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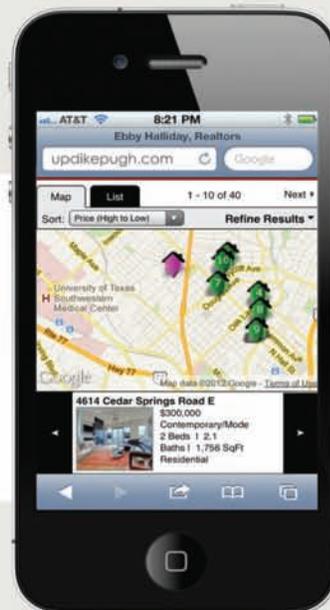
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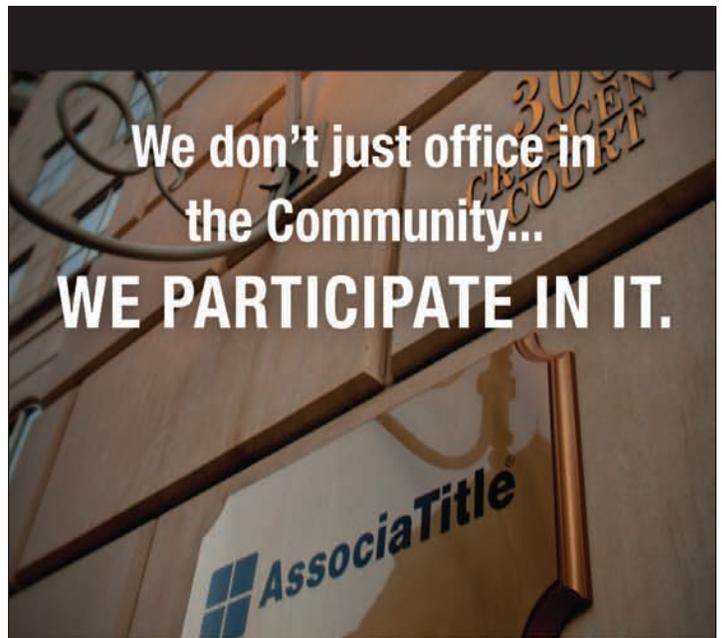
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Ask the experts

In the hierarchy of needs, food and shelter top the list. So it's no wonder that buying or selling a home can quickly move from a business transaction into an all-consuming personal life issue.

To help navigate the ever-changing world of real estate, we reached out to a few of Dallas' top realtors to learn all about the good, the bad and open inventory in today's market.

By Jef Tingley

Tony Nuncio
Dallas City Center Realtors

Inventory is the biggest thing affecting the market right now. The average supply of home inventories in Dallas are between 4.5 and 5 percent, and in some neighborhoods, inventory is lower. We haven't seen low inventories like this since 2006. Real estate analysts and experts consider low inventories to indicate a "seller's market." With a lower supply of inventory, buyers are scrambling to get to new listings on the first day they hit the market. Since early spring, I have personally been involved in at least 10 transactions where my clients have been in bidding wars with other potential buyers for the same home. These multiple offer situations give the sellers the upper hand in the transaction, as they are more likely to get the listed sales price, or higher, for their home and they are not having to pay closing cost concessions to the buyer.

Matt Watson
The Waller Group, LLC

There is a lot that is good in real estate right now: Prices are rebounding, mortgage interest rates are still at historic lows, FHA guidelines related to condominiums are being loosened up a bit. I think we've seen the worst for our

in-town neighborhoods. Builders are building again; things are looking up. Banks are also loosening up their requirements on homeowners that are underwater on their mortgages, they are more freely approving short-sale transactions and expediting their processes so the approvals are coming quicker, therefore potential buyers aren't having to hang in there for months and months waiting on a response. Of course, this isn't true for all the banks, but there are some banks out there that have recognized the benefits of shorter wait times and avoiding the foreclosure process, so that is a huge improvement.

Jenni Stolarski & Robb Puckett
Briggs Freeman Sotheby's International Realty

Here's our advice for buyers and sellers — buyers should take note! Coming out of the strong buyer's market of the last four years, prices are still relatively low. Add to that the low interest rates and it makes a perfect storm for buyers. We have four different buyers who are ready, willing and able, but can't find a property to fit their needs. So sellers who may have rented their home in the last four years or postponed putting it on the market because of economic factors have a real opportunity



Tony Nuncio



Matt Watson



Jenni Stolarski and Robb Puckett

now to sell their property. The big thing is using a professional to help price and market the home correctly to these buyers.

Jeff Duffey
Duffey Homes

If you have the cash and the resources to buy and renovate homes, then now is a great time due to the ridiculously low interest rates. But the inventory is misleading. Most of the homes currently on the market are in need of a lot of work. The problem is that their list price does not reflect the need for those improvements. Deals are harder to come by these days because many sellers are strapped for cash, or they are underwater on their mortgage. And like most buyers, investors don't have a sense of urgency to buy. They will wait for the right deal to come along. Or they'll simply wait until you reduce, reduce, reduce.



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Someone's in the kitchen

A kitchen redo can
make living — and
marketing — a breeze

By Arnold Wayne Jones

If there's one thing Mary Kathryn Reece has learned in eight years designing kitchens, it's that every family is unique.

Reece includes herself in that assessment. She and her partner, Jennifer Sherrill, were in corporate consulting when they adopted their first child and decided they needed jobs that required less travel and were more personally fulfilling.

"I like the kitchen — I'm a culinary enthusiast," says Reece. "She likes to lay tile and rewire homes and put up sheetrock. We thought, 'This may be a perfect thing: I get to talk about kitchens and she gets to remodel them.'"

The result has been two companies — Kitchen Design Concepts and Snappy Kitchens — that the two run.

So why concentrate just on kitchens? It's more involved than you think.

"A kitchen is the second thing after curb appeal" in terms of convincing a home purchase, Reece says. "Kitchens can make or break a real estate deal. The Wall Street Journal just wrote about that, and Forbes before that — stories about low 'attractive inventories,' where there are not enough [good] homes for buyers who are ready to buy."

A kitchen redo not only can make your life easier, it also adds significant value to a home, Reece says. If done thoughtfully — good use of color, good design principles — it should expect to pay off.

"If you spend \$25,000 on a kitchen, you should expect at least 70 percent of that back handily in the value of the house," she explains. "We had an evaluation recently that was in the high 80s/low 90s, which beats the national

average. We do a fair number of second projects for people who get a second home because they know the advantage."

And that's where the uniqueness figures in.

"Our philosophy is to focus on how people will use the kitchen — both from a culinary standpoint and an entertaining standpoint," Reece says. "Not everything will work in every situation. [We design differently] whether it's a family of one or nine. Me, I don't use a microwave, but we had a family who had two microwaves; [the woman] couldn't have cared less about the ovens."

There's even a tool on the Kitchen Design Concepts website called a lifestyle assessment that allows people to figure out what's right for their family, from how long are they going to be in the house, to what they use the kitchen for. Still, there are some trends that seem basic — at least in recent years.

"For at least 10 years, the idea of the kitchen being the heart of the home where families hang out has been on the rise," says Reece. "Almost every family with children, we ask, 'Where do your kids do their homework or sit with their friends and do projects?' And everyone will say at the breakfast nook at the island — within 15 feet of the kitchen sink. With the advent of technology, I also want to see my kids on the Internet."

That often means making the kitchen merely the center of a larger concept.

"Of our new clients this year, at least [20 percent] want to open up their kitchens to the great room," Reece says. That means the job isn't just





Kitchens designed by Kathryn Reece and her partner, Jennifer Sherrill, are customized to reflect the way their clients live.

about *kitchen* remodeling but *home* remodeling. “You cannot just drop in a good looking kitchen in a dated environment. In Plano, you have these built-ins and when you make a kitchen look fabulous you have to make sure it doesn’t make the rest of the room look un-updated. We might tweak it, like replacing a door to tie [the rooms] together.”

Kitchen designs, while situation specific, can even improve relationships — at least indirectly.

“We see many couples today where both people want to cook. Not every kitchen — in fact, very few — are laid out to make two cooks happy,” Reece says. Offset sinks, separate prep areas and two ovens can make a difference — turning a generic food space into “his and his, or hers and hers, kitchen,” she says. “We are also seeing more multigenerational families [in one home]. That can mean one meal eaten at three different times, so we recommend installing warming boards.”

Someone looking to buy a house (or sell one) should keep a checklist in mind when looking at (or redoing) a kitchen.

“We do think about surfaces. Linoleum flooring is not great for resale,” sighs Reece. “Wood is the most common flooring material we use. One entrance into a large kitchen can tie up foot traffic.” If possible, a second entrance is preferable for flow. And while it may seem obvious, “make sure you can open the refrigerator

doors *and* the [crisper] drawers inside. So often they touch next to the dining room door and it won’t pull out.”

For older homes with original appliances, make sure the oven works and that there are plenty of electrical outlets in the back-splash area.

“And we don’t recommend microwaves over the range — if you are past a certain age, or below a certain height or insufficiently strong, they can be dangerous.”

Even colors can make a difference in marketability; soft blue is popular right now, and gray has been hot for several years. Another trend is a simplified aesthetic: Flexible cabinet, mixer lifts, blind corners by the sink with inserts to make them more accessible. There are a *lot* of space considerations (for example, frameless cabinetry can knock off three-quarters of an inch per cabinet, which may not seem like a lot but can add up quickly). But there are also visual considerations.

“Glass-front cabinets can be nice, especially in a smaller kitchen or a dark kitchen,” Reece says. “You have to be fastidious though — people can see what’s inside.”

Of course, if you’ve come out of the closet, showing off your cabinet is a no-brainer.

For more information, visit KitchenDesignConcepts.com and SnappyKitchens.com.

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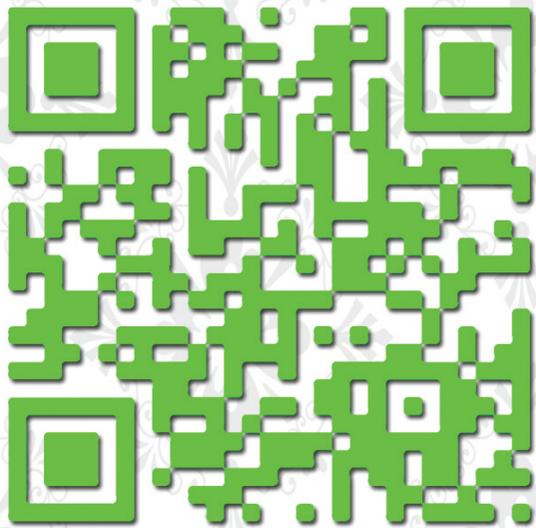
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The magic queendom

North Dallas' Disney Streets, perhaps unsurprisingly, attract many gay homeowners

By Jonanna Widner

For years, the Oak Lawn area has been known as The Gayborhood, an enclave not just where the LGBT community gathers to party, but also where many choose to live. The demographics in this part of town skew so heavily, just saying "Oak Lawn" or "Cedar Springs" is practically code for "gay."

As the community has grown — and, in some ways, grown up — many queer folks are making different choices about where in Dallas they choose to live. Parts of Oak Cliff have seen an upswing in gay homeownership, attracted by the beautiful homes with storybook profiles.

But when you're talking about fairy tales, well, that requires a few princesses. Like Snow White. And Cinderella.

Which is perhaps why the Disney Streets area of North Dallas has become a hot spot for gay homeowners.

"I tell my friends who don't live here that it's very *King of the Hill*," says Jason Kloss, who lives along Wonderland in the area just off Royal Lane, roughly between Midway and Marsh. "I'll mow my lawn and my straight neighbors will all come out with their beer and hang out."

Kloss is one of many gay denizens who have made the move toward a part of town once thought to be suburban, straight and sterile. But after looking at several neighborhoods, he settled on the Disney Streets based on several factors.

"I looked into Oak Cliff, and I liked it, but I found it kind of detached from the rest of the city with just the one major artery," he says. "After a couple of treks in traffic, I ruled it out real fast."

From his four-bedroom, four-bath home, Kloss notes, he can still drive



Jason Kloss is one of a growing number of queer homeowners attracted to streets with names like Wonderland, Snow White, Pinocchio and Cinderella — plus the roomy backyards and friendly straight neighbors. (Photography by Arnold Wayne Jones)

to the Gayborhood in about eight minutes. "It's a straight shot into town," he says. The easy commute allows him access to the traditionally rowdy part of town, minus the hubbub.

"It just seemed like it would be — how should I say it — *overwhelming* to live there," Kloss says.

Another draw of this neighborhood is the surfeit of unique mid-century homes that are typical of the area.

"Of course, in Dallas you had the [gay] guys come in and say, 'Oh my god, mid-century ranch!'" laughs Realtor Phillip Archer, who has sold several homes to gays and lesbians in North Dallas. "They're mainly brick ranch homes, which gives the area a very distinctive flair."

In the latter part of the 1980s and early '90s, Archer says, gays were buying homes here and completely renovating them. Now, most of the homes have already been redone, attracting even more buyers. Archer estimates that between 30 and 40 percent of the homes can claim LGBT owners — a number to which Kloss can anecdotally attest: He ticks down a list of his neighbors that bear out the evidence.

"There's a lesbian couple a street over ... there's a gay couple down the street," he notes (although he's also quick to point out the friendliness of his straight neighbors). "We joke that once I moved into the neighborhood, they're going to have to really take care of their yards."

Both Kloss and Archer point out that, while obviously the nightlife doesn't rival that of the Oak Lawn/Cedar Springs area, North Dallas offers plenty of shopping and dining options, particularly along Forest and Royal. Archer says the area suits people who prefer not to live as far away as Plano, but also not in the heart of the city, and it affords the demographic a community feel that once was relegated to very specific parts of Dallas. Kloss points out that a neighborhood LGBT group meets for dinner at the local El Fenix once a month, as well as regularly meeting up for cocktails at rotating establishments.

It's a different vibe, of course, than the Gayborhood — mel-lower, a bit older and more settled — but the Disney Streets and beyond have quietly grown into a place where the queer community can feel comfortable. Maybe they should call it *Queens of the Hill*.



An intersection of Disney characters marks this burgeoning gay-friendly neighborhood in North Dallas.

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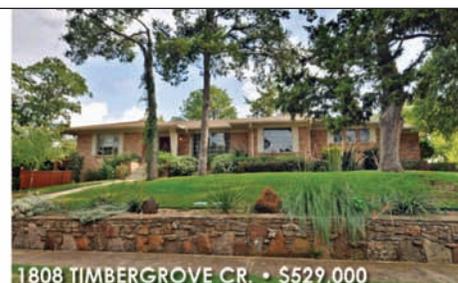
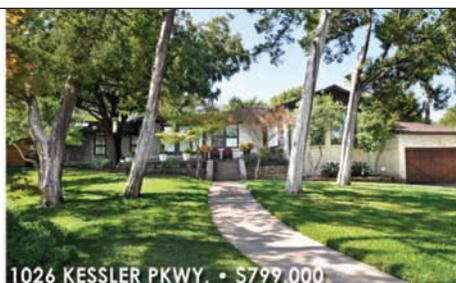
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A dog's life?

With construction under way for an opening next fall, ilume Park plans to take urban living to the dogs

By Howard Lewis Russell

Anyone dashing by the Cedar Springs Kroger lately has certainly noticed the forlorn, 4-acre lot of bulldozed ground next door with its sole, giant live oak left bravely standing. More green space giving way to over-development, right?

Not at all.

Phase II of the wildly successful ilume development across the street has begun in earnest, and it'll be a boon to all you pooch lovers: A 4-story urban paradise for pet people to be named, appropriately, ilume Park.

"The 'Park' is for dog park, where pets can be happily walked in a *totally* secure area," owner Luke Crosland proudly explains. "In the GLBT community, dogs are part of our families, and ilume Park will be a Ritz for your dogs. It's completely enclosed, and all dogs will be safe."

First-floor residents will even have a patio that leads straight onto the dog walk, Crosland says, which surrounds "75 percent of our 3.7 acres and its three elaborate courtyard areas."

One planned courtyard boasts a year-round pool; one will have a koi pond in a Zen-like setting and the other "will be a terrace area with grills," Crosland says. Gotta be *some* space for the humans, after all.

Indeed, Crosland considers ilume Park "an even more beautiful expansion of ilume. We're going to extend on the wonderful services of our Members Only brand platform—a 4,000-square-foot fitness center, an air-brush tanning facility, a massage therapy area. Our mission is to provide the ultimate in urban residential living primarily serving the GLBT community, its allies and equality-focused clientele."

Emphasizing a "We got it right" philosophy, ilume's staff "is committed to community involvement and making this proud community [of Cedar Springs] the benchmark for socially-conscious living," says Crosland.

Not just socially-conscious, either: Budget-conscious figures into the plan. When the two properties are taken together, there is, quite literally, no need to go anywhere beyond Cedar Springs. At least, if that's what you want.

"By living here, you actually save money," Crosland says. "Our utility costs are less than anyone in town. On-site pet grooming, tanning and fitness save you money because it's *all* free." Being a resident gets discounts at Dish and the newly opened hot spot Monica's Nueva Cocina and Mi Lounge. "Other participating Cedar Springs' merchants equally offer discounts to our members in order to keep the money on Cedar Springs," Crosland says.

"When you park your car after work on Friday, you shouldn't need it again until Monday," adds Joshua Welch, ilume's community director. "At ilume and ilume Park, our resident members' needs for *anything* are met within easy, very easy, walking distance: We're not here to change



The new ilume Park concept, which is currently under construction, will be a haven for four-legged residents of the Cedar Springs area and their owners. It is scheduled to open in November 2013.

the street; we're here to elevate and celebrate."

And there's the dog-friendly nature of the complex, too. ilume was on the cutting edge instituting dog poop DNA testing to encourage residents to clean up after their pups or else get a hefty fine; the four-legged residents will be further pampered in the new space.

"The Purr & Furr Lounge in our Phase I building will have expanded across the street at ilume Park into a luxury Pet Lounge with three veterinary wash facilities, two hydraulic lift tables, four dryers, pet-friendly furniture and even dog vending machines," says Crosland. (Moreover, near that sole, brave live oak now left standing shall be another giant, iconic feature that all dogs love, but which is to remain a top-secret surprise until ilume Park's grand opening.)

Indeed, both ilume properties have the look of a luxury resort hotel in an apartment environment. Their colors are a suave combination of lavender, violet, gray and shimmering black. ilume Park will have 240 units and more than 20 floor plans to choose from, many of which will be facing either the three resplendent, interior courtyards or the gorgeously landscaped and secure dog trails weaving ilume Park's perimeter.

Even though construction is still in the early stages, Crosland says the opening date for ilume Park will be November of next year, 2013, with pre-leasing to begin on July 1. Members of both ilume and ilume Park will be able, naturally, to enjoy the facilities of each, which, as Crosland points out, resemble more of a boutique, resort hotel than a mere apartment building.

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Retiring minds want to know

The conveniences of retirement living are possible even in the Gayborhood

By Jose Ralat Maldonado

As former club kids age well past maturity, eventually thoughts amble away from nights at Sue Ellen's or the Hidden Door, a chic meal at Monica's Nueva Cocina or rustic bistro fare at Parigi, and toward a carefree spell at home — perhaps even a quiet one with likeminded contemporaries who enjoy peace and quiet more than see-and-be-seen.

Some move to Florida. But that's so hetero.

A retirement community might sound the same, but increasingly, gay seniors are turning that way. And looking for queer-friendly accommodations.

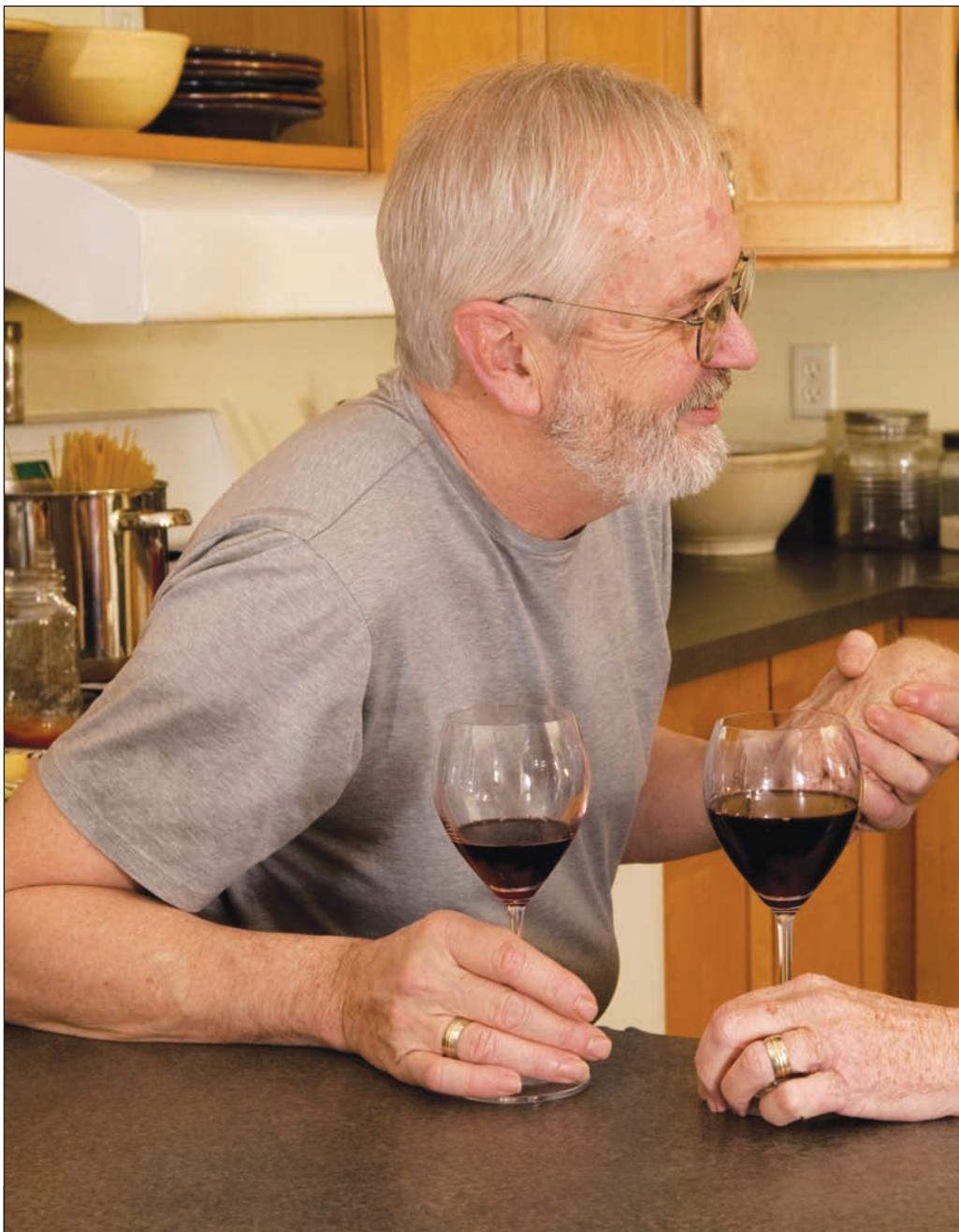
Nestled in the Gayborhood between Turtle Creek and the Park Cities, the gated retirement community ParkGate Dallas offers the kind of stylish setting LGBT seniors can appreciate.

"We value the energy and variety a mix of people from all walks of life bring to our neighborhood," says Chris Smith, ParkGate's marketing director and senior living counselor regarding its Oak Lawn location. "Our residents are single men and women, couples and [same-sex] partners."

Retirement communities target seniors by offering access to amenities that permit independence but also give the occasional assist, especially for those living alone, or who wish to limit driving or even noise. (Don't expect teenagers roaming the courtyard at 3 a.m. in a senior facility.)

So, for instance, ParkGate houses an on-site hair salon/barbershop. If you'd rather not cheat on your regular stylist but don't care to drive yourself, one of the staff drivers can zip you over in the refined comfort of a Lexus. The staff can, in fact, take residents almost anywhere they need to go — an autumn afternoon at the Nasher Sculpture Center, an evening excursion to the Winspear or grocery shopping at Whole Foods.

After a trip to the market, you can whip up an old favorite like rabbit paella with a versatile tempranillo in the facility's kitchen and have the staff take care of the sticky brown bits. Residents who would rather



Retirement communities can offer gay couples the conveniences of a hotel with the independence

leave the culinary calisthenics to the professionals can get chef David Jackson or his staff to prepare selections from weekly menus in a white tablecloth, restaurant-style setting.

"We're not formal," Smith insists, though recent selections on the menu have included blueberry pancakes and eggs Benedict, for that snazzy brunch feel.

ParkGate certainly offers individual residents freedom to go their own way. It also offers seniors group excursions to Dallas' chic shopping meccas, including NorthPark Center (and not just for mall walking). Community activities like Wii Bowling (don't knock it till you try it) and twice-weekly happy hour with complimentary wine keep everyone swinging. Try a hand at blackjack. But definitely, try the vino.

The 46 apartments — one of which, centenarian "super-ager" Lea, a former concert pianist for the San Francisco Ballet, has loaded with a six-foot grand piano—are available in 14 designs, from studios to two-bedroom, two-bath pads upwards of 1,000 square feet. Many of the



pendence of single family living.

apartments have panoramic views of downtown. Each unit is offered weekly housekeeping, trash pickup outside the door and laundry.

Gay guys especially still appreciate access to a gym, and can maintain a chiseled look with the help of weekly exercise classes in the on-site fitness center. Or you can sweat it out in the dry sauna or make a splash in the pool.

With living this good and with dear friends as neighbors, jetting away for a week on Fire Island seems like a downright chore.

OK, maybe you don't need to give up *all* your old habits just because you're getting older.

ParkGate Dallas, 2801 Wycliff Ave. Parkgatedallas.com

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