She moved in this week.

"I was at RIT for 24 years. Essentially, as a retiree, I do have benefits at the campus anyway, but the rich programming they do here at the apartment building is wonderful, and I wanted to take advantage of that," she said.

Before moving in, Goodman already took advantage of two lectures at the building, one on Abraham Lincoln and one on nutrition.

But what really made Goodman want to join Rivers Run, she said, was its layout.

"I have M.S., and the apartments in the building are totally accessible," she said. "I had been living in a nearby townhome for 20 years and just couldn't keep up with a bigger house like that, which wasn't accessible. This just seemed like such a wonderful opportunity between the educational component and the physical component. It made my life so much easier."

Located on Fairwood Drive near Lehigh Station Road in Henrietta, Rivers Run has been a long time in the making, Tobin said. He started working with RIT on the project seven years ago. One key component for Tobin was getting the university to build its Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at RIT on the Rivers Run campus.

Osher, founded in 1987 as Athenaeum at Rochester Institute of Technology, has 400 to 500 enrolled students over the age of 50.

For its high enrollment, RIT in recent years obtained a grant to move Osher to a new headquarters, this time on the Rivers Run campus.

Now nearly finished, the 6,500-square-foot headquarters is attached to the community's 125,000-square-foot main building.

"RIT has entered into a long-term lease (for the) newly constructed program space inside Rivers Run to be home to the center," said James Watters, senior vice president of finance and administration at RIT.

But, he added, Osher is not the only partnership component with Rivers Run.

"The residents can join fitness programs housed inside RIT's newly constructed wellness and nautilus center. They have access to plays, sports, concerts, lectures, food service facilities, at various discounts," Watters said. "And we are exploring the development of mentorship programs between retired business executives and young entrepreneurial students."

The entire idea behind Rivers Run, Tobin explained, was to involve the community in its creation.

Through an agreement with local arts and cultural organizations such as Artisan Works and Writers & Books Inc., artists and authors plan exhibits and readings for the residents of Rivers Run and the public.

Including the public is key to making Rivers Run a center for learning, Tobin said.

The result, he said, is a community that does not resemble typical senior living at all.

"The dining area isn't a dining hall, it's a restaurant. When we planned this (community), I didn't want a beauty shop; I wanted a salon. I didn't want a workout area; I wanted a wellness center. And I didn't want a multi-purpose room; I wanted a lecture hall," Tobin said.

"I want it to be motivational for the people who are living there."

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