



# These Are the 6 Trends You Need to Watch!

By Susan Saldibar

We hear from owners, operators and real estate developers all the time about what's on the horizon for senior living communities. But what about the folks who design and build those communities. What do they think?

Steve caught up with Tom Levi, AIA, President of the architecture firm, [LWDA Design](#) in Concord, Massachusetts (a Senior Housing Forum partner) at the recent Leading Age 2018 Conference in Philadelphia. As the Co-Principal in charge, along with Ruth Neeman, AIA, of all senior living and care, and healthcare for LWDA Design, Tom has been a driving force behind some innovative senior living approaches within communities.

Steve asked Tom to share, from his vantage point of over forty years' experience, some of the trends he's seeing take shape in senior housing. You'll want to watch the [full video](#), but here are a few key observations Tom made:

1. **Affinity-based communities.** People are getting more demanding. They expect more. No longer are people looking to simply be "cared for" or just for places to live or specific amenities, Tom tells Steve. Instead, he is seeing more and more people asking themselves, "Why am I going into this community?" Senior living will be increasingly clustered around interests, occupations, and varying lifestyle choices. As an example, we may see communities centered around art, music, nature, and stewardship of the planet, academic learning, civic/charitable advocacy, etc.
2. **Built for resiliency.** Built-in flexibility that will allow a building to react with agility to changing needs. "Don't design a building for only independent living as an example," Tom says. "Make sure it has the flexibility to be used for other living options, such as assisted living, co-living, market-rate housing, student housing or even a long-term care facility," he adds. Makes a lot of sense, especially as we see more life planning (CCRCs) communities emerging that foster aging in place.

3. **Inter-generational.** Tom sees more senior living communities adding more and more family amenities for all ages; example, small playgrounds and play stations to encourage children to visit and with seating areas for residents and parents to be passive or active with the children – a fun engagement area for everyone. “Will others be annoyed by it? They’ll probably love it,” says Tom. Many of the ideas (pools, restaurants, conference or meeting areas, play areas, etc.) have been around for a long time, but very few providers incorporate them into their communities in a way that fosters inter-generational engagement.
4. **Biophilic design.** This approach to architecture enables residents to live within a more natural setting, bringing in elements like natural light through larger windows and natural materials. “You live in a building that lives in a larger ecosystem, so you can easily move in and out of that environment,” says Tom. And residents can enjoy more of nature while remaining safely indoors. The larger aspects of biophilic approaches are sustainability, WELL building standards, and initiatives for healthy food, gardening, exercise, and fitness – combining them all together is the essence of Biophilic design, and the unique magic an architect can bring to a community.
5. **Technology-enabled.** Most of us have witnessed the progression of technology in senior living. And it will continue to improve and grow, especially within newer buildings. Tom talked about circadian lighting. “Using circadian LED lighting will not only help regulate circadian rhythm (sleeping, eating, behavior) but will help with energy costs as well,” he says.
6. **Sustainability Approaches.** Tom also talked about the importance of designing buildings that are sustainable. Operators need to look, not just at the initial costs to build, but look at downstream sustainability. They should be looking at a fifteen- to twenty-year cycle. “That also involves energy conservation, such as using more sunlight so that you don’t need as much artificial lighting,” says Tom. He is seeing a whole evolution and technology developing. And, it’s having a positive impact on things like HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems), exterior wall and roof design, kitchen design, and water recovery and reuse, just to name a few. Many of these improvements are contributing to an improved ROI over time. “Educated and interactive residents in senior living communities who have the ability to monitor and control their energy use, individually or collectively through ‘interactive dashboards or monitoring system’, can bring the cost of energy use down and take pride in the process,” Tom explains.

Owners and operators would be wise to partner with architects like LWDA, who are out there listening to the needs of future residents and are designing, not just for where we are today, but where we’re headed in the future.

I urge you to [watch the full video](#). This is just the first of a few conversations Steve had with Tom Levi. More to come!

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