

The Spires at Berry College



Rome, Georgia



2024 Post-Occupancy Evaluation White Paper

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The Society for the Advancement of Gerontological Environments (SAGE) has been conducting post-occupancy evaluations for more than a decade. In early 2024, a post-occupancy evaluation was conducted at The Spires at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. The post-occupancy evaluation (POE) was authorized by The Spires Executive Director Laurie Steber. The POE was conducted within the four-year old continuing care retirement community, located on the campus of Berry College—which just happens to be the largest contiguous college campus in the world!

While on site the SAGE POE team was hosted by Laurie Steber, Berry College’s Leah Cobb, Faulkner Design Group’s Stacy Peters and Nicole Hill, and Ken Kite with THW Design. Members of the SAGE POE team included Amy Carpenter, Migette Kaup, Lisa Warnock, Tammy Sealer, Sandra Soraci, Margaret Bartholomew, and Andrew Carle. These individuals represented a broad cross-section of expertise in design for aging, intergenerational design and programming, codes and regulations, and operational and organizational management related to senior housing (See next page for team member information).



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Executive Director
The Spires at Berry College



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All POE Team members completed CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Certification for full compliance with Federal Guidelines for Research and the use of Human Subjects in Research. An IRB application for this research POE titled “A SAGE Post-Occupancy Evaluation: An Investigation into What Matters in the Design of Spaces for Older Adults” was submitted to the Kansas State University of Research Compliance and approved January 2, 2022. Project #9080.

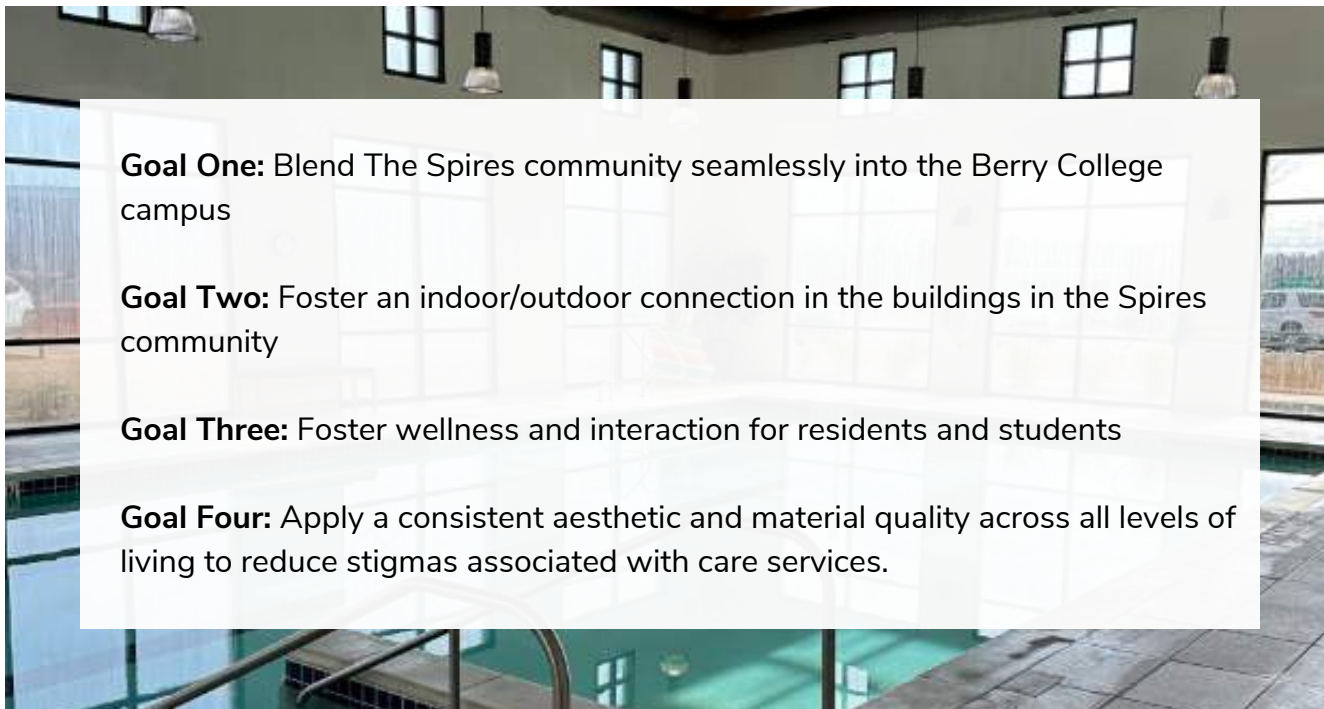
Project debriefing information was sent to The Spires before the site visit and distributed to residents, staff, and family members to provide notification about the SAGE Team’s visit. Spires administrators also invited residents and staff to participate in interviews and focus groups. Project information and consent forms were provided to residents and staff before these interviews and focus group sessions on the day of the site visit as well.





The Spires at Berry College was designed by the teams at THW Design and Faulkner Design Group. This project was an Award of Merit recipient in the 2021 Environments for Aging Design Showcase. The awards submission package provided by THW Design and Faulkner Design Group identified several functional and therapeutic goals (see below). These goals were used as a basic guide for the targeted observations for the POE team.

Design Goals - The Spires at Berry College



SAGE has a set of guiding principles and goals that are the basis for assessing the effectiveness of senior housing and for those who also require additional care services. These goals are especially relevant for residents who may have cognitive challenges.

The following are considered important in providing a therapeutic environment for residents and a supportive work environment for staff:

SAGE holds the following values related to gerontological environments.

- **Physical safety and psychological security:** Provide appropriate safe guards and enhance perception of security.
- **Environment as a therapeutic resource:** Utilize all aspects of the environment (physical, programmatic and organizational) as a resource for healing and improved functioning.
- **Holism and well-being:** Focus on needs and desires of the whole person social, emotional, spiritual and physical, vocational and intellectual.
- **Individual rights and personal autonomy:** Maximize available choices, opportunities for self determination, and accessibility of options.
- **Communities and relationships:** Generate opportunities for meaningful interactions and relationships among peers, families and staff.
- **Support of caregivers:** Create an environment that promotes safety, efficiency, and emotional support.
- **Function enhancing technology:** Harness new technology to increase functionality of the environment.
- **Creating and evaluating:** Encourage innovation, diversity of approaches, experimentation with new solutions, and systematic evaluation of outcomes.



SAGE team members draw upon their expertise, familiarity with industry best practices and experiences with senior living as they evaluate the effectiveness of the settings. Many of the SAGE principles can be evidenced by architectural and interior elements. The team also considers the historical context and input and feedback from staff as well as family members who volunteered to share their insights and perspectives.

Architectural or Interior Element	Considerations (Selected Examples)
Lighting	Lighting levels, sufficient foot-candles. Control for glare.
Use of Color	Support for depth perception for aging eyes while maintaining residential or homelike aesthetic.
Floor Coverings	Support for ease of mobility while creating a soft surface to reduce potential injury from fall. Aesthetic supports a residential appeal and specification is appropriate for health care setting and required maintenance and life safety.
Window Treatments	Ability to adjust for different daylighting conditions (controlling glare). Aesthetic supports a residential appeal and specification is appropriate for health care setting and required maintenance and life safety.
Acoustical Treatments	Spatial volumes and potential sound transmission between private spaces is effectively designed to reduce negative stimulation and protect privacy.
Circulation Patterns	Movement through the space is supported by spatial layout and features that support autonomy in navigation and stamina (landmarks for reminders, handrails for support).
Fixed Furnishings & Equipment	Furnishings are supportive of frail adults. Aesthetic supports a residential appeal and specification is appropriate for health care setting and required maintenance and life safety.
Moveable Furnishings & Equipment	Furnishings are supportive of frail adults. Aesthetic supports a residential appeal and specification is appropriate for health care setting and required maintenance and life safety.

Elements of the physical environment that contribute to the goals for a therapeutic environment for residents and a supportive work environment for staff.





Stacy Peters Gardner
Principal, Faulkner Design Group

SAGE POEs are conducted at an indicative level which includes gathering basic information on the building, understanding the primary design drivers, and then collecting feedback from key stakeholders. This is supplemented with a walking tour and photo-documentation of the spaces to capture examples of the building in use.

Stacy Peters Gardner, Principal, and Nicole Hill, Director of Design, for Faulkner Design Group, and Ken Kite, Senior Project Manager for THW Design, met with the SAGE POE team to share planning and design decisions as well as constraints and challenges that impacted the final project outcomes. The initial meeting was focused on understanding the context and history of the planning for the building, major factors that impacted the planning and design process, operational goals and challenges, and practices that were guided by internal programs and policies.



Nicole Hill
Director of Design
Faulkner Design Group

During the tour, photo documentation of the spaces and the details of features were recorded. POE team members also record observations of the presence or absence of features, details of design features, and operational issues that impact patterns of use. These attributes included both desired goals and architectural and interior elements that can be critical for effective use and navigation of a space (see previous page).



Ken Kite
Associate, Sr. Project Mgr
THW Design

Team members met with residents and staff in small focus groups. A group of residents met with the SAGE POE team and shared their perspectives on why they chose to move to The Spires, how they formed relationships with the students at Berry College, and what these types of engagement meant to them. Leadership from Berry College also shared their perspectives on the success of the intergenerational programming and their continued plans for more work-study opportunities. Staff from various departments met with the POE team to discuss how the building supported their work and operational practices. The administration also met with the SAGE team members at the conclusion of the day to provide additional information and answer final questions.

Located in Rome, Georgia, Berry College was founded by Martha Berry in 1902 with the mission to educate the Appalachian children and prepare them for work through both academic and hands-on experiences. This mission remains a cornerstone of the college, even as it has expanded in both size and academic programs over the years. Today, approximately 95 percent of Berry College students engage in the work-study program, gaining valuable experiences that support the goal of educating the head, heart and hands of each student.

With over 27,000 acres of land, Berry College is the world's largest college campus. The commitment to maintaining and designating land for meaningful use is what led to the prospect of adding a continuing care retirement community to the expansive campus in 2007. As the college trustees weighed the financial implications of such a move, plans were not formalized until 2015 with the creation of an independent 501(c) (3), Lavender Mountain Senior Living. This set in motion a series of development, financing, and design steps. The flow of the project was interrupted by market fluctuations, increases in the costs of construction, as well as COVID.



BERRY
COLLEGE



Martha Berry

Photo courtesy Berry College



Photo courtesy The Spires at Berry College

● ● ● ● The Setting / Context (cont)



Project Background

In June of 2020, The Spires began to welcome their first residents to the independent living apartments, with healthcare services opening following later in December 2020/early January 2021. Due to the challenges of the pandemic, resident-student engagement initiatives were limited. Students were also initially reluctant to initiate engagement with The Spires residents due to perceptions of having “an old folks’ home” on campus.

Knowing that the college desired to have meaningful intergenerational relationships emerge between residents and students, The Spires residents eagerly engaged with the campus following the removal of COVID restrictions. Residents began showing up on the Berry campus during finals week with snacks and treats, supporting student athletes at their sporting events, attending musical and theatre productions, as well as introducing themselves to faculty with invitations to come to The Spires to deliver lectures. Many students now engage with residents frequently, some even working at The Spires through their work-study position, and have come to form very strong relationships.

Using the criteria for goals and environmental features, the POE team identified distinct features and supporting practices for The Spires that had notable outcomes. These are summarized as they relate to each of the design goals. Specific attributes for each of these assets and opportunities to enhance their experience are highlighted below.



Design Goal One: Blend The Spires community seamlessly into the Berry College Campus

The first challenge the design team faced was the location of the CCRC on the Berry campus. The location needed to be close enough to support intergenerational engagement and access for the work-study programs yet with enough separation for a comfortable division of activities. The chosen location was adjacent to a limestone quarry that was classified as a brownfield.



Google Maps

The next challenge was to create a walkable connection that could also support secure vehicular traffic. A connector road wasn't originally planned, but administrative leadership at Berry advocated for this feature. On the back side of the Berry College campus, the site had a significant depression. In order to provide for path and road that could be intuitively used by residents and students, a significant amount of infill and regrading was required. This investment in the site planning and landscape has paid off. The distance needed to travel between the heart of the two parts of the campus is manageable by foot, and residents can use their vehicles in inclement weather.

● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal One (cont)



There is a secure access point that requires a pass card for vehicles which prevents this road from being a public thoroughfare or a short-cut through campus (above). From the Spires, residents arrive at the back of the Berry campus, however, and the "sense of arrival" could be stronger (though the plentiful deer are quite welcoming!).



● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal One (cont)

The unit mix for The Spires includes independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, and memory care. See details below.

Living Type	Number of Units	Feature/ Details
Independent Living	170 Units	Includes 28 Cottages and 17 Lodge Apartments
Assisted Living	36 Units	2 Floors
Skilled Nursing	34 Beds	30% Short-term Rehab
Memory Care	36 Beds	1 Floor

At the time of our POE visit, there were 350 residents on the Spires campus with approximately 230 independent living (IL) residents. The average age upon move-in to independent living is about 85. The administrator noted there are multiple IL units that are occupied by couples, more couples than they had anticipated. This dynamic in their occupancy has had an impact on the space utilization of their social areas.

Residents come to The Spires from across the country. It was noted that 70% of the residents come from outside of the immediate market area. Approximately 8% are Berry College alumni, and another 20% have some connection to the college (e.g., retired faculty and relatives of current administration).

Resident Composition

- 10% of residents are in their 60s
- 40% in their 70s
- 45% in their 80s
- 5% in their 90s

- IL Apartments are filled with **50% couples**

● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal One (cont)

The independent living residents who spoke with us shared their perspectives on the integration of the Spires with Berry College. Key features included the openness of the campus that provided a fluid crossover for pedestrian and bicycle movement. Residents noted the culture of wellness and the connections to the educational richness as well as accessibility to students created a natural sense of reciprocity. They felt the design of the buildings on the Spires campus reflected the design aesthetic of the Berry College that made them feel like an integral part of a larger community.



The community bicycle paths and racks are well utilized!

Spaces designed to support socialization and programmed activities include a multi-purpose room (known as the Mt. Berry Room), the dining room, a bar area and card room, art rooms, fitness rooms, and lounge areas throughout the building. All the common spaces are heavily used. In the Mt. Berry Room faculty from Berry College come to present lectures about once a week. Residents put on plays – that they produce, and there are frequent Berry College choir productions. Because of the heavy use for presentations and entertainment, there are plans to upgrade the sound system.



Mt. Berry Room

● ● ● ● **Observations/Design Goal One (cont)**



The SAGE POE team was tickled to look out the meeting room window and see young children and their parents coming and going for music class at the Spires.

Even the art rooms are used for a wide variety of purposes, including meetings, bible study, band practice, children’s music classes, and more. This is another space that is frequented by students who bring pottery activities to the residents. Stakeholders noted that a successful intergenerational community needs to have a different set of program benchmarks than a regular Life Plan community. Spaces just generally need to be larger.

In the original programming for the Spires, no real spaces were planned for classroom space with the anticipation that residents would go to Berry to participate in educational activities there. The number of programmed activities and the popularity of the lecture series and visiting faculty who frequently come to the Spires, the absence of these types of spaces is notable by the planning team and the Spires leadership.

● ● ● ● **Design Goal Two: Foster an indoor/outdoor connection in the buildings in the Spires community**

The campus is active with pedestrian and bicycle traffic. There are 2.8 miles of wandering trails/paths around the immediate area of the Spires. You can make a 1.5-mile loop around the Spires without the off-shoots, and sidewalks lead to and from convenient exits from the building. The buildings have also been designed to bring in natural light and provide visual access to the landscape. Viking Trail to Berry College’s “mountain campus” is 3.6 miles one way, and the Spires is just 1/10 of a mile away from that (see site plan, next page). Overall, there are 15 miles of paved trails accessible to residents.

● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Two (cont)



Partial Site Plan. Spires residents have access to over 15 miles of paved biking/walking paths.

Within the Spires building, there are numerous rooms that have strong visual connections to the outdoors. The dining room is positioned with a view of the back patio and the lake (see image, right). The full height windows bring in an abundance of natural light. A sun study was conducted, but the strength of the daylight proved to be more intense than anticipated and sun shades were added after residents started using the space.



The Mt. Berry Room (left) also has large windows that were supplemented with shades after construction.

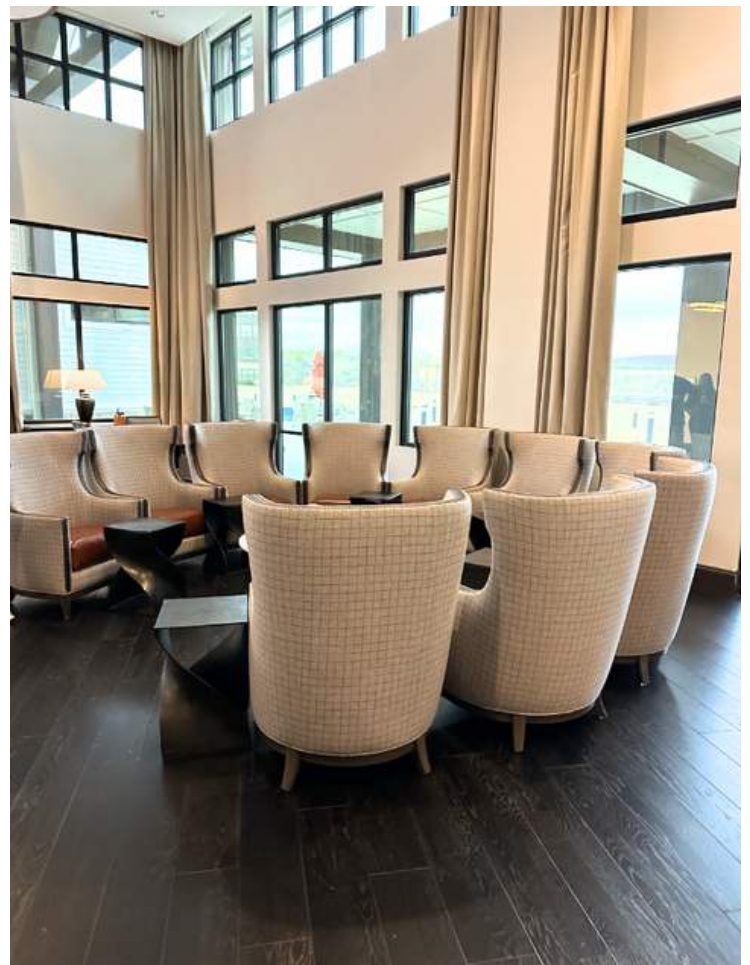
● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Two (cont)



The front lobby area has a lovely view through to the back patio and lake (see image, left). The full expanse of windows creates a bright space and some glare. Staff didn't detect that this was problematic, but the lobby space was observed to be the least used during the POE visit. During warmer months there might also be some heat gain in this space.

The windows in the adjacent bar space and card room, however, were tinted because the low afternoon sun proved to be too intense for residents enjoying afternoon happy hours (see image, right).

The pictured seating arrangement, dubbed "Circle of Friends" by Spires residents, was a deliberate rearrangement of seating by residents to help everyone feel included. During the POE visit, the SAGE team was delighted to see many residents gathered in and around this space for happy hour.



● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Two (cont)

Shading for outdoor patios is limited (see image, right). It was noted that some spaces provided “a million-dollar view but were almost unusable during months when it was hot.” Staff added, “They do line dance out there at night, though!”



For interiors, the designers noted they wanted to make sure there were interior architecture-esque features that define spaces but didn't close them off. Private dining areas are incorporated into other dining venues, glass walls are used so they are still a part of the bigger picture. The dining venues are very open, with large rooms. The intention was to give different dining destinations, a bistro, formal and informal dining rooms. Although the main dining area is a fairly large space, there are intimate spaces provided throughout with different seating options. Everywhere you eat you see the view.



Outdoor views can be enjoyed from the private dining room (above) and main dining room (right)

● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Two (cont)

The bar off the lobby was originally closed off from surrounding areas, but during the design process it was decided to open up the wall from bar to the lobby so it could be a pre-function space, not separate from lobby. Double-sided open shelving was incorporated to promote active sight lines.



Lobby bar seating



Residents in the bar area can enjoy views out to the lobby



Double sided shelving allows residents to peek into the bar from the adjacent corridors.



Design Goal Three: Foster wellness and interaction for residents and students



The focus on wellness is promoted by the convenient location and easy access to the fitness room and the pool. The pool is actively used by residents from all living areas for independent lap swimming, aqua therapy, and organized classes.

The gym space is outfitted with a variety of machines and fitness equipment and organized classes, like “cardio-beat” are popular with the residents. There are two fulltime fitness employees plus a physical therapist. Students in the Exercise Science program at Berry College come over and coach residents on individual exercise plans as well.



The Spires gym and nearby group fitness room are popular with residents from all living areas.

● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Three (cont)



Adjacent to these fitness areas are a hair salon (above left) and locker rooms (above right). The salon was noted as a popular space for haircare but residents were still going downtown to get their nails done. They were looking forward to getting a manicurist more engaged to use this side of the salon area more frequently.



While these spaces on the first level are open and freely accessible to all residents at the Spires, there is also a smaller exercise room (left) and another salon station (below) located in assisted living.



● ● ● ● Observations/Design Goal Three (cont)

Special Spaces and Features

The interior design and planning have also created meaningful spaces for interaction and engagement between residents and residents and students. The Veterans Wall is a permanent display that pays tribute to members of each armed service branch (see below). On Veterans Day, residents who have served in the armed forces set up a table with memorabilia from their time in service and students come over and learn about their lives and duty. Faculty in some classes even create assignments around these topics to encourage these interactions and the sharing of stories. Residents also find the memorial wall meaningful and often pause and reflect on the lives of those they have loved and lost. The design of the wall is elegant and well-composed, and the graphics are especially detailed for visual accessibility.



Veterans Wall just off main lobby

Another spot that has a special quality to it is the social space in the Lodge, a separate building of independent living apartments adjacent to the main building. This was a “wild card” space that wasn’t originally conceived of as a social area. The composition of the apartments that resulted in the Lodge were a marketing “hit”. The social areas evolved as the residents began to organize activities and events of interest to them.



This social space/room on the main floor of the Lodge building was the perfect spot for POE team members to interview residents and staff.



Design Goal Four: Apply a consistent aesthetic and material quality across all levels of living to reduce stigmas associated with care services.

One of the main goals for The Spires campus was to create a uniform aesthetic and material quality that did not differentiate between living areas. This was clearly evident as the team toured the building. The CEO and the Faulkner design team even noted that one of the details they felt was so appealing was the fact that every single entrance to apartments and rooms were the same. The door, the colors, the graphics for the numbers and nameplates, and the lighting were exactly the same. If a resident moved to a different area in the building, their door plate could go with them. It was a sign that all were equal on the campus.



The wall art in the healthcare wing (above) is the same as that in the main lobby (below), just on a smaller scale.

The POE team agreed that keeping the quality of the materials consistent was a highly effective strategy, but one consequence of a uniform aesthetic was a challenge with wayfinding. It was difficult to distinguish where in the larger building you were located. A bit more variation in key landmarks or distinctive artwork would be helpful for wayfinding.



The Assisted Living Veterans Wall is very similar to that in the main Independent Living commons area (see previous page)

There were several market factors that impacted the schedule of the project as well as the budget. The design team noted that there were a number of major value engineered items.

- Landscaping
- Exterior Architectural detail cut way back & simplified
- Wellness center size reduction
- Miscellaneous square footage reductions
- The original goal was to have as many units as possible facing Eagle Lake. Value Engineering took a few units out of each wing, to reduce the size of the building, especially for the first phase
- The lighting package was slashed by \$1M
- Went with a lesser weight of carpet. The team from Faulkner Design Group expressed concern about how the carpet has held up because of that



Plans for a large shade structure in this outdoor space were value engineered out of the initial construction, with plans to add back at a later date. While shade in this area would make the space more usable in the summer, residents whose views would be impacted strongly oppose the possible addition.

Some Challenging Trade Offs

Kitchen space. The main kitchen is located adjacent to the IL dining room and in the original layout provided an open kitchen that offered a made-to-order bistro-style fare. This “display cooking” feature has been turned into a production center for the other remote dining spaces in the building (see right) because of a lack of other food preparation spaces for assisted living, skilled care, and memory care.



Originally intended for display cooking for bistro-style fare, this space is now used as a production center due to space constraints in other living areas.

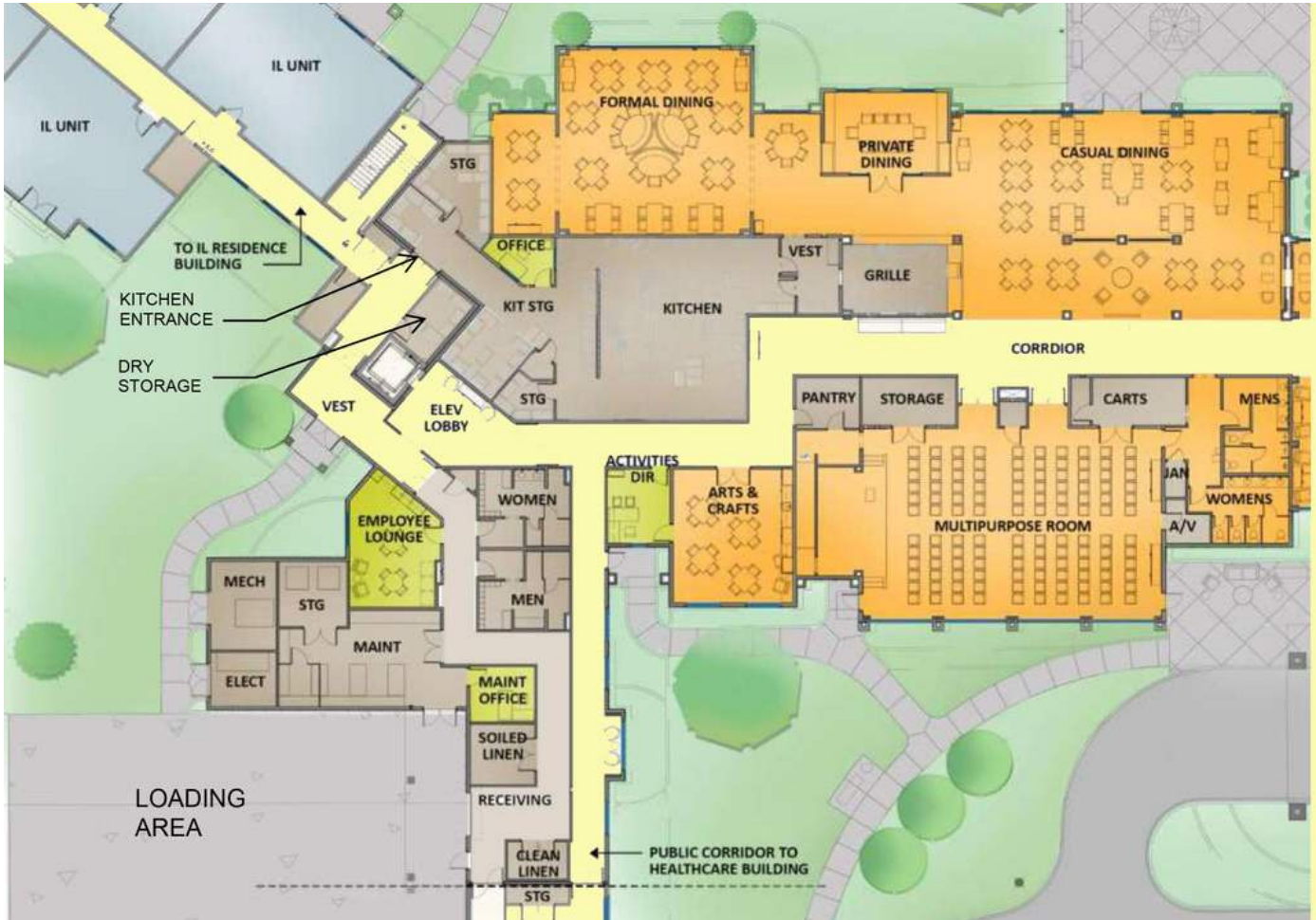


The back-of-house corridor bustles with food deliveries (and storage!)

Staff noted other challenges due to space constraints in the kitchen. They had to build a walk-in freezer outside in the loading dock area to be able to store enough food. The original plan was for food deliveries to come in a side door, cross the public route to the IL apartment wing, and go into the kitchen. However, there’s not enough space in the kitchen or storage areas to stage and break down the shipment before it gets put away. It also became a hazard for the residents traversing the public corridor. Now, the food deliveries go through the back of house corridor.

See detail, next page.

Other Design Details of Note (cont)



Back-of-house detail



Because there is no provision for cooking in Healthcare, food is prepped and cooked in this main kitchen and then has to be transported back across public zones, past the loading dock, and up/into pantries for Healthcare. This naturally creates challenges to maintaining quality control for meals.

Other kitchen challenges noted by staff included the need for a second beverage station in the main dining room, and more storage for food inventory, especially refrigeration and freezer storage.

The salad bar (left) was added later because of resident requests. It's really not integrated or designed in way to match the rest of the building's quality.

● ● ● ● Other Design Details of Note (cont)



The independent Living corridors (left) are very dark and the predominant use of recessed “can” lights create undesirable shadow patterns. The POE team really liked the unique gypsum soffit detail over each unit entry as it added interest and variety to the corridor ceiling, but the dark green color with the dark brown door really added to the feeling of darkness in the corridor. Our suggestion would be to add a small downlight in the center of the soffit to help brighten and add additional interest.



The furniture, accessories and artwork placement in the elevator lobbies, while visually appealing, could benefit from reconsideration. The placement of the two large lamps on the credenza completely blocks the artwork, which was meant to be used as a wayfinding device. The photos are spectacular images of the Berry College campus, but unfortunately, no one can see them. Perhaps a wider credenza would have allowed the lamps to sit at the outer edges of the picture frames, or even one, centered lamp would have been a better option.



The fourth floor elevator lobby, top right, is difficult to distinguish from the third floor elevator lobby, bottom right.

● ● ● ● Other Design Details of Note (cont)

Specifications and Details to Learn From



Scratches on wood flooring at bar area

The wood floors throughout the common space/main hallway are really getting scratched and showing wear. Our team questioned the use of real wood, even if it is “engineered” wood. This was especially noticeable at the bar seating on the lobby side of the bar. These chairs have no casters and metal legs. They are clearly scratching the wood when used.



Unfortunate carpet fraying

There were several areas where the custom carpet had frayed at the joint to other flooring finishes. There were some areas where at least 1/2” to 3/4” of concrete was showing through. This carpet was used throughout the IL apartment corridors, AL corridors, and the corridor leading from common spaces to Healthcare. This might have been an area where budget cuts impacted the weight of the face carpet. Value-engineering a material that takes so much wear and tear is always tricky.

Note: While Tarkett was the sponsor of the 2024 SAGE POE, they were not the flooring provider for this project.



Across from the dining room, there is an area where the walls are getting scuffed up. This was due to the chairs (orange twig chairs) rubbing against the walls, but also this is a prime parking spot for mobility devices (see image, left). Adding some wall protection in this area – perhaps a product that looks like wallpaper but is really very tough and durable – would reduce the wear and tear.

● ● ● ● Other Design Details of Note (cont)

Hits and Home Runs

One wall in the fitness equipment room has a montage of black and white images of Berry College sporting events (see below). Berry College also allowed them access to the entire photo archive to select images to use in the building. This was a wonderful way to tie the Spires back to the Berry College campus.



Photos provided by Berry College can be found in the Wellness Center (above left) and throughout the common areas (above right)



The design team did an outstanding job creating smooth transitions between different flooring materials. This provides easy mobility for all residents and supports the objective that residents from health care and assisted living are welcome and encouraged to take advantage of the social spaces throughout the building.

LEFT: While this is an excellent example of a smooth flooring transition, we would be remiss if we didn't mention that we feel there is too much contrast between materials in this image. Even in Independent Living, designing for people with low vision is very important and this could be misinterpreted as a step, causing falls.

The Spires at Berry College, a shining example of intergenerational living, has been a resounding success since its opening in 2020. Located on the beautiful and historic Berry College campus, this senior living community blends the wisdom of older generations with the energy and enthusiasm of students, creating an environment where both groups thrive together. The Spires is designed to foster meaningful connections between residents and students through work-study opportunities, educational events, and shared social activities. With its roots on a former limestone quarry site, the community has overcome significant challenges and is now an exemplary model of how intergenerational living can be done right.

At the heart of The Spires is Berry College is their longstanding commitment to work-study programs. Founded on the principle that students should earn their way through college, this tradition is alive and well at The Spires. About 30 students work within the community at any given time, taking on roles that range from healthcare positions to business administration and hospitality. These students are compensated for their work, with the college covering wages for key positions like HR, accounting, and concierge services—positions that are highly coveted by students.

The design of The Spires brings together both student and senior populations to create a dynamic, supportive environment. While the site itself posed significant challenges, these obstacles have been overcome, and the final result is a space that fosters connections between generations and offers residents and students the opportunity to live, learn, and grow together.



Lisa Warnock

Principal and Founder
Glow Interior Designs, LLC
SAGE Representative,
Intergenerational Task Force



Above and below: Residents interact with work-study students from Berry College. Photos courtesy the Spires at Berry College.



● ● ● ● Intergenerational Living Done Right (cont)

The Spires has quickly become a home for a diverse group of seniors, with 170 independent living (IL) units filled and only five remaining vacant at the time of the POE onsite evaluation. The community also includes 36 beds in assisted living (AL), 36 beds in memory care (MC), and 34 private skilled nursing units (SNF), all of which are operating near full capacity.

Many of the residents come from out of state, with 70% of them relocating from places as far away as California, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Florida, underscoring the broad appeal of the community. The appeal lies not only in the high-quality living spaces but in the robust connection to Berry College's academic, social, and cultural life.



Above and below: Spires residents can often be found on the Berry College campus. Photos courtesy the Spires.



One of the highlights of The Spires is the Spires Lecture Series, which offers residents the opportunity to engage in educational activities. The program is open to all seniors in Rome, not just residents of The Spires, and has been a tremendous success. The program has grown so popular that the Mt. Berry Room, where lectures and events are held, is often too small to accommodate the growing demand. To meet this demand, events are sometimes repeated to ensure everyone who wants to can participate.

Left: Participants learn how to make an ionic compound at a Spires Lecture Series event. Photo courtesy the Spires at Berry College.

● ● ● ● Intergenerational Living Done Right (cont)

The original design of the Spires anticipated a larger number of single residents, but it turns out that more couples than expected have moved in. This has created pressure on dining and kitchen spaces, as these were originally designed with a more single-resident population in mind. The team has recognized this need and is already discussing how to address the growing demand for these amenities.

Another lesson learned was the lack of smaller meeting spaces for educational and social activities. While the design team had anticipated that most of these programs would take place on the Berry College campus, the reality has been that residents want more opportunities for on-site learning and engagement. As a result, many educational programs are now held in the Mt. Berry Room, which has limited capacity.

The Spires is home to a dynamic and active resident population. The average age of residents is notably younger than in many traditional senior living communities, with the youngest resident being just 60 years old. See *resident age breakdown*, page 14.



Residents, students, and presenters mingle following a Spires Lecture Series event in the Mt. Berry Room. Photos courtesy The Spires at Berry College.

● ● ● ● Intergenerational Living Done Right (cont)



These residents are not only active but also deeply engaged in their communities. Cycling, in particular, has become a favorite pastime, and bike parking around campus is in high demand. During our walkthrough, we had the pleasure of observing a 98-year-old resident zooming around campus on his bike—a testament to the vitality of The Spires' residents. In fact, the community has experienced such a high level of cycling activity that the available bike parking is nearly full, and the addition of more bike racks is under consideration.



One of the most successful aspects of The Spires is the strong, organic connection between students and residents. From attending Berry College's sporting events together to baking treats for students or hosting after-game socials in their homes, residents have embraced the opportunity to build relationships with students. These interactions are a key part of what makes The Spires so special and illustrate how intergenerational living can benefit both groups.



The "Adopt an Elderberry" campaign, a recent initiative, further strengthens these connections by encouraging students to volunteer their time and talents to engage with the residents. While student participation in the early stages was slower than expected, interest has grown significantly over the past year. Today, 35-40 students work at The Spires regularly, contributing to a thriving, supportive environment for residents.

Spires residents shared cookies and encouragement with Berry College residents during finals week. Photos courtesy The Spires at Berry College.

Although Berry College is a dry campus, one concern during development was whether students would come to The Spires to socialize inappropriately. However, this has not been an issue. Students respect the community's culture, and there has been no disruption. Instead, students and residents have created a harmonious and enriching environment where they can learn and grow together.

● ● ● ● Intergenerational Living Done Right (cont)



One of the big factors in the connection between the Spires and Berry College is Leah Cobb, the Director of Auxiliary Initiatives and Partnerships at Berry College (left). Leah was a student at Berry during the design and construction of the Spires, working as part of the finance team of the college. She was part of the design meetings, so she really had the opportunity to understand the intent behind the project and all of the project goals.

After graduation, Berry College hired Leah to -among other things - act as the liaison between the Spires and the college, helping to really build and foster the strong resident-student connection that exists. Leah fields requests for activities and interaction, from both entities, and finds ways to make it happen. As she says, “we never say no. Instead, we say let’s find a way to make this happen.”

The POE team feels that she is a critical ingredient to the success of this inter-generational community. Other University-affiliated retirement communities should take note and see how they can create a similar position.

“
We never say ‘no.’
Instead, we say,
‘let’s find a way to
make this
happen.’

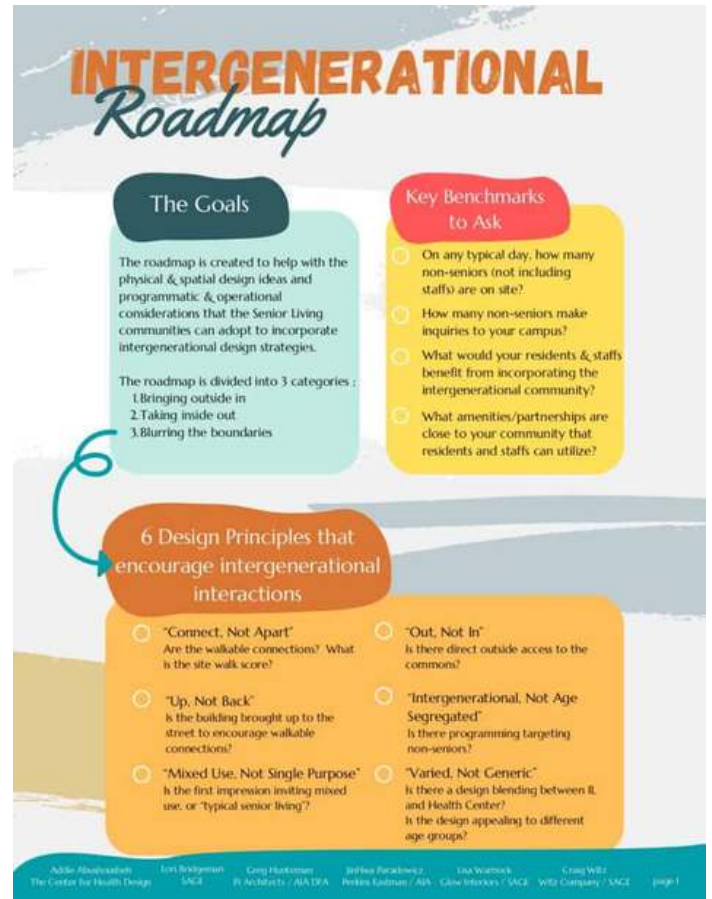
-Leah Cobb

The Spires is a clear success and stands as a model for how intergenerational living can create thriving, dynamic communities. The strong connections between students and residents remains its most significant achievement. The Spires has created a unique space where both generations can learn from each other, form lasting relationships, and lead enriched lives.

The success of this community demonstrates that intergenerational living is not only possible but a truly rewarding model for senior living. The Spires has created a model community where people of all ages can live, learn, and grow together. It’s a success story that exemplifies the power of intergenerational living and sets the stage for future innovation in senior living communities.

Intergenerational Living Done Right (cont)

Lisa Warnock is one of the founding members of, and represents SAGE on the Intergenerational Task Force, a collaboration between SAGE, the Center for Health Design, and AIA Design for Aging. This committee, assembled in 2023, seeks to normalize Intergenerational Living in a further effort to reduce ageism and isolation of older adults onto “senior islands.” Through a series of conference presentations and webinars, the committee has been sharing the results of their international survey aimed at identifying the consumer and industry interest in Intergenerational living. The overwhelmingly positive response to the questions and data that has been shared has prompted the committee to continue to develop additional content such as best practices, relevant case studies and their very own “Road Map” to successfully design an Intergenerational Community. Learn more at www.sagefederation.org/roadmap



The SAGE, AIA Design for Aging, and Center for Health Design Intergenerational Task Force relaxes after presenting their findings, best practices, and insights to a packed room at the 2024 Environments for Aging Conference.

From Left: Lisa Warnock, Gina Paradowski, Craig Witz, Addie Abushousheh, and Greg Huntman.

The realization of this campus addition to Berry College involved the engagement of many stakeholders over a decade of planning. To advance such a unique relationship between generations took vision, creative thinking, risk-taking, and lots of persistence in a market where the economy can have such a big impact on project viability.

The resulting Spires at Berry College is a beautiful example of mission and purpose expressed through intentional design and a merger of operational practices with organizational principles. The spaces that have been created set a backdrop for a range of users to feel comfortable in their living and working spaces. There is an authentic sense of community here that is a reflection of the design solution provided through a skilled team of professionals.

The observations of the POE Team on some of the design challenges are common to other projects where cost-saving measures are required to keep the project moving forward. It is never the intention of a design team to specify a less-than-optimal product or detail. Sometimes in the good-better-best options, good just isn't "good-enough." Material failures are always disappointing to experience and require future investments in replacements to maintain a safe and healthy building. Avoiding pre-mature replacements should be an industry-wide goal as we strive to keep from kicking the inevitable costs down the road and reduce unnecessary waste out of our landfills.



Photo courtesy The Spires at Berry College.

● ● ● ● In Summary (cont)



Photo courtesy The Spires at Berry College.

Space is also a cost factor and programming enough area to serve the cross-section of users who occupy our buildings and play important roles is also a consistent challenge. Space that generates revenue is always a priority, but space that supports the well-being of staff cannot be undervalued, especially in a labor market where more qualified staff are in limited supply.

These are some lessons we can all consider, and one of the benefits of the SAGE POE process is to share these outcomes and experiences. The Spires at Berry College is a success on so many levels. We are grateful to everyone at the Spires, on the Berry Campus, and the design team, who provided their feedback and insights. The blend between design and intergenerational programming that has been created is a model that many will desire to capture for their projects.

Congratulations on a beautiful project and recognition as an EFA Design Showcase Award of Merit Recipient.

Amy Carpenter and Migette Kaup
SAGE POE Team Leads



Migette and Amy (center and right) kick up their heels with SAGE co-founder Maggie Calkins (left) at a recent SAGE member reception. Great minds can have fun too!

Dear friends,

We recognize that aging well is about a sense of purpose and place, engagement, human connections, and belonging. Senior living communities are homes where every element incorporated into the design encourages mobility and embraces one's vitality and wellness. Evidencing the impact of interior finishes, such as the floor, is a means to foster health and safety.

Evidence-based Design (EBD) is integral to the design decision-making process. Owners, operators, architects, and designers not only have a financial responsibility to ensure that their capital investment achieves financial objectives, but that their design decisions make occupant lives better as well, which is why they embrace the principles of EBD.

A Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is critical to building a knowledge base to see how occupants interact with the built environment and how the design intent supports the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of the residents, caregivers, staff, and family members.

A University-based Retirement Community (URC) provides primary access to advanced educational opportunities to continue learning. The website for The Spires at Berry College states, "Senior Living like you've never seen before." Seeing this community first-hand, I can't think of a more fitting statement. They also share, "a time to grow and flourish, to enjoy and appreciate, that this time of life should be spent in an equally special place." This is the essence of The Spires at Berry College and for us at Tarkett, a global flooring manufacturer, lead with solutions that deliver our promise to be the supplier of choice. Though our flooring is not installed at The Spires, we recognized this partnership with SAGE as a unique opportunity to listen and learn, using the findings as an integral component of how we focus on who we become. Focusing on human-conscious design, we realize that flooring solutions can do more.

continued



Sandra Soraci
Director, Healthcare and
Senior Living Segment
Strategy





Sponsor Message (cont)

Supporting SAGE in this POE was meaningful, impactful, and purposeful. The site evaluation was thoughtfully approached and enabled us all to engage in a collaborative opportunity. The insights shared in this whitepaper will inform the knowledge base across many platforms. This is why we, at Tarkett, wanted to partner – as one of our core values is to listen and learn – to create solutions.

It was truly a pleasure to meet and work with the SAGE Team, Faulkner Design Group, The Spires, and Berry College to learn about this exceptional URC. A heartfelt thank you from the Tarkett family to the SAGE POE team for being a like-minded partner. Together, we will meet the ever-changing needs, and drive insight and innovation. With a deep human understanding, we will enhance people's lives.

I will close with, the Japanese concept of Ikigai which blends 'iki' meaning to live, and 'gai' meaning reasons to live. The purpose of life is a life of purpose." This encourages people to discover what truly matters to them and to live a life filled with purpose and joy. That, my friends, is aging well, what we want for ourselves and our loved ones, and why our passion drives us every day.

Best,

Sandra Soraci, EDAC, LEED AP, NCIDQ, IIDA, RCR

Director of Healthcare & Senior Living Segment Strategy

Tarkett North America

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[Learn more about Tarkett's commitment to Senior Living Flooring Solutions](#)

Founded in 1994, the Society for the Advancement of Gerontological Environments (SAGE) is a membership-based organization that represents excellence in all facets of the senior-living industry.

Our mission: "SAGE is a diverse network that is committed to inspiring and creating environments where older adults can thrive. To accomplish this, our members leverage collaborative opportunities to engage in research, education, advocacy and innovation." To achieve this, SAGE:

- Provides a nexus for collaboration among all disciplines involved in the development, operation, and regulation of settings for older adults;
- Offers educational forums that feature current research and best practices for the design of living environments;
- Evaluates senior living environments based on SAGE's design principles and shares results through conferences and publications; and,
- Promotes regulatory change and research that supports resident-directed care.

SAGE members enjoy networking and design-jury opportunities, free AIA-approved monthly webinars and TECHTalks, committee participation to advance the SAGE mission and initiatives, exclusive member discounts, and more. To learn more about the benefits of SAGE membership, visit www.sagefederation.org.



SAGE members love to collaborate with other great minds. This multidisciplinary group of "SAGERS" served on the 2025 Environments for Aging Design Showcase Jury.

We are so proud to publish the latest SAGE post-occupancy evaluation white paper summarizing the 2024 SAGE POE of The Spires at Berry College.

It is a priority for SAGE to lead meaningful research for the senior living industry. To facilitate innovation, we share the data that is relevant to our community of professionals to help inform design with new ideas, fresh approaches, and creativity.

SAGE strives to be the platform for evolving environmental improvement for aging adults, enabling our community to implement both small and grand strategic elements of research-informed design. We are honored **Tarkett**, our sponsor, shares that vision and recognizes the value of this important work.

On behalf of SAGE, and in accordance with our research initiatives, I am so pleased to present to you this publication.



Jill Schroeder
SAGE President



Sandra Soraci, Leah Cobb, Migette Kaup, and Amy Carpenter presented the findings of the 2024 POE at the Environments for Aging Conference + Expo in Atlanta, Georgia.



SAGE Webinar Recording:

Notes from the Field: A SAGE Post-Occupancy Evaluation of The Spires at Berry College

Presented September 18, 2024

Click below to learn more about the organizations involved in the 2024 SAGE POE.

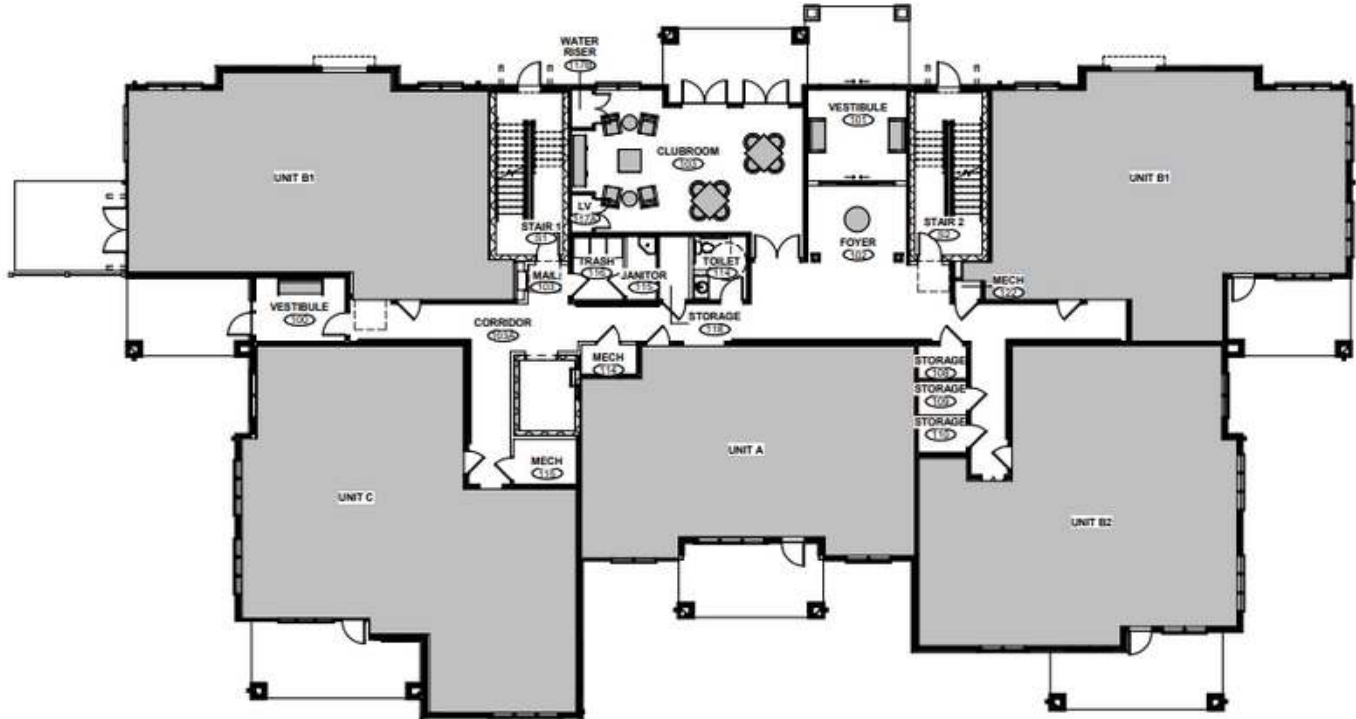


Media Partner



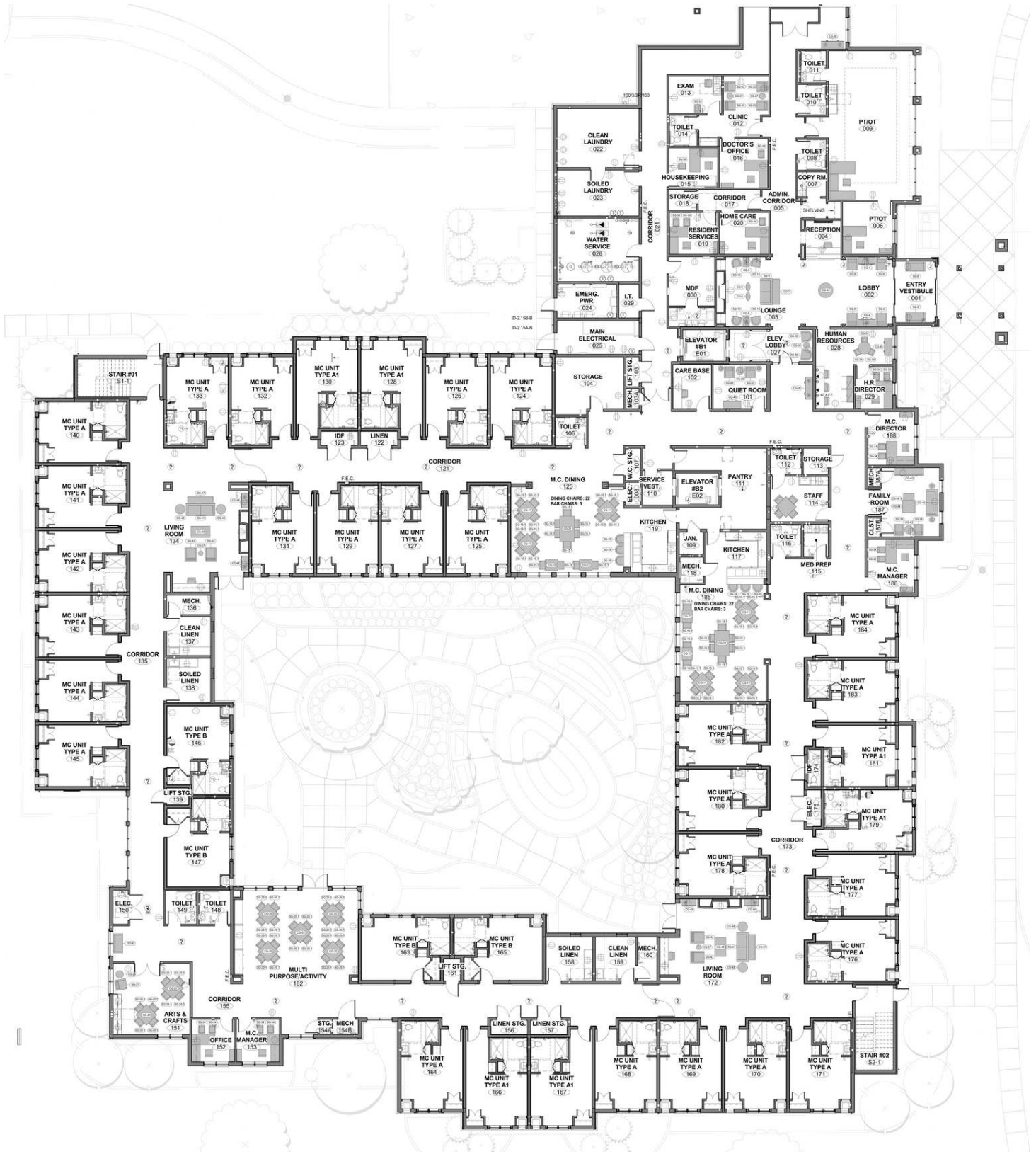
Commons Level 1

- IL COMMONS
- BACK OF HOUSE
- IL UNITS
- ADMIN/NURSING
- CIRCULATION



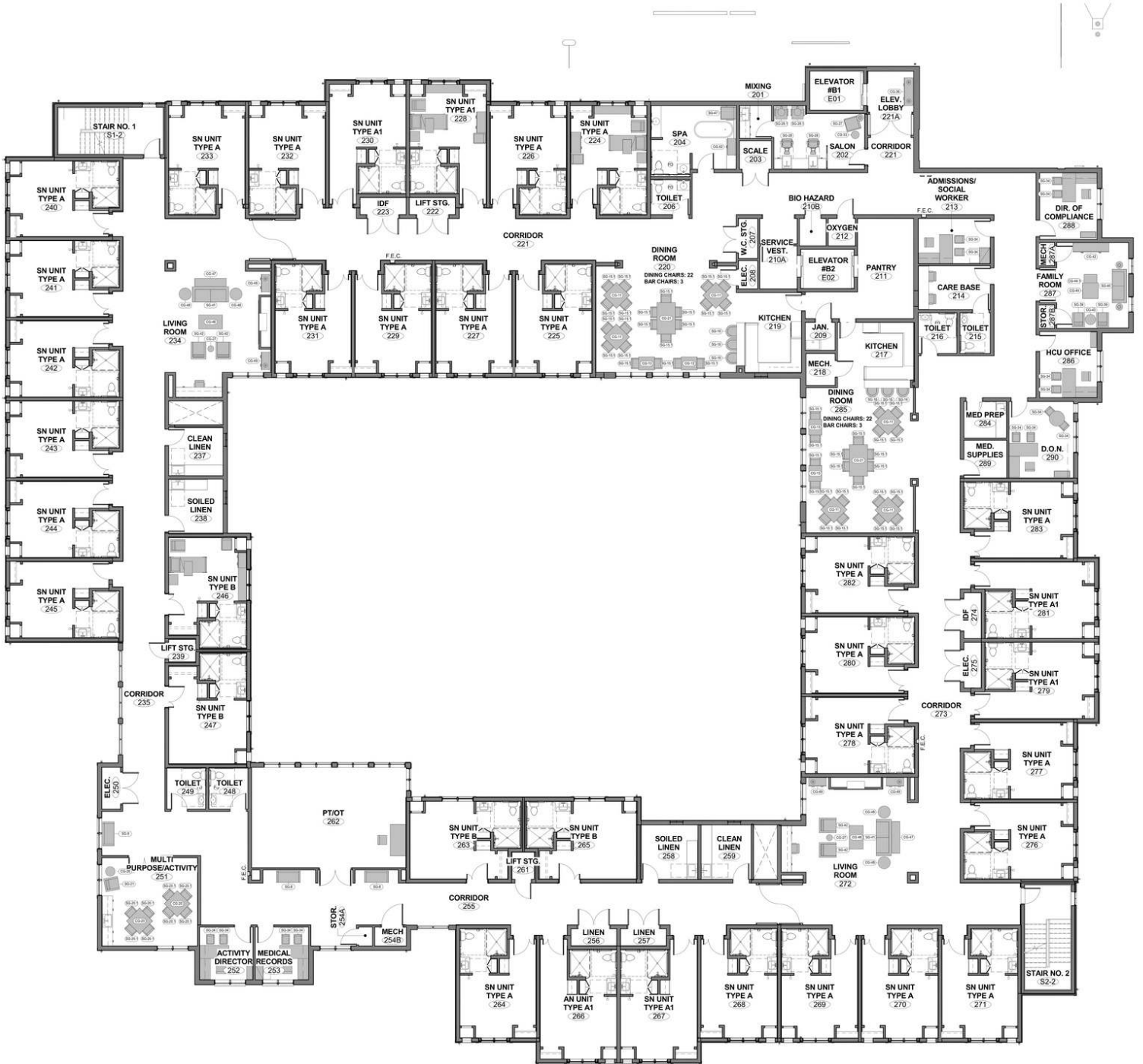
Lodge Furniture Plan, Level 1

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 Floorplans (cont)



Healthcare Level 1 (Memory Care)

● ● ● ● Floorplans (cont)



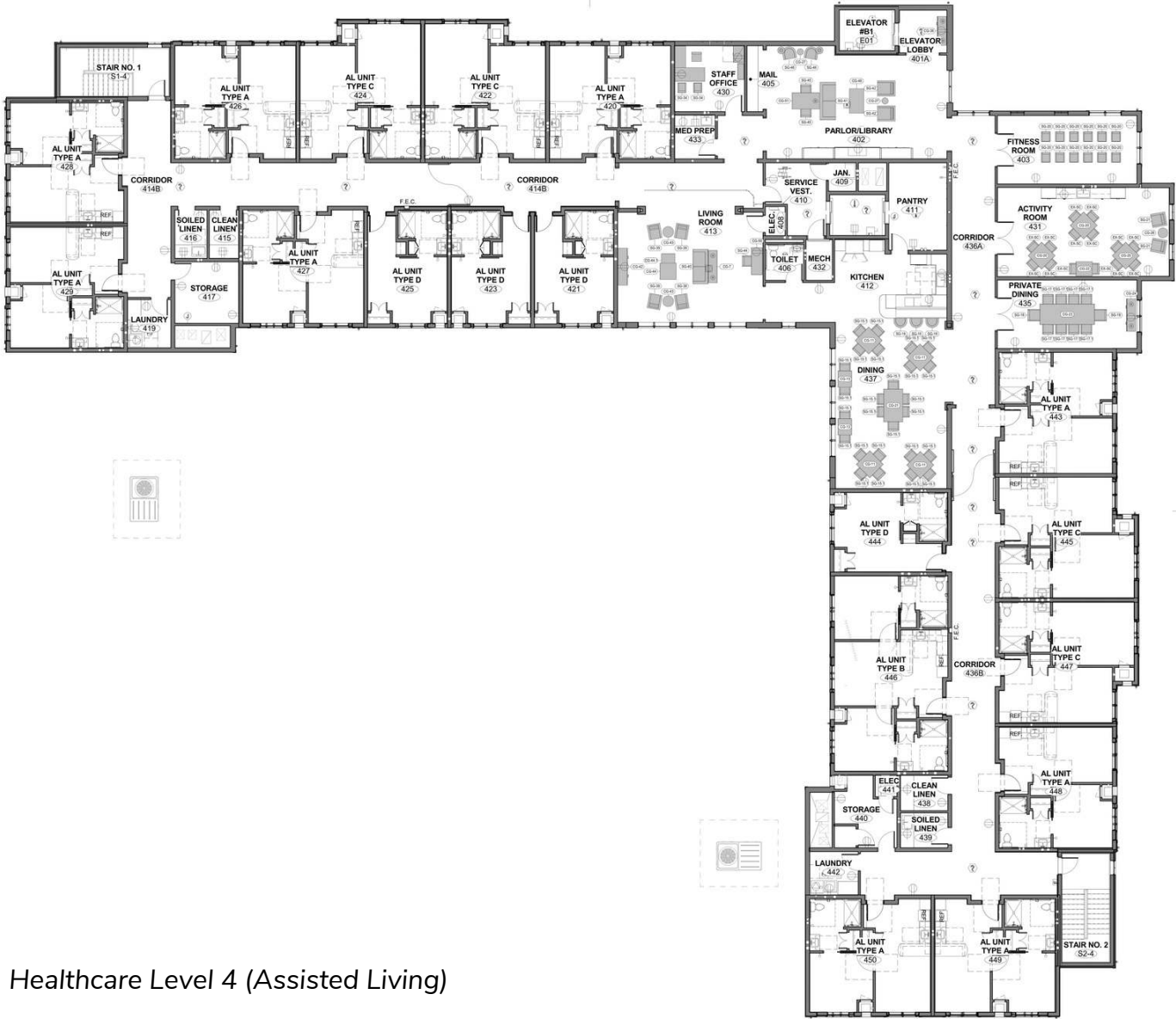
Healthcare Level 2 (Skilled Nursing)

● ● ● ● Floorplans (cont)



Healthcare Level 3 (Assisted Living)

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 Floorplans (cont)



Healthcare Level 4 (Assisted Living)