

Building Scene

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Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102

Thursday, March 12, 1992 O&E

★ 10

Priestly digs

Architects integrate 'sense of community' into apartment complex for retired clergy

By Doug Funke
Staff writer

Apartments for retirees present some architectural challenges. Some owners, realizing that prospective tenants generally are on fixed incomes, would rather concentrate on interior space needs and design than exterior construction materials, elevations and ancillary amenities.

But that wasn't the approach taken by Kamp-DiComo Associates of Livonia, architect and builder for a priest retirement village under construction in that community.

The project, a joint venture of the Archdiocese of Detroit and the Felician Sisters, is scheduled for completion by September. "We started at that point — maximal function and minimal cost of the building," said Daniel G. DiComo, project manager and architect. "The owners were potential occupants, so they had a little different outlook."

"They figured we should try to afford nice things," again, speaking the most they can out of square footage but still have a quality project. It grew on us," he said.

"It went from just apartments to apartments with carports to apartments with detached garages to apartments with attached garages."

THE DEVELOPMENT will consist of five single-story buildings each containing four apartments. Each unit of 820 square feet has a utility room/storage room off the garage that leads to the kitchen that leads to the living room/dining room and the bedroom.

Each unit has three private entrances.

A separate community building will sit at the entrance point to the village. That structure will have a parlor with a fireplace, a library area, living room/visiting area and game room. The dining room/activity room flows from the parlor and a chapel flows from the large congregating room.

The community building also will house an exercise room and whirlpool.

"I'd imagine most senior apartment complexes normally wouldn't have a separate community building," DiComo said. "This affords more a sense of community. Rather than being in the same building all the time, they (tenants) can move around, get out and get more involved in what they're doing."

A SINGLE roadway circles the village. "The ring road is a control point so they can see everyone coming and going," DiComo said. "That provides a little more security."

The central courtyard will have hedges to define walkways and perennials will be planted to bloom at different times so that the residents will have color but not have to garden themselves.

"You can access the community building through the courtyard without ever walking across a street," DiComo said. The farthest distance from an apartment unit to the community building will be less than 100 yards.

Amenities in the apartments include smoke alarms with strobe lights and sound, plus blinds to provide a uniform look from outside. Tenants will be encouraged to decorate inside with drapes.

'There are vaulted ceilings in the living areas and kitchen.'

— Daniel G. DiComo
project manager and architect

"The entire place is designed barrier-free to meet codes for wheelchairs," DiComo said. "One unit is pre-planned for someone in a wheelchair. Normally those are the last to get rented. Those have no cabinets under the kitchen or bathroom sinks, the shower stall is a little larger and doesn't have a lip."

OTHER UNITS could be converted for other wheelchair tenants with some minor modifications, DiComo said. "We've been very careful to make sure everything is available for adaptation."

The showers in all bathrooms have seats, grab bars and hand-held shower heads. There are no tubs. "We gave them one big tub in the community room," DiComo said.

"There are vaulted ceilings in the living areas and kitchen. The kitchen space is not apartment-like. There's more counter space, space for a microwave," he added.

Exterior materials are brick and vinyl siding. Windows have metal exteriors and wooden interiors, DiComo said. Roof lines and garage peaks provide elevation variances to avoid box or institutional appearances.

"It looks more like a condo unit," he said.

Projected rent is \$750 monthly and includes one meal per day in the community building.

Total cost to build — \$2.5 million.

A task force including several priests and prospective tenants met periodically with Kamp-DiComo to develop the plan.

"I WANTED something light and airy, something pleasant," said Bishop Walter Schoenherr, chairman of the task force. "Something home-like, as much as possible, nothing that looks like an institution. Older people don't like institutions."

"I like the openness, higher ceilings. That's a beautiful feature," Schoenherr added.

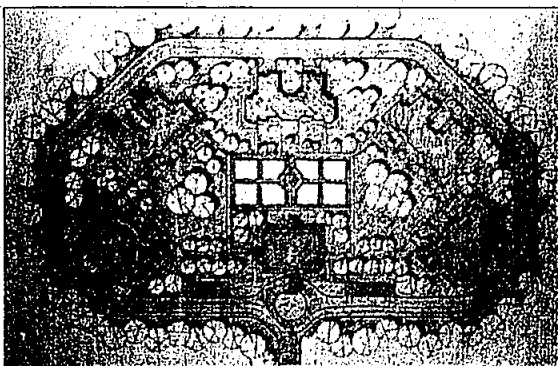
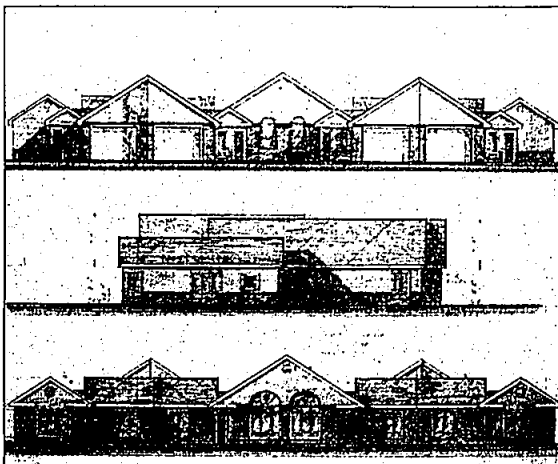
Providing an opportunity for independent living with options to socialize was the overriding objective, said Sister Danatha Suchyta, who represented the Felician Sisters on the task force.

"They would have total privacy (in apartments), but one of the components of the total village is a community building that has a nice lounge and chapel," Suchyta said.

"Initially, we felt we would give cages to tenants to store things (in a central location). We gave that up. We felt we would provide attached garages, which is really unusual for most places," she added.

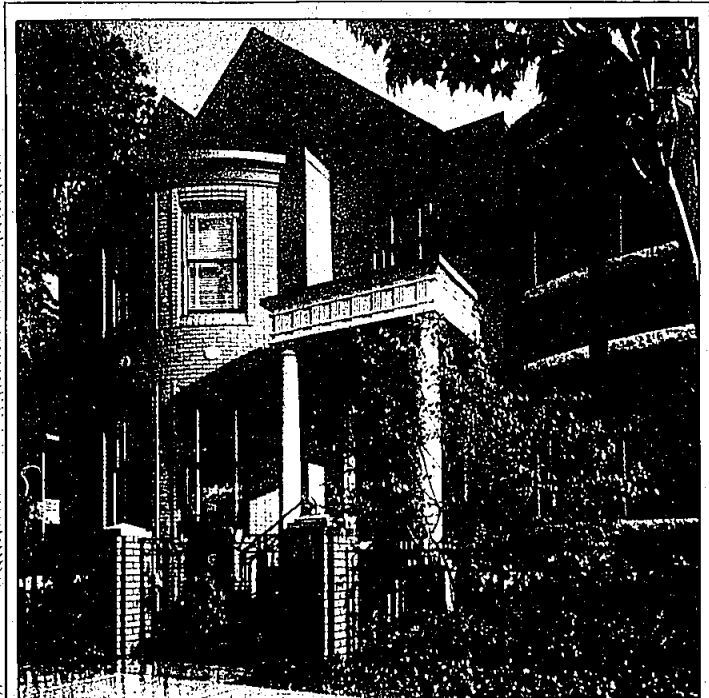
Garages — which might be used for hobbies — and utility rooms with a washer and dryer in each unit and a kitchen in every unit foster independence, Suchyta said.

Kamp-DiComo also has been involved with Newburgh Village apartments in Livonia, Allen Terrace apartments in Northville, Civic Center Library and Laurel Manor banquet hall, both in Livonia, and Exotic Rubber & Plastics in Farmington Hills.



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will sit at the entrance point to the village and feature a parlor with a fireplace, library area, living room/visiting area, game room, dining room/activity room, a chapel, an exercise room and whirlpool.



Award winner

Merrill Park Townhomes in Birmingham was one of five design award winners recently announced by the Masonry Institute of Michigan. For more on

this project, designed by Victor Sarokl and Associates Architects, and other winners in surrounding communities, please turn to Page 2G.

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