

Sunny's Café offers "eating out" feel to on-campus dining

Residents of Buhler's Sunshine Meadows Retirement Community have a variety of living options – and now they have choices in dining as well. The community recently opened Sunny's Café, which provides a restaurant-like experience for residents, their guests and staff as an alternative to the more traditional dining room or -- in the case of the independent living residents and staff – their own cooking.

"Our goal is to encourage person-centered care," Sunshine Meadows administrator Keith Pankratz said. "This new dining option allows our residents to make choices about when they go to eat and what they eat. It's an opportunity to 'eat out' without leaving the campus."

The café features tables and booths along with bar seating by the open kitchen. The area is tastefully decorated in an up-to-date style designed to not look institutional. Drop pendant lighting softens the ambience of the room. Diners order at the counter and the food is brought to them by café staff. Breakfast menu items include eggs, pancakes, and biscuits and gravy. The lunch menu features salads, soups and sandwiches all made to order. Open from 7 a.m. – 2 p.m., seven days a week except for holidays, the café has already proved to be a popular option. Pankratz said there are plans to include evening hours in the future.

When the facility's board decided they were interested in adding a café-style dining experience to the existing facility, they bypassed hiring an independent architect or letting out construction bids and contracted with Fuqua Construction of Inman, Kansas. Max Fuqua and his team worked with the Sunshine Meadows board to discuss the board and staff's goals for the project, developing the initial architectural and construction plans together as part of a design-build team.

"We had worked with Fuqua Construction on several previous projects including our independent living complex and our Alzheimer's Unit," Pankratz said. "In those earlier projects, we did request bids from several general contractors, but for this project, we decided to work with Fuqua Construction without letting bids."



PROJECT PROFILE

Sunshine Meadows Sunny Cafe

Administrator: Keith Pankratz
Location: Buhler, Kansas

Project Scope: Renovation, New Construction

Project Type: Retirement Community
Team: Fuqua Construction
Landmark Architects

Pankratz explained that the board was comfortable with that decision because of the quality of the work the company had done on previous projects and a belief that the design-build approach Fuqua Construction utilizes is cost effective. The trust level in the company's integrity was high, he said. The board was also comfortable in having the Fuqua team develop the design on a project of this size. In addition to the



The bar sitting area in Sunny's Café provides a view of the open food preparation area of the new café at Sunshine Meadows Retirement Community in Buhler.

café, several improvements and modifications were done to other parts of the building adjacent to the primary project.

According to Pankratz, he believes that Sunshine Meadows saved a lot on design costs by working with Fuqua Construction and Landmark Architects to develop the project.

The project transformed a little-used common "living room" space in the primary building on the Sunshine Meadows campus into a café. The new dining area, with a seating

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capacity of 40, includes remodeled space as well as new construction that tripled the living room's original square footage. The entrance to that part of the building was also altered to fit the new use.

The Fuqua Construction team began meeting with the planning team from Sunshine Meadows on a regular basis, first to discuss the goals and scope of the project and to consider design options and then, as construction began in June



Counter at Sunny's Café. Diners can choose from several entrees, salads, soups and a breakfast menu.

2011, to update both parties on day-to-day project progress. Fuqua Construction's past construction experience with a wide range of elder residential living facilities, from independent living to assisted living to full nursing care, proved valuable in the planning process.

Pankratz said he believed what the firm had learned on previous projects and working with state inspectors on completing them gave Fuqua Construction staff and construction crews a good understanding of what features, safety, and quality standards were necessary when designing and building this type of project. The result was that there have been very few things, mostly ADA-related, which the crew has had to return to redo after the inspection.

"(Knowing they have successful past experience with elder care facilities) gives a sense of confidence and a comfort factor when starting on a project," Pankratz said.

There were challenges after construction started as the facility never closed down. This is a place where people are living and concerns about resident and staff safety and comfort were always a consideration. Fuqua crews' past experiences with remodeling projects in active facilities gave them an awareness of the difficulties construction can cause, Pankratz said. The construction team met on a weekly basis with Sunshine Meadows staff to discuss upcoming stages of the construction and resolve any problems that had come up or that might be anticipated.

"The workers were very attentive to our needs since they were working in a commons area, even the subcontractors who came in worked very well," Pankratz said. "Throughout the project, there was a lot of communication happening."

Crews were mindful of the inevitable noise and dirt asso-

ciated with a construction project. A temporary wall was put up to help contain both dirt and traffic into the area and when necessary, plastic sheeting was used to further control dust and dirt. The crews were very good about maintaining the work area so that it was as safe and attractive as possible for residents, staff and guests. Pankratz said they were able to work through the inconveniences of the remodel with few complaints.

The positive communication between all parties involved also allowed change orders to be kept within a reasonable range, holding costs for the Sunny's Café part of the project within the planned budget. When changes were made to the original plan – whether requested by Sunshine Meadows, or suggested by Fuqua Construction – it was a mutual decision by the parties involved.

"Max (Fuqua) and his team want what's best for the customer and lets them be in the driver's seat. Their flexibility with work change orders is appreciated," Pankratz said.

Sunny's Café opened for business the second week of February, 2012, to positive reviews, Pankratz said.

"Some people are eating two meals a day in Sunny's Café. I see smiles on their faces, and I see new faces coming to eat nearly every day," Pankratz said.



Tables and booths provide a restaurant feel to the dining area of Sunny's Café.

Assisted living and nursing care residents can eat in the café using the meal plan they are already on. Independent living residents, staff and guests pay ala carte prices for meals eaten there. Pankratz has been pleased that not only have residents found the new dining option to be popular, meeting their original goal, but that staff and guests are also enjoying it. Sunshine Meadows board members and staff have been very satisfied with the finished project and their experience with Fuqua Construction.

"I have given out (Fuqua Construction's) name often (when asked for a recommendation for a construction company)," Pankratz said. "They get a good referral from me. They always have a good response when things don't go as planned. There are not a lot of return needs, but they are quick to respond when there are."

written by Cindy Baldwin, Baldwin Creative Services