

Addition adds needed option for Pretty Prairie residents

As Rex Maris contemplated the new assisted living wing at Prairie Sunset Home in Pretty Prairie, he said with satisfaction, “We can say, we got what we wanted.”

The project, which added a 12-apartment assisted living complex wing, was completed in January after a process that included an extensive collaborative effort between Pretty Prairie residents, facility administration and other stakeholders, architectural firm Landmark Architects of Hutchinson and general contractor/builder Fuqua Construction of Inman. Construction began on the facility in April, 2012.

It was a very positive experience, according to Maris, who has managed Prairie Sunset Home since 2003. In his 33 years in working in the nursing home/retirement business, this was his first remodel project, made necessary by changing expectations of senior living options.

The wakeup call for Maris and the community came when he realized that Pretty Prairie residents were looking outside of the community for assisted living options. The home originally only offered nursing care. Several years ago, one wing had been converted to assisted living rooms, but the small rooms were unsatisfactory.

“People want (a better assisted living option) now. We had to do something or we would (eventually) have to close the doors,” Maris said. “What we could offer was not what people wanted.”

Community feedback was sought and using that input, Maris secured partial funding for the project from the USDA and the remaining funding was pledged by the Pretty Prairie community. The project was then let out for bid.

“The funding from the USDA required that we bid out the project, but we were hoping Max (Fuqua) would get the bid, because we knew of his work,” Maris said.

Even though Maris had submitted a project plan with the USDA funding application, the project required additional refinement before work could begin. In addition to the completed assisted living wing, the project will also include re-



PROJECT PROFILE

Prairie Sunset Home

Owner: Prairie Sunset Home

Location: Pretty Prairie, Kansas

Completed: 2013

Project Scope: Assisted Living Wing

Project Type: Remodel, new construction

Square footage: 34,550 Total Sq. Ft.

Design Build

Team: Fuqua Construction, Landmark Architects, Hutchinson, KS

construction of the office area and extensive remodeling of the nursing care areas of the home. To assist with plan refinements, Dan Link of Landmark Architects, Hutchinson, was brought in as part of the design-build team. Link had worked on previous projects with the Fuqua Construction team and had experience with the demands and quirks of remodeling aging facilities. The Pretty Prairie Sunset Home of-



Residents of Prairie Sunset Home’s assisted living wing share a dining area in the wing.

ferred some challenges for the team.

“The building was very dated. Most of the utilities were beyond their expected life. The corridors weren’t wide enough and included load bearing walls. We had to be pretty creative as the (project) budget was very limited,” Link said. “Max made a very concerted effort to be cost conscious so that the owners could have as much of what they wanted as

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possible. The majority of Max's projects are remodels and he has staff who knows how to do the work. You have to be creative to solve the issues that come up."

The assisted living phase of the project included the addition of 12 apartments with congregate activity, living and dining areas, serving kitchen, a spa/whirlpool room, laundry facilities, post office and outdoor patio area. The wing is connected by a hallway to the facility, but is an enclosed, separate unit from the nursing care wings.

According to Maris, a project of this scope could have been completely overwhelming, but the Fuqua Construction team with its experience in building and remodeling care facilities provided invaluable support throughout the process – especially when it became clear that the budget would require some choices to be made. When the plans were finalized, Fuqua put dollar amounts to everything and the Prairie Sunset Board prioritized desires and needs. During the nearly four-month planning stage of the project, Maris met with Max and his team every two to three weeks.

"We'd meet, we talked about what we wanted and Max would go back and refigure. Then that process would repeat until we managed to get the most critical things on our wish list included within the budget," Maris said. "Max's knowledge and help was invaluable during that process. Truthfully, I can't even describe how invaluable."

To illustrate, Maris used the selection of windows as an example, noting that there were several options that were nice to look at, but of different quality and price.

"We would ask him if he would put something like this in his home, or a home that his mother was going to live in, and he would give us his opinion. We really trusted him to give us an honest answer balancing quality and cost and feel that we have done the very best we could do within our budget limitations," Maris said.

Fuqua's expertise also was invaluable in helping Maris meet deadlines throughout the construction and keeping the project on schedule. Fuqua and his crew would meet weekly with Maris to update him on progress and let him know what was coming up, when items would need to be onsite for installation, who was responsible for ordering what, and guiding him throughout the process. Those meetings were also used to inform the home's staff about the construction schedule.

"Fuqua's crew supervisors were very good about letting us know if something was going to infringe on our space so we could plan around it," Maris said. "The crew was very good about being respectful of our staff and residents and the last 30 to 40 minutes of every day were spent in cleaning up the site."

Maris noted that even though the project involved a variety of subcontractors, Fuqua Construction foremen were always onsite providing consistency – including expectations that all workers would be respectful of residents and maintain the standards set by Fuqua Construction.

"Max would meet with subcontractors before they came on the job and tell them that he appreciated them being there, but that they must remember that (Fuqua) was there to serve the Lord and help people build their projects. (He would say) You can't forget we are in their home," Maris said.

He and his staff appreciated that swearing and smoking were not allowed on site and that it was made clear in subcontractor meetings.

As the assisted living wing neared completion, Maris said he had been pleased that the project came in under budget and noted that there was only one change order, something that is unusual on any project according to Link.

"I'm sure that was because Bob (supervisor on the project) had resolved many of the issues before they became a problem," Link said.

Maris also appreciated Fuqua's experience and expertise with nursing home construction and regulations when the wing had its final inspections. The state inspector found only three minor things that needed to be done.

"He granted us the license anyway, because he knew Max would take care of it. Max is very well respected at the Department of Aging," Maris said. "He set the bar high from the beginning of the project. I would highly recommend him to others looking at a project. Max is easy to work with and knows what he is doing. The job will be done well and done right. That's the main thing."

As the work moves to remodeling the nursing and memory care wings of the facility, Maris is confident that the experience with Fuqua Construction will be as positive as on the job just completed, providing a quality living option for Pretty Prairie's senior residents.

written by Cindy Baldwin, Baldwin Creative Services



Above: A view of the congregate living area showing the fireplace and comfortable seating. Right: The Spa room is available to all the residents of the wing.

