

Elderly find new housing offers hope

By MARY GNIEWEK

"The first six months are the most traumatic in a new building. Tenants know this will be their final move. Some must give up furniture, a pet, or a home they've lived in for most of their lives."

That's the observation of Margaret Davey, field director for six senior housing buildings in metropolitan Detroit, including Farmington Place.

The 153-unit, six-story building on School Street has been fully occupied since Jan. 1, and if there are any anxious feelings among tenants, they don't show it.

The front lobby buzzed Wednesday with the chatter of eight residents who comprise the newly formed tenant council. They'll plan activities for the building. President George D. McNamara vows to get everyone involved in some activity.

Across the hall in the community room, four women discuss an upcoming trip to Canada. It's available to all tenants at a special discount rate. McNamara jokingly tells his group he'd like to plan a trip to Hawaii. They love the idea.

Down the hall, Helen Douglas is teaching her first sewing/craft class to a packed house of attentive students, including her mother and sister, who are both residents. Today's lesson is making kids clothes from remnants. Mrs. Douglas shows the class the covers with heart motif she made for her granddaughter for Valentine's Day.

THE ACTIVITIES are many. There's a Bible study class. Mass once a week provided by clergy from Our Lady of Sorrows and an exercise class.

Many of the tenants have their own cars. One 83-year-old woman still goes to work one day a week.

"This is a very active group we have here," Mrs. Davey said. Farmington Place is a Housing and

Urban Development (HUD) sponsored project. It was built and is managed by Forest City Dillon, which is headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio.

In keeping with HUD requirements, tenants pay 25 percent of their income for rent, which includes heat and air conditioning. Tenants must be at least 62-years-old with income not exceeding \$13,600 annually. For two persons living together, the income ceiling is \$15,500.

The waiting list for Farmington Place has 1,900 names on it. And turnover is only 12 units a year.

"They stay healthier and younger in these buildings because there's more purpose in life," Mrs. Davey said. "Everyone finds a friend here."

Her own mother lived for more than a year in a similar HUD building in Livonia.

"She was 84 when she moved there. Once she got settled, she told me she wished she was 10 years younger to enjoy all the activities. She loved it there."

THE KEY to the success of senior housing is good management, Mrs. Davey said. She worked for another management firm but joined Forest City Dillon because of its good reputation across the nation.

Around the clock security is provided for the tenants. And one tenant on each floor checks each unit every day to make sure there are no problems.

"They really take care of each other," Mrs. Davey said.

Tenants must admit their own visitors at the front lobby as an added security precaution.

The essence of Farmington Place is summed up best by a tenant, who gives it an "A" rating.

"I love it here," said Hedy Dornenburg, a 29-year Farmington resident. "There's so much to do and so many nice people."



Billie Chall enjoys her new surroundings at Farmington Place.



Craft classes given by Helen Douglas (standing) are just one of the activities offered to seniors at Farmington Place.



George McNamara, at the head of the table, presides over a tenant council meeting as its president. To his left are Bea Endahl, vice president; Ella Mae Greer, treasurer; and Thelma Faulman, financial secretary. To

his right are Harry Endahl, vice president; Mary Clancy, recording secretary; Opalma Montagne, social director; and Hedy Dornenburg, sunshine girl.



Bill Burns (left) and Bill Cudd perform routine maintenance on the buildings fire sprinkler system.

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