

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Allegheny County offers various senior housing options

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

Matthew Lau of Verona is one of many seniors in Allegheny County who lives on his own, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I think I have finally mentally grasped the fact that I am 76 years old," said Matthew, 76, who has been living independently since 1999 in a single family dwelling. "If I can live on my own until the very end, I will be very satisfied."

Matthew values his independence and enjoys the freedom of doing what he wants, such as spending time with his six children and 12 grandchildren. "I'm not ready to move to an assisted living facility," he said. "I just want to hang in there as long as I can and continue doing what I've been doing."

"Most seniors like this option because they get to remain independent," said Christie Johnson, housing specialist for the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA). "For the most part, they do better emotionally and spiritually because they're in the environment they want to be in."

One concern about living independently is being able to continue paying real estate taxes and utilities. One option that some seniors choose is to downsize to a smaller home or apartment; in doing so, they reduce their housing expenses.

"If you want to live independently, you may need to find more affordable subsidized housing," said Christie, adding that subsidized housing entities charge no more than 30 to 40 percent of your income for rental expenses (including utilities), providing you meet income guidelines.

Seniors can look into public housing that is available through the Housing Authority of the City



Chuck LeClaire/Pittsburgh Senior News

Matthew Lau relaxes in the comfort of his beautiful home in Verona.

of Pittsburgh (HACP). They currently house more than 20,000 Pittsburghers and manage more than 7,000 public housing units. More than half of the residents live in Section 8 housing. HACP provides case management services and works to link seniors with other service organizations to meet their needs.

Applicants must submit a number of forms to ensure that they meet the criteria for eligibility. Primary factors are the size of the family to be served and income level. For more information, visit www.hacp.org or call (412) 456-5000. In addition, the Allegheny County Housing Authority offers similar programs. For more information, visit or call (412) 355-2189.

Although seniors may find that there is a waiting list for subsidized housing, Christie encourages them to apply and get on the waiting list for the places in which they have an interest.

If you want to live independently but need assistance, the federal Administration on Aging (AoA) suggests purchasing in-home services to cope with declining abili-

ties. For a fee, you can hire people to take care of your personal and medical needs.

For some seniors, another option to consider is moving in with a family member. Seniors may find that it's a comfort to have someone there in case they need them.

While many seniors are able to live independently, some choose the security and dependability of a long-term care facility such as a nursing home, assisted living community or continuing care retirement community. A nursing home provides nursing care without being in a hospital. A doctor supervises this type of care and state boards of health regulate these facilities. An assisted living community is designed for seniors who cannot function in an independent living environment, but do not need daily nursing care. Assisted living communities usually offer help with bathing, dressing, meals and housekeeping. According to the AoA, Medicaid and Medicare cover some long-term care offered by assisted living, and some assisted living communities offer subsidies or other forms of

financial aid on the basis of individual need. Seniors who move into a continuing care retirement community will find a choice of services and living situations. A senior may initially move into the independent living section, but as needs change, may progress to others including assisted living or skilled nursing care.

In continuing care retirement communities, seniors typically pay significant entrance fees ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 a month, but they include a life-care contract that guarantees nursing and health-related services for the duration of the senior's life.

For information on housing options, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*

Home repairs can help seniors remain in their own homes

Seniors who want to live independently may find that some home modifications may be necessary to adapt the home to make it easier and safer to perform daily activities such as bathing, cooking and climbing stairs. According to AoA, research suggests that one-third to one-half of home accidents can be prevented by modification and repair. This allows seniors to remain in their homes longer. Possible solutions for adapting your home include:

- Installing grab bars, shower seals or transfer benches
- Placing nonskid strips or decals in the tub or shower
- Replacing door knobs with lever handles
- Installing ramps
- Installing insulation, storm windows and air conditioning
- Installing handrails for support