A perfect storm: In 40 days, kids help mom escape isolation in her older house, for independent living with a social life

In more than a decade of owning a single-family home in Castle Rock’s Medford Ranch, Karen Osmun never met more than a couple of neighbors—including some nice folks across the street who helped her shovel snow.

Single-family homes can be isolating for those living alone in any circumstances—but even more so since COVID-19 arrived, says agent Blair Bryant at The Steller Group Senior Solutions Division.

Bryant just finished helping Osmun out of that house, and into Wind Crest, a senior community in Highlands Ranch. “I’ve met more neighbors in a week than in 13 years,” Osmun says, settling into her new community, where she went to lunch with two new friends last Wednesday.

Her daughter Sherry Hess and son Dan Osmun, both of Highlands Ranch, had started thinking last year that it was time to get their mom, age 77, out of her older place. But the arrival of COVID-19 added new urgency. Following the advice of the experts in dealing with family in the high-risk age group, the kids and grandkids had cut back on their visits to Castle Rock.

“We thought we were doing the right thing, being protective,” Sherry recalls. But as mom’s isolation increased, the children worried that they saw signs of declining health—culminating in a 911 call in August after a fainting spell.

‘Isolation takes a toll’

Osmun showed no signs of a serious malady. “But isolation was taking a toll on her that we weren’t expecting,” daughter Sherry says. The kids took her on an exploratory tour of Wind Crest in Highlands Ranch; and Karen immediately liked the looks of its independent-living apartments.

However, Sherry and Dan knew that making that transition would be daunting. Their mom had raised her kids on a schoolteacher’s salary, and did a great job of setting aside a nest egg—something she credits to watching her own mother save money following the Depression. But nicer communities like Wind Crest charge an entrance deposit that starts in the low $200,000-plus range—one that would still be a hurdle for the former teacher; that is, until she had recovered equity from selling her house.

Wind Crest recommended bringing in The Steller Group’s Bryant, a preferred agent for Wind Crest. What happened next, says Sherry, amounted to a “perfect storm.” While the kids went all-hands-on-deck to clear the house of a lifetime of accumulations, Bryant brought in contractors to paint the place and replace the carpet, then to stage it for sale.

Two weekends ago as a snowstorm blanketed Denver, Osmun’s 25-year-old ranch sold in a single day for over-asking price—$400,000-plus. Meanwhile, Wind Crest made it possible for Karen to move in right away, before the house was put up for sale.

“That’s an ideal scenario that allows us to coordinate the improvements, staging, and marketing to maximize value while limiting our client’s exposure to COVID-19,” says Bryant.

Karen Osmun is now unpacking her collection of 300 thimbles for display in her new apartment. Total elapsed time from beginning to end of the crisis: 40 days.

“Your quality of life improves, your health improves,” says Bryant. You can attend his webinar Downsize 2021: Planning a Move in an Unpredictable World Tuesday, Nov. 17, 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. (register free at DenverSeniorSeminars.com).

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