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El idioma de
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Ken Regan—meeting people with MS where they live

by Vicky Uhland

After Ken Regan, vice president of Ardsley, N.Y.-based Regan Development, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1993, he turned to the National MS Society for help. “I was so pleased with the support and information they gave me at a difficult time in my life that I wanted to give back,” he says. So Regan, whose company specializes in building affordable and special-needs housing, asked Society staff members what they needed. “They told me that every day,

A developer with a heart—and MS—builds accessible apartments to meet an untapped need.

they get calls from people who are not appropriately housed because of their MS—perhaps they live in a second-floor walkup, or their apartment is too expensive—issues like that,” he explains.

With Society staff, Regan helped form a task force of people with experience in accessible housing and MS

to discuss how the Society could do more to meet the residential needs of people with MS. As a result of those discussions, Regan wrote “Developing Housing for the MS Community,” a step-by-step handbook that local builders can use as a guide for financing and constructing accessible housing. In addition, Regan’s company built the first of what he hopes will be many apartment complexes designed specifically for people with MS.

A ‘commons’ cause

Kershaw Commons in Freehold Township, N.J., opened in 2011 and consists of 30 fully accessible rental apartments with helpful features such as automatic door openers, slide-out shelving in the kitchens and linen closets, accessible light and thermostat controls, and transfer showers.

On site, the Society offers MS-related educational lectures, as well as social programming and support services. In addition, residents are able to access nursing and therapy

Ken Regan visits with Samantha Hicks at Kershaw Commons.

PHOTOS BY MAUREEN KRENZ

professionals specially certified in caring for people with MS, thanks to an arrangement with the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey.

Regan also worked with local county agencies to provide rental-assistance vouchers that ensure that even if residents' employment status changes, they will never pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities.

Today, Kershaw Commons is so popular that more than 230 people are on a waiting list for apartments. "Some of our residents are in their 20s or 30s, and before they found us, they



Kershaw Commons in Freehold Township, N.J., was the first of several accessible housing developments that Ken Regan's company developed for people with MS.

thought they would have to live in a nursing home their whole lives," Regan says.

A labor of love

Regan hasn't stopped with Kershaw Commons. One

46-unit rental apartment building with six units dedicated exclusively for people with MS is set to open in Bayonne, N.J., this spring. A 28-unit building with 10 apartments for people with MS is under construction in Montvale, N.J., and similar projects are in the planning stages in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Regan's company also added several fully accessible units for people living with MS to apartment complexes it built in Fishkill and New Windsor, N.Y. In addition, the Society recently hired a housing development consultant to help chapters team up with other developers like Regan to create accessible living opportunities for their members.

"What it really comes down to is how do we assist people with MS so their overall quality of life improves?" Regan said. "It's exciting to have the opportunity to contribute to this. It's really a labor of love for me." ■

Vicky Uhland is a freelance writer and editor in Lafayette, Colo.

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