

The New York TimesPRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT
SPONSORED BYFrom Director
Danny Boyle

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

January 11, 2009

IN THE REGION | LONG ISLAND

Lowering the 'Golden Age'

By **[MARCELLE S. FISCHLER](#)**

East Meadow

RONALD KARBEN, a retired lawyer and consultant, was sold on the model two-bedroom two-bath condominium he saw at the Seasons at East Meadow, a "golden age" gated community under construction here. He was ready to make an offer on a \$359,000 unit.

"It's a gorgeous place," Mr. Karben said, wooed by a second-story loft that he could use as a computer room. "I fell in love with the layout."

He was also enticed by the complex's 17,000-square-foot clubhouse with in-house cinema, gym, library, game room, and indoor and outdoor pools. And he relished the sense of community that the setup promised to provide.

About a quarter of the new development's 416 condominiums are ready for occupancy, and Mr. Karben, who now lives in a one-bedroom rental in Howard Beach, [Queens](#), has no financial reason not to make the move. The problem is that at 57, he's too young. On [Long Island](#), those 55 and up are eligible for age-restricted housing; but Seasons at East Meadow is actually "golden age" housing — and the two are not the same.

Age-restricted housing is a designation set by developers, who are allowed to place age limits on the applicant pool as long as they nod to discrimination laws — having at least 80 percent of the units occupied by persons 55 or older, and allowing a small percentage available to those 48 and older. Any buyer who fits the age criteria can apply, whether he or she is a local resident or not.

Golden-age zoning districts, on the other hand, are designated by municipalities themselves, to keep local residents 62 and older from having to move out of town when they retire. The districts offer affordable housing, in denser concentrations — on the theory that residents won't have as many vehicles and won't have children to burden the school system. The

communities are open only to people whose incomes fall within certain limits. The Island has about 16 of them.

What with the shrinking economy and a shrinking applicant pool, however, the niceties of these distinctions are starting to grate on developers. Anxious about sales, they are seeking broader customer bases — and younger homeowners — than the zoning allows.

Six months ago, Steven Krieger, a principal with Engel Burman, the Garden City-based developer of the Seasons at East Meadow, approached Hempstead about lowering the eligibility age to 55. The condos, he said, had snagged the interest of 20 to 30 potential buyers between 55 and 62. East Meadow is a village within the town of Hempstead.

The town has so far put off a decision. But in December it turned down a similar age change request for Dutch Gate, a golden-age complex under construction in North Valley Stream (also in Hempstead).

Developers of both projects say that capitalizing on the thousands of Hempstead town residents 55 to 62 could help fill the complexes.

Dutch Gate's 388 units, starting at \$249,990, aren't on the market yet, but Douglas Partrick, a co-owner and principal of Dutch Gate, said he was concerned "about people's inability to sell homes to buy from us," as retirement money has been "cut in half; some have lost it."

Mr. Partrick said that in rejecting his request, officials had expressed concern about overflow parking, as well as the potential for school-age children. But he maintained that "even at 62, we are not precluded from having school-age children."

"The difference between 55 and 62," he added, "is seven more years of people who could be interested to buy." Also, those renting in 55-plus communities may want to buy at Dutch Gate, "after doing the math."

According to Mike Deery, a Hempstead spokesman, the town has more than 1,500 units of golden-age housing.

Density in golden-age zones can go as high as 30 units per acre, said Joe Ra, the Hempstead town attorney, compared with a density limit of 20 units per acre in any other apartment setting on the Island. Similarly, parking in golden-age zones is four spots for every three units, whereas elsewhere the rule is seven spots for every three units.

Jack Libert, commissioner of planning and development for the town of Oyster Bay, wears a

second hat as a lawyer for Dutch Gate. He said that while people were “just clamoring” for old-age housing 10 to 15 years ago, “the big need now is in the empty-nester category.” Lowering the age to 55 increases the chances of selling, “while retaining the character of an adult community, not a community of newly married young people who will have a bunch of kids and will be taxing the schools.”

Fern Karhu, executive director of the North Shore region of Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate, based in Syosset, expressed agreement with Mr. Libert. She said that because of the age-62 requirement, in recent years “many seniors who are between the ages of 55 and 62 were not able to down scale because of a lack of available housing for that age group.”

“There are many divorced and widowed people in the 55-to-62 age group that can no longer take care of the maintenance involved in single-family homeownership,” she said, “and they would prefer to be in a community where there are opportunities for socialization.”

[Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
