

## COME TWO BY TWO - A LOOK INSIDE NOAH'S ARK

by Ginny Powell

Tucked into the all-American city of Lakeland, Fla., is not just a community, but the realization of a dream initiated by a small group of parents nearly 20 years ago. It's called The Village at Noah's Landing.

Nearly two decades ago, a small group of parents of adult children with special needs met while watching their children take part in sporting activities. They began to talk with each other about what would happen to their kids if they were no longer around. Who would oversee their care?

Their worries were further reinforced when they discovered that the options for care in and around Lakeland were extremely limited. But instead of becoming defeated, these five sets of parents took action—big action. In 1997, they created Noah's Ark of Central Florida.

The first homes were built between 2002 and 2007 and are located near downtown Lakeland. Called Noah's Nest, this clustering of four houses is home to 17 residents living independently with the support of their fellow residents, family and friends.

### A Dream of Building a Community

While Noah's Nest was a great start, the dream was always to build a bigger community for adults with developmental disabilities. The Villages of Noah's Landing, with Phase I scheduled to open later this summer, is precisely that.

Phase I can accommodate up to 132 developmentally disabled residents and only takes up a fraction of the property's 62 acres. When all phases are complete, the community will



The Village at Noah's Landing

offer a wide selection of social, recreational, educational and vocational choices, and provide for the health care needs of its residents.

"Due to this project's long-term vision, it was important that we consider the many product verticals that are available," says John Cohrs, Director of Specifications for Hager Co. "We created our specifications based on how Noah's Landing is projected to grow over time – from multi-family residential to their health care facilities in the future."

Noah's Landing will also have several common areas for social interaction. "There will be a clubhouse with a commercial-grade kitchen and dining facility so residents can come together in one place to eat and have fun," explains Jeff Rhodig, third vice president on the board of directors, a designer by trade and the community's volunteer activities director.

The community's master plan is a product of many families working together. Safety and lifestyle needs were all top considerations, and according to their website, the goal is

to create "an inclusive community where adults with special needs can be safe, enjoy a variety of activities and build lifelong friendships with others."

This pedestrian-oriented community will feature apartment-styled one to four-bedroom homes that are clustered together to promote socialization and community.

Each resident has their own "apartment" within an up-to-four-bedroom home. The floor plan includes common areas—a kitchen/dining area, living room and laundry facility—for all to share and enjoy, while each resident has his/her own master suite that includes a full bathroom and bedroom that allows the residents privacy, as well.

A heightened sense of comfort and security is important for persons with special needs and their families, which is why additional measures have been taken to include gated control entrance into the community during nighttime hours, security cameras and an on-site security guard.

### Life Safety and ADA a Top Concern

While creating an enjoyable and interactive community was important, above all else was the safety of the residents, which begins inside the homes. “Accidents happen,” says Rhodig, “which is why life safety was at the forefront of every design decision we made.”

The exterior doors are equipped with keyless entries. “One of the many things we learned from The Nest is that our residents sometimes forgot to lock the door,” notes Rhodig. “For Noah’s Landing, every resident will have a key fob for their homes. Now the door is always locked.”



Some of the other home safety items include fire sprinklers and placing fire extinguishers in every kitchen, in addition to safety fire ladders in every second-floor bedroom. Additionally, 13 apartments are geared toward the hearing impaired. When the doorbell rings, a light flashes inside.

ADA integrations were also included. Apartments on the first floor are made for wheelchair accessibility, and the interior doors of all units have Hager’s 3600 series handle, which is ADA compliant and much easier to use than a knob.

“Due to Hager’s broad product base and overall industry knowledge, we were able to provide solutions that not only complied with building code and ADA standards, but also the client’s budgetary considerations,” notes John Kay of KBO Sales, who represents Hager Companies in the Lakeland area.

Outside, while not regulated by ADA, the sidewalks are eight feet—double the width of a typical sidewalk. “We built them this way so our residents can ride their bikes, drive their golf carts and still pass walkers.”

### Plans for Future Growth

With Phase I nearly complete, the board has their sights set on the next phase of construction. Noah’s Landing is intended to be a life-long residential community. A future phase includes a supportive living home with 24-hour care so as residents grow older, and as their personal care needs change, they can remain in the community they call home. There are also plans for building more apartments to accommodate more residents.

“When writing specifications, we all recognize how important it is to keep the vision the owner has at the forefront,” says Cohrs. “You need to select products that are going to meet form, fit and function not just now, but at each phase of the project. I feel that the door and hardware industry, as a whole, does that quite well, and I am proud that our team could be part of such an amazing and worthwhile project.”

The Village of Noah’s Landing is a culmination of true dedication and determination to see a dream realized. To learn more about Noah’s Ark of Central Florida, visit [www.NoahsArkFlorida.org](http://www.NoahsArkFlorida.org).

---

**GINNY POWELL** is Digital Marketing Specialist for Hager Companies. She can be reached at [gipowell@hagerco.com](mailto:gipowell@hagerco.com).

