

# Rochester's Park House is Excellent Example of Shared Housing Concept

By Julia Purdy

With baby boomers nudging senior status in the early 21st century, the challenge of housing independent seniors in affordable living environments that also make them feel comfortable and valued is becoming more critical. Park House in Rochester (VT.) represents a low-key solution to this challenge. Park House has offered friendly, supportive shared housing to qualifying seniors since 1991.

Take a rambling, gracious mansion in the center of town; remodel it to create sixteen private bedrooms, extra bathrooms, common areas, a dining room and an office; install CO detectors, an elevator, a central alarm system, and accessibility features; furnish the common areas with attractive secondhand furniture, and the result is a comfortable, safe home environment.

Juli Reiderer, native to the area and Park House's youthful new director, wants to continue its respected reputation as a "happy, genial, pleasant home." With accommodations for fourteen residents, Park House avoids any hint of institutional coldness, projecting instead a tranquil atmosphere of stability.

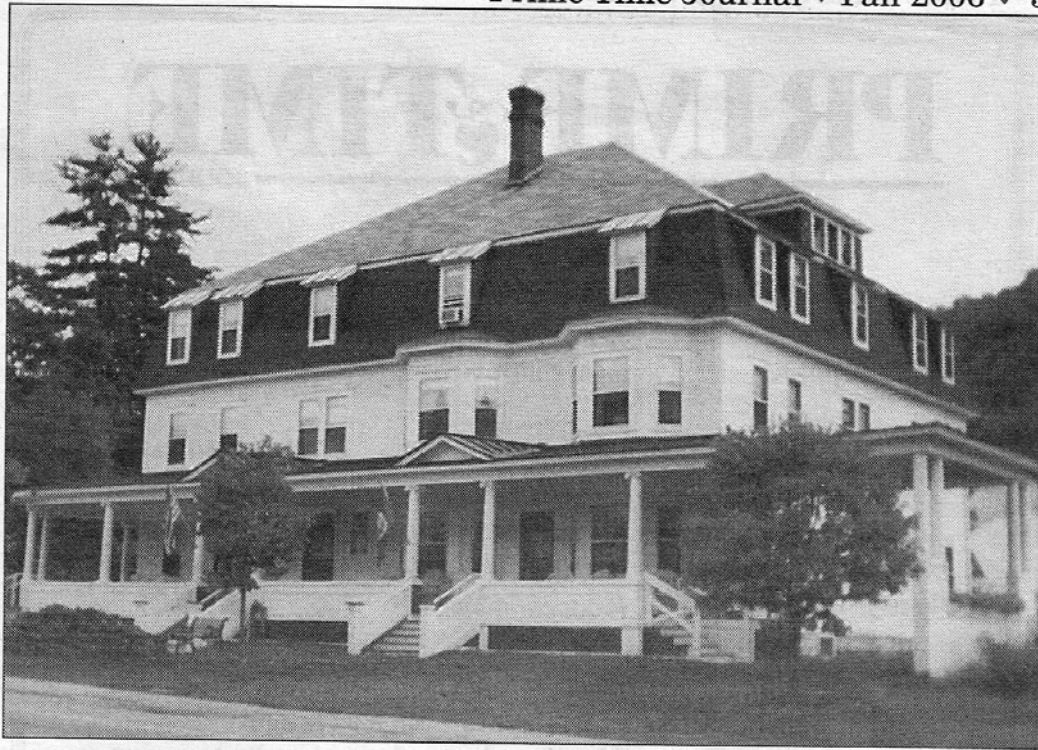
While the facility offers many opportunities to socialize, including hosting concerts, lunchtime lectures, and community events, one of its ingrained traditions is respect for residents' privacy and independence. Residents live with their own furnishings and cherished possessions. Rooms do not have cooking facilities;

three nutritious sit-down meals a day are planned by the kitchen director, Hoppie, who uses all fresh ingredients ("organic if possible"), including bounty shared from neighbors' gardens. Attendance at meals is optional.

Although resident managers George and Mary Goding are available to handle emergencies, and residents must sign out when leaving the building, residents are responsible for their own self-care and can contract with outside services such as cleaning services or the Visiting Nurse Association, just as they would in their own home. Daily life at Park House is closely interwoven with the life of the community, through regular mail delivery to private boxes, private cable and phone lines, subsidized community transit, and even a hairdresser who comes by appointment. Residents can do daily business in the village, which offers the full complement of resources typical of much larger towns.

Eligibility to apply at Park House includes a minimum age of 60 and a doctor's written approval. The facility also qualifies for the Section 8 housing subsidy. Applicants are asked to weigh the relative benefits of leaving their familiar home environment for a group situation. To help them make this all-important decision, prospective residents can stay in a guest room on a short-term, paid basis, sharing meals and activities and getting the "feel" of the place.

Beyond the physical building and services, it's the people that make Park House special. Several residents



*The rambling gracious mansion in the center of town was remodeled to create 16 private rooms for residents and attractive common areas.*

did not hesitate to share their positive comments with *Prime Time*. Hal, a retired businessman who moved in last April, especially commends the “kind and considerate” management, adding that he appreciates the “fine kitchen,” Rochester’s scenic valley, and of course the ability to continue an independent lifestyle.

For Mary, a retired schoolteacher and also a “newbie,” the proximity to Gifford Hospital medical facilities and the nearby park with its “beautiful trees” and music concerts ranks high, but she prizes above all the fact that she can keep Bandit, a loveable, well-behaved 4-year-old long-haired chihuahua.

Alice, also a schoolteacher, worked alongside her farmer husband, raising children and milking Holsteins at their farm, two towns away. She appreciates the “wonderful food—with options,” enjoys exercise class, and finds a sense

of belonging at Park House. She is especially glad she can keep her family doctor.

Marion, the senior member of the community, appreciates the “incredible living room,” a spacious room with a big fireplace, bow windows, attractive wallpaper, and the original stamped tin ceiling and plaster molding. She appreciates the ability to join in civic life, participating in the governance of the town and networking with likeminded folks on environmental issues.

Those who spoke with *Prime Time* all have family living in the area, and many discovered Park House almost by accident. Park House has traditionally promoted itself by word of mouth and fundraisers; it is currently developing its first website, as well as networking with the social work departments at area hospitals.