



The Academy Village in the Rincon Valley

by Dr. Henry Kaffler • published in the September 2009 issue

Even as a young faculty member I was disturbed by the way we treated elderly colleagues. Our national tendency to put people out to pasture when they retire causes unintended damage. Not only does this practice limit useful activities by elderly people and negatively affect their self-worth, but it also results in a loss of talent and institutional memory that society can ill afford. The avalanche of people over the age of 65, which will reach 70 million by 2035—almost double today's number—has made this problem even more urgent.

After I stepped aside as President of The University of Arizona I decided to stop talking about this issue and start doing something about it. Developing a living and learning community of mature professionals who want to remain engaged in their fields or in some other worthwhile endeavor and enabling them to continue contributing to society struck me as a creative alternative to traditional retirement.

The organization sponsoring this endeavor, The Arizona Senior Academy, is an educational and charitable tax-exempt corporation and an affiliate of The University of Arizona. In concert with Doucette Homes, a for-profit developer, The Arizona Senior Academy has created such a unique community—The Academy Village. Designed to bring together individuals with intellectual curiosity in a stimulating environment, The Academy fosters continued growth in the company of interesting neighbors.

The Academy Village is situated on 168 picturesque acres adjacent to the Rincon Mountains and the Saguaro National Park East and is planned for 204 single family homes and 60 town homes, with 121 residences completed to date. Doucette Homes (see <http://www.theacademyvillage.com>) provides five models for individual homes, ranging from 1680 to 2650 sq.ft., plus two car garages and optional casitas, and three models for town homes (930 to 1440 sq.ft.), with one car garages. Base prices vary from \$304,000 to 399,000 for individual homes and from \$179,000 to 254,000 for town homes, with options for customization and upgrades.

The central campus consists of The Academy Building and a Community Center. Together they house a wellness clinic with R.N. and private duty home health care; a lecture and concert hall; a commercial kitchen and bar service; dining rooms; a computer room, copy and fax services; conference and seminar rooms; activity rooms, including an art and crafts studio; an art gallery; two small libraries; administrative offices and substantial gathering spaces. All structures are equipped with state-of-the-art communication technology with electronic access to The University of Arizona Library, so residents remain connected to the outside world even if temporarily or permanently disabled.

The essential aspect of life at The Village is the belief that both bodies and minds must be exercised to stay healthy. Residents exercise their bodies by actively participating in a broad fitness program that includes aerobics, circuit training, water exercises, yoga, Pilates and massage therapy. A large heated swimming pool, hot tub, tennis court, a well-equipped exercise facility, and a large room dedicated to fitness classes invite these activities. Our attentive nursing staff, acting as care managers, supervises a highly regarded wellness program, including health education. We are closely associated with The University of Arizona's health establishment and provide transportation to medical appointments for those who require it.

Residents exercise their minds through a wide selection of educational and cultural opportunities (see <http://www.arizonasenioracademy.org>). Residents enjoy a year-round series of concerts, lectures, movies, and play readings, classes in art, music, foreign languages, theater, and other areas of resident interest together with discussion and study groups. There are strong ties to the University of Arizona. Many University faculty members give concerts and lectures as The Academy, while several of our members have adjunct appointments to continue their research and teaching at the University. To keep Village residents vitally involved in the larger community we encourage interactions with younger people through mentorships and by inviting the general public to participate in Academy programs. Individually and collectively, the members are engaged in numerous volunteer public service activities.

Before the first of our assisted living facilities—"The Villas at The Academy Village"—is completed in February 2010, home health care is available as needed. Funding for this facility and its initial operations has been provided entirely by donations from Village residents, a vote of confidence in the concept that guided the creation of this community. The Freshwater Group and Watermark Retirement Communities have provided valuable advice and have guided the design and construction of the first Villa; Indevco is responsible for the design and construction.

In developing assisted living we decided to build several 12-unit homes rather than a single larger facility to eliminate the institutional atmosphere that characterizes so many of such facilities. This arrangement also enables us to provide a high ratio of caregivers to residents and to provide a home-like atmosphere and a comforting sense of family that is difficult to achieve in larger facilities. In addition, all the enjoyable and stimulating activities provided by the Arizona Senior Academy will be available to Villa residents.

Among my greatest satisfactions in helping develop this venture has been the mutual support that residents give each other. Residents in the assisted living villas will continue to be valuable members of this extended family. These relationships will ensure their sense of belonging and security.

The present residents are an extraordinarily talented and vital group of people, coming from all walks of life—academe, the professions, business, and public service. Village life has evolved as I had anticipated, except that the mutual caring far exceeds my expectations. Throughout my career I have been blessed by being surrounded by highly original and enjoyable people, but life in The Academy Village has been a unique and inspiring experience. With the financial and personal support of many individuals and organizations to whom other residents and I will always be indebted, we have developed a successful model for creative retirement that is now being emulated by several other American universities.

Dr. Henry Koffler has had a productive career as a scientist, teacher, and leader at Purdue University (1947-1975), as Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Minnesota (1975-1979), as Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst (1979-1982), and President of The University of Arizona (1982-1991). Since 1993 he has been Founder, President, and President Emeritus of The Arizona Senior Academy and continues as President Emeritus of The University of Arizona and board member of several not-for-profit organizations to share his experience, largely on aging and environmental issues, behavioral health, and innovation/economic development. He can be reached at hkoffler@al.arizona.edu.

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