

Back to school, again: Boomers are choosing on-campus retirement living

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Lasell Village

Nan Stearns (left) and Jennifer Huntington (right) at Lasell Village

As a retired high school principal, Jennifer Huntington, 81, has always loved education. So, when she was looking for a retirement home, she prioritized communities where she never had to stop learning. The university-affiliated senior living community Lasell Village went to the top of her list.

Lasell Village is a retirement community located on the campus grounds of (and managed by) Newton's Lasell University.

The biggest appeal for Huntington? The 450 hours of class that each Lasell Village resident is required to complete every calendar year. The classes are offered both directly by Lasell Village and through its host university, giving residents the opportunity to study alongside undergraduates.

"I don't want my mind to stay static," Huntington said.

Huntington isn't alone. Many retirees are opting to spend their golden years on college campuses across the country. A spokesperson for Lasell Village estimated there are more than 100 retirement communities affiliated with college campuses in over 30 states, including Kendal at Oberlin in Ohio, University Place at Purdue and Holy Cross Village near Notre Dame in Indiana.

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As more and more baby boomers retire, college retirement communities are seeing larger influxes of interest, said the newly appointed president of Lasell Village, Zehra Abid-Wood.

Lasell Village is unique in Massachusetts, Abid-Wood said. While college retirement communities are rising in popularity around the country, Abid-Wood said Lasell Village is the only college retirement community in the Bay State that requires its residents to complete a designated amount of courses affiliated with the university.

The retirement community has 260 residents that stay in independent-living apartments with a communal dining area. Residents range in age from 66 to 102. It attracts people who want to not only live in a community, but live in an intellectually-stimulating environment, Abid-Wood said.

Residents are able to take, and teach, classes within Lasell Village, and they also have the opportunity to take intergenerational classes with undergraduate students at the university. Class names include "Poetry Corner," "The Voices of Experience," and "Science and Its Impact on Society: Past, Present and Future."

Nan Stearns, 87, was living alone with her dog for two years after her husband of 60 years passed away. After a long time alone, she decided that she needed to make an "enormous change," she said.

When she visited Lasell Village, she saw a bulletin board in the front hall with flyers about "Black Lives Matter" pinned onto it.

"I thought, these people are paying attention to what's going on in the world. It was a really easy, after that, to make the decision to move there," Stearns said.

Stearns said her favorite part about living in the community is that she gets to meet "so many interesting people who come from every walk of life," she said. During her two years at Lasell Village, Stearns has had dinner with over 100 different people. She knows this number because she keeps track of everyone she meets, from undergraduate students to her fellow residents, in her green notebook.

"Retirees want to go somewhere where it's vibrant, where they can go attend a lecture and feel like they're part of a community, and stay relevant," Abid-Wood said.

By living in a college area, the residents are able to imbed into an already-formed community that lends itself to plenty of social events. Additionally, Lasell Village is the largest employer of Lasell University students, making their presence plentiful in the retirement community.

"You get to talk to the young students, and find out what they're majoring in and what made them take this job. There's always a nice sense of connection with the next generation," Huntington said.

Like with any retirement community, there is a cost factor.

To be admitted into Lasell Village, applicants must undergo a financial review to ensure that they can afford to live in the community. Lasell charges from \$460,000 to \$1.45 million as an entrance fee, and monthly fees of about \$4,750 to \$11,200. The entrance fee can be paid in two ways: Residents pay 100% of the total entrance fee at the time they sign their contract, and at the end of the contract Lasell pays back 90% of that fee. Alternatively, residents can pay 65% of the entrance fee at signing, with a refund that declines at a rate of 1% per month of residency. If a resident were to choose that <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2023/02/14/back-to-school-again.html?s=print>

option and stay for over eight years, there is no refund. Included in these costs are up to 60 hours per year of home care and supportive living services through the Village's Wellness Center and tuition costs.

The highlight for Jennifer Huntington is taking classes in topics she has never learned before. The fun part, Huntington said, is that residents don't have to take any tests or write any papers.

She recently took an intergenerational class in which she got to participate in readings and discussion about World War II. "It is so interesting to see the reactions of the younger generation to history that was a part of my life," she said.

Nan Stearns said she was excited to take her first art class soon and was looking forward to a ukulele class with five other women. The group also does a ukulele jam every Sunday night.

"There is a narrative around aging in this society that really limits the potential for people to remain relevant as they age," Abid-Wood said. The integration of generations that Lasell offers allows for more opportunities for the Lasell community to "learn, connect, and grow," she said.



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