

Places found for all 73 residents of defunct Oxnard care home

Seniors' problem solved

By Kevin Clerici

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Seven weeks after 73 senior residents of an Oxnard assisted-living home were given devastating news that the facility was closing in 60 days, each has a new place to go and more than half will stay in Ventura County.

Every resident has been successfully placed — in similar facilities, in seniors apartments, or returning to live with family — according to the outside management firm, Integral Senior Living, brought in by a court-appointed receiver.

Securing local homes for a majority of the residents was a feat few thought possible. Harbor Pointe is one of the least expensive facilities in the area for assisted care, which can run upward of \$4,000 a month at high-end centers. Some 80 percent of Harbor Pointe's residents were paying less than \$1,000 a month, dramatically limiting the pool of local alternatives in that price range.

Fortunately, some local facilities showed a rare willingness to accept reduced rates at their facilities, said Sylvia Taylor Stein, director of the county's Long Term Care Services, a watchdog organization for roughly 8,500 seniors in 234 nursing homes and assisted-living facilities in Ventura County.

"These facilities opened up and found room, which is just awesome," she said. "Initially, we were really unsure if we could place more than a couple in local facilities."

Citing privacy rights, Stein and ISL officials would not release names of individuals or where they moved, but they did forward interview requests to some former residents on behalf of The Star.

Stein praised ISL for handling a difficult, emotionally charged situation. "We have not had any calls from anyone saying they were unhappy," she said of the former Harbor Pointe tenants.

As part of approving the closure of the aging facility, the state required the center's managers to assist the more independent residents in relocating to places where they were comfortable and to play a greater role with those mentally incapable of making such decisions.



PHOTO BY JUAN CARLO, JUAN CARLO / STAR STAFF

Guadalupe Rivera relaxes with his panda in his room at the Royal Gardens of Camarillo. He and girlfriend Laura Searcy — two of 73 people forced to vacate an Oxnard assisted-living center — have relocated to Royal Gardens.



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Guadalupe Rivera opens the door to get some fresh air inside his room at the Royal Gardens of Camarillo.



PHOTO BY JUAN CARLO, JUAN CARLO / STAR STAFF

Guadalupe Rivera relaxes in his new room at the Royal Gardens of Camarillo.

Thorough process

Seniors were able to visit prospective homes before making a final decision. And a Harbor Pointe staff worker or nurse has visited every former resident to ensure he or she is comfortable in new surroundings, said Ashley Pillado, Harbor Pointe's acting administrator, whose job, like those of all current employees, will end when the facility closes.

"At first, it was very time-consuming. It was chaotic, actually," she said of the search for replacement homes. "But the goal has always been to best match the needs of each person to the best facility. We wanted to make sure it was the right fit."

Harbor Pointe has been in receivership since February after the owners defaulted and the bank sought intervention. Years of neglect led to disrepairs and its license being revoked. The end came in November, when a judge authorized the receiver to shut down the building and give employees and residents 60-day notices.

The notices arrived the week of Thanksgiving.

Some residents cried. Others protested having to leave. And most fretted over the prospect of finding a replacement home on such short notice and within their limited price range.

From frightened to happy

"I was terrified. I thought I would end up on the streets," said Guadalupe Rivera, 87, a former mechanic and laborer at a fertilizer plant whose career shuffling between jobs left him with little retirement money beyond Social Security.

On Friday, smoking a cigarette in a chair under a shade tree outside his new apartment at the Royal Gardens of Camarillo, Rivera said he couldn't have imagined things working out better. His girlfriend, Laura Searcy, another former Harbor Pointe resident, was able to move in with him.

"If anything, it's too fancy," he said of his new surroundings. "I think we'll be very happy here."

Royal Gardens, a higher-end, full-care home on Carmen Drive, accommodated 10 former residents, working with them or their families on reduced rates.

"We would have liked to have taken in more," Administrator Marshall Staunton said. "It wasn't their fault that this happened."

One of the last to leave

Only a couple residents remained Friday at Harbor Pointe, including Jimmy McDaniel, who is scheduled to move this week into an apartment in Oxnard.

McDaniel, 68, a retired mechanical engineer, lost an arm and must get dialysis three times a week because of kidney disease. He said he was desperate to stay local so he could keep his same doctors and so stressed at possibly having to start over in Los Angeles that he started to drop weight.

He said the closure was bittersweet, because he will miss the relationships he forged with other residents. He is eager to move on, with the halls eerily silent now that most residents have moved out. His apartment will give him greater independence, he said, and his social worker is arranging for a cook to stop by and prepare meals.

"I'm happy," he said. "Everyone else turned me down."

