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Aging in the Right Place: Doing your homework to find the perfect option for you



**Article by Michael Moore Jr.
Staff Writer, Herald-Tribune
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Mike Ward, President and CEO of Pines of Sarasota, encourages people to visit as many different facilities and retirement communities as possible in order to find the best possible fit. Doing your homework, he said, is one of the keys to aging safely.

Aging in place is more than a concept, it’s a movement. But is it a good fit for you and your family? Doing research and keeping an open mind may be the best way to find out, according to experts.

Aging in your home may not be right for you.

Each new AARP survey shows that most adults prefer to age in place. A quick look and it’s easy to see why it’s such an attractive option for those trying to figure out how they are going to spend their golden years. I mean, who doesn’t want to stay in their own home? But here’s a better question to ask yourself: Should you?

There’s no one-size-fits-all when it comes to how and where you should age. Everyone’s needs, lifestyle and support systems are different, and what works for one person may not for another. That’s why, going forward, this series won’t just focus on “aging in place” but will instead explore whether we’re “aging in the right place.” For some, this might mean staying in the home. For others it could mean independent living or a retirement community, a skilled nursing facility or rehabilitation care, a memory care unit or assisted living — or really anything in between. It should mean, according to experts, exploring and obtaining a solid understanding of all the options available because things change quickly.

“There are different types of care and living situations out there that are equipped to help people at different levels,” said Don Fitts, president of Cornerstone LifeCare and spokesperson for retirement residence Alderman Oaks. “Some people may find that they have different phases or stages of their life where their needs become different, and the standards of care may need to be much higher than where they’re at now, and that’s where you run into issues if the level of care they are receiving isn’t appropriate for where they’re at.”

That’s why having a backup plan and thoroughly digging into all of the resources available is important, according to Fitts and others. Want to age in place? Great. But what happens if your health severely declines in the next five years? Are you and your family set up and prepared to deal with that? These are uncomfortable questions that prompt difficult conversations, but they could mean the difference between aging comfortably or not.

“You don’t want to wait until the last minute when a crisis occurs to have that conversation,” said Mike Ward, president and CEO of Pines of Sarasota.

Avoiding difficult conversations or being closed off to choices can sometimes spell difficulty of its own kind.

“One thing that I like to stress is that the earlier you go and look at different communities to see what’s the best for you, the more you empower yourself with the ability to choose where you’re going to live as opposed to a crisis happening and now your family has to choose for you,” said Amanda Collier, the assisted living facility administrator for Pines of Sarasota.

Both she and Ward encourage people to visit as many different communities and facilities as possible. Doing your homework, Ward said, is one of the major keys to aging safely, as is being open minded. Coming up with a plan is great and should be prioritized, but having fallbacks and being adaptable can be just as important.

Aging in place might not be right for you. Then again, it might be the perfect fit. By doing your homework, keeping an open mind and having honest conversations with your loved ones, you’re giving yourself the best opportunity to find out which option is best for you.

Find more Aging in the Right Place stories online at heraldtribune.com/aging-in-place. If there are aspects of aging in the right place you would like us to explore, send ideas to mmoore@heraldtribune.com.

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