

# Friends Undertake Urban Aging Experiment

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Seniors who wish to live out their lives in an urban community have a new option in Philadelphia - a condominium project that has been created by Friends Center City (FCC).

Called Friends Center City Riverfront, the project at 22 S. Front St. is part of what FCC calls a "grand urban experiment" to provide living options for seniors that combine center city's cultural assets with the security of fellowship and healthcare coordination.

FCC's goal is "to enable people to live out their lives downtown," says FCC Board Chair Ted Reed, 69, who is also a principal of a Center City marketing research firm. "The city is out campus."

Friends Center City (FCC) is a non-profit entity committed to engaging its members in Center City life as a diverse and evolving community, true to Quaker values. During the past decade, FCC has been fashioning new ways for aging members to maintain independence within a supportive urban community.

## **Some communal meals**

Mary Anne Hunter, 74, a recently widowed landscape architect, is one of the pioneers at Friends Center City Riverfront. She says she gets community and support in a natural, intergenerational environment at the seven-story Riverfront, and it's just steps (or a short cab ride) away from theater and concerts.

"Community has always been important to me," Hunter says.



*Photo of Sarah Maxwell (left) and Mary Ellen McNish at Friends Center City Riverfront by Paolo Noguerras*

In creating "intentional communities" like Riverfront, FCC incorporates already-existing facilities and partnerships. The building includes condominiums of varying sizes and styles. Some communal spaces are owned by the Friends organization, and a number of communal meals are arranged each week to take advantage of surrounding restaurateurs.

"When you're alone or lose a spouse, meals can be especially hard," says Pamela Freyd, an FCC Board member and co-chair of its Community Committee. "When you begin to lose your eyesight or become unsure in your mobility, it's nice to have a little help. And it's tremendously important to keep intellectually active and have community.

### **Friends Life Care an option**

FCC Riverfront also takes a unique approach to long-term care services. Friends Life Care, a separate non-profit organization, is offered as one of the options for Riverfront residents. Its mission is to help aging adults stay in their homes as long as possible, according to its president, Carol Barbour. Unlike services with typical long-term care insurance, care coordinators develop personal relationships with members and oversee whatever care is required, she explained.

Members range in age from 40 to about 105, she said, although new members cannot subscribe after 81. The average annual fee is approximately \$3,000.

Realtor Richard Wolgin, an FCC Board member who has been working on the residential project, described the first wave of FCC Riverfront owners as "a neat bunch of people ... accomplished, sophisticated and well-educated."

### **"Value added"**

He said that people can purchase their units directly from the developer like traditional condos, paying separate fees for specific services; or, people can purchase their units from FCC Riverfront. In that case, they pay FCC Riverfront one monthly check thereafter to take care of services, taxes, insurance and maintenance, and when the residents leave, they or their estate will receive back 90 percent of the cost of the unit and they won't have responsibility for selling it.

About 1,000 people are part of the network embraced by Friends in the City, a loose social and cultural group within FCC. "Their plates are pretty full already, but we supply the value added to their activities," noted Evelyn Eskin, co-chair of the Community Committee, referring to additional social benefits.

One example of the value Friends in the City adds to member is the popular "ethnic eating" program, featuring special talks by chefs to enhance regular dining events. And instead of just attending a play, members of Friends in the City will engage in a play-reading session together in advance of the show.

"People don't have to go to the symphony alone," Wolgin says.

Walkability is stressed at FCC Riverfront and building is expected to be a starting site for a monthly restaurant night and walk to a movie at the Ritz movie theaters.

Hunter's condominium at FCC Riverfront has a loft and two bathrooms, and overlooks the building's gardens. Living in an intentional urban community, she says, "is a good feeling."

***For information visit the website or call: 267-639-5257.***