

# Design in Action: The Village at Waveny Care Center

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Located in New Canaan, Connecticut, the Village at Waveny Care Center is an assisted living (AL) facility for those with dementia. The center received an Award of Merit for its design from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) *Design for Aging Review* juried biennial competition (see *AIA Designs for Aging Knowledge Community* on page 27 of this issue). Completed in 2001 and opened in early September, the 2-story structure offers residential AL for 52 residents and day care for about 60 individuals with dementia. It was constructed as an addition to a community-based nursing facility to provide an additional level of care within a community structure.

Organized in 4 households of 13 residents each, the structure is configured with pleasant exterior views from each resident room. Each household has an activity kitchen that allows natural light to flood into the adjoining family room and household circulation space. The family room has a fireplace and a television. A residential dining room and commercial pantry is located in the area where the two households connect, as are the front doors of each household (Figure 1).

The interior of each household is designed to minimize ambient noise and provide a soothing, quiet retreat for residents and staff

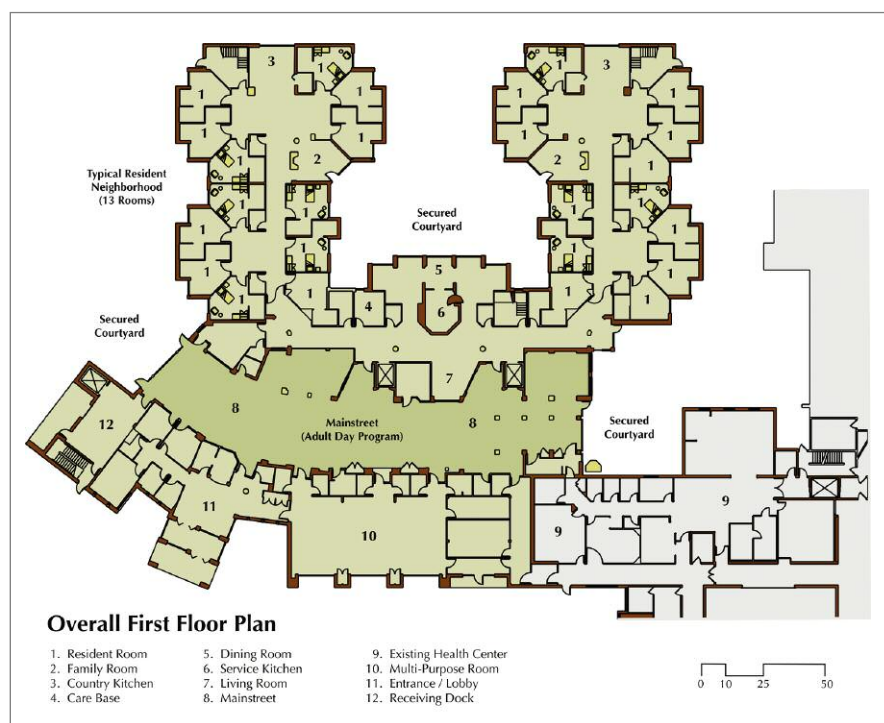


Figure 1. The Waveny floor plan.

alike. Lighting is sensitive to degenerative elderly eyes and can be adjusted.

Resident rooms, while not large (300 square feet), are private and have full bathrooms that include European showers (Figure 2). Built-in cabinetry provides shelving, dresser drawers, and hanging space for clothing. The room design provides subtle visual cuing for residents with dementia. For example, the door to the bathroom is positioned so that the resident can see it from bed. For patients

with dementia, particularly, seeing the open door helps orient them when they feel the urge to urinate. Likewise, using built-in casework across from the resident's entry door enables residents to place familiar objects where they will be able to see them when entering the room.

The design attention in resident rooms and households is certainly important, but the part of the Village that is truly innovative is its main street (Figure 3). This 2-story space is located just outside the AL



Figure 2. A resident room.



Figure 3. Main street at Wavenly.

households, providing a community center, not only for the AL residents but for the staff and residents from other parts of the campus.

Since most residents at Wavenly are from the close-knit community of New Canaan, the architects, Reese Lower Patrick and Scott, took their design cues from the quaint village commercial structures in downtown

New Canaan. Residents have immediate recognition and familiarity of place and understanding of the community organization: main street is where residents and staff meet, and just off of main street is where residents live.

Wavenly's main street is populated by small stores that include a sidewalk cafe, a convenience store, and a dining venue. The stores offer opportunities for both structured and unstructured activities. Along the main street are street lights and signs, and the carpet pattern replicates cobblestones.

Main street is the place where residents go, leaving their homes for outings with family or friends. They walk to the sidewalk cafe or simply to sit and watch the traffic. Staff gravitate here for breaks and have been known to spontaneously sit at the piano and begin a sing-a-long for everyone's entertainment.

The design of the Village at Wavenly Care Center is a precedent-setting approach to the organization of a campus community as well as a response to the needs of those with dementia. Coincidentally, it has provided a connection to the larger community outside the campus confines by welcoming families and performance groups. The design is not contrived, but respectful of New Canaan; thus, it is successful on more than 1 level.

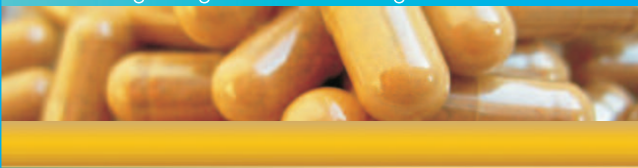
Since its opening, the Village at Wavenly Care Center has been copied at a number of locations. Some have been successful emulations, but most have simply been derivative of this original—an original that was well conceived and that treats the residents as members of a community, with feelings for that community and with an intuitive understanding, despite their dementia, of what *community* really means.

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Jeffrey W. Anderzhon is chair of the American Institute for Architecture's Design for Aging program.

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