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Powell facility finds balance for those with dementia

Ganzhorn Suites first of several housing complexes for seniors to open off Sawmill Parkway



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THOMAS GALLICK/THISWEEK

Eleanor Alvarez (left), CEO and founder of the Ganzhorn Suites, stands with the company's marketing director, Deborah Taylor, on Friday, March 25, in the kitchen of the Powell memory-care facility's Liberty Household. The 64-unit complex opened earlier this month off Sawmill Parkway.

By THOMAS GALLICK

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The founder of the Ganzhorn Suites, a new memory-care facility in Powell, said her goal is "creating moments of joy every day" for residents with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Although the complex launched last week with just a few residents, Eleanor Alvarez said those moments already are happening.

The first two residents of the \$12.5 million facility -- northwest of Sawmill Parkway's intersection with North Hampton Drive -- moved in last week.

Alvarez said one of the residents spoke his wife's name for the first time in a year after moving into the facility.

"That is what brings the tears to your eyes," she said.

Alvarez said the Ganzhorn Suites was designed after company officials toured other memory-care facilities throughout the country and studied best practices in the field.

In the past, Alvarez said, memory care largely meant institutional-style housing in which security was the overriding concern.

She said she wanted to create a community in which residents' security and therapeutic needs are balanced.

The Ganzhorn Suites features four "households" featuring 16 units per household adjacent to a kitchen and other common areas. Alvarez said the complex's designers were asked to avoid long hallways and dead-ends, which can frustrate and confuse patients with dementia.

"This environment is easier to understand, it's easier to remember and it's just more comfortable and cozy," she said of the households.

Amenities at the complex include a barber shop and salon, outdoor walking paths and a spa.

The Ganzhorn Suites will employ about 70 people. Deborah Taylor, the company's marketing director, said the facility will be staffed by certified dementia practitioners, and the building will have nurses on-site 24 hours a day.

Security equipment installed above doorways -- along with bracelets worn by residents -- will allow staff members to monitor residents' locations at all times via handheld devices.

"It's discreet," Alvarez said. "You won't have alarms that are blaring all of the time."

Taylor said the facility is drawing interest from the families of potential residents throughout central Ohio. She said the interest is split about evenly between potential residents who live at home and those who already live in other memory-care facilities.

Alvarez said she selected the Powell location after a thorough look at several areas in central Ohio.

"We did a lot of demographic research and we looked at where the need would be the greatest and where the market would be strongest," she said.

Company officials expect the Ganzhorn Suites to be fully open in early April. Alvarez said she hopes the facility's 64 units will be full by the end of the year.

Rates for suites at the facility start just shy of \$8,000 per month.

The Ganzhorn Suites is the first of several new senior-living complexes expected to open in the next few years in Powell.

Denver-based Spectrum Retirement Communities is building 130 senior apartments across the street from Ganzhorn and plans to construct an assisted-living and memory-care complex between Sawmill Road and Liberty Crossing Drive.

Margello Development Co. and Schottenstein Real Estate Group plan to build a 308-unit rental complex for seniors near Sawmill Parkway's intersection with Seldom Seen Road.

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