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Photographs by LAWRENCE K. HO Los Angeles Times

**RESIDENTS:** Dody Fertig, center, and Merle Ribnick, second from left, join neighbors for happy hour at the Village, a high-end facility in Northridge. "What the hell do you need rocking chairs for?" asked Fertig, 87.

## Senior living, high style

### Upscale retirement home has a movie theater and full bar

BOB POOL

It was happy hour and cocktail glasses were being hoisted in the San Fernando Valley.

Retirees at a new senior residence were toasting their good fortune that there wasn't a recliner in sight.

"What the hell do you need rocking chairs for?" asked 87-year-old Dody Fertig, taking a sip of wine. "Who doesn't want to live their life out in style?"

That's what residents of the \$90-million Village at Northridge are paying for, after all.

The new five-acre "senior living community" built atop the site of a grapefruit grove-turned-aerospace plant was alive with cocktail chatter and the tinkling of ice as residents relaxed before adjourning to nearby restaurant-style dining rooms for the dinner hour.

With Impressionist paintings on the walls, oversized ceramic art pieces scattered across decorative ledges and tabletops and modernist, blown-glass chandeliers hanging from raised ceilings, the place looks more like the Waldorf-Astoria than retirement home.

Actually, said Mary Dawson, "it's more like the Ritz-Carlton."

She should know. A former professional figure skater,



**DECOR:** The Village isn't cheap — \$4,600 to \$6,800 a month — but residents say it's "like the Ritz-Carlton."

er, Dawson, 83, relocated to Northridge from Rancho Mirage. Her late husband was a developer of country clubs and the pair had a second home in Montecito. She sold that house and now plans to sell the one in the desert as well.

"My son in Porter Ranch found this place," Dawson said, nursing a soft drink and eyeing strawberries, grapes and cheese on a floral-bedecked hors d'oeuvres table across from the lounge's bar.

"The decorator here must have made a fortune. But don't write that down," laughed Claire Friedman, 90, a former school guidance counselor who moved here from Florida, as she sipped a margarita.

Although other retirement homes offer residents beer and wine, those li-

censed for a full bar are apparently rare. "I have not heard of this before," said Will Salao of the state's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control office in Los Angeles.

Built by Senior Resource Group, a Solana Beach company that develops and operates high-end retirement homes, the Northridge complex has been open about a month. It features 240 apartments and 35 assisted-living units. Its eventual occupancy will total about 300.

Monthly fees range from about \$4,600 for a studio apartment to \$6,800 for a two-bedroom-plus-den unit. Many of the apartments have 12-foot ceilings and broad expanses of windows.

That's much more than most traditional retirement homes charge. But there's a demand for high-end aging,

according to Michael Grust, president of Senior Resource Group.

"Certain markets are a little more sophisticated. Los Angeles has been a little behind the curve" in offering extra touches in senior citizen housing, Grust said.

"People don't necessarily want to live in a resort the rest of their lives. But they do like some of the amenities that resorts offer."

So along with the typical exercise room, the Northridge development also has spaces for aerobics, weightlifting and Wii video game workouts. Besides its library and computer room, it has a toy-equipped playroom for grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In addition to field trips and in-house activities typical in retirement homes, there's a movie theater in the middle of the complex with 62 plush seats, a sloping floor and old-school velvet curtains lining the walls.

Felipe Bulmaro, a bartender at the Northridge complex, said he has never encountered a senior center with a cocktail lounge and bar, either. But "these are very social people," Bulmaro said, pouring another margarita.

Added Andy Salazar, another bartender: "I'm surprised. They can really drink."

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