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Yes, we're of age

Jennifer Febraro, National Post · Saturday, Feb. 12, 2011

For empty-nesters, downsizing to a condo is often the next logical step. But developers exploring the in-between zone of luxury living and the nursing home are creating a niche market to accommodate the needs and desires of the zoomer population. Moses Znaimer, the Toronto innovator, rabble-rouser and founder/ CEO of Zoomer Media, explains the term zoomers as "boomers with zip" -- the active 45-plus segment of the population that doesn't want to slow down so much as change direction on retirement.

As Mr. Znaimer notes in a January edition of Canada AM: "It's true that half of our zoomer cohort are working more because they need to work more, but what the other half have figured out is that the best way to keep going is to keep going, to stay engaged."

Mr. Znaimer has become one of Canada's most vocal proponents of striking down mandatory retirement. As president of CARP, a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote a "new vision of aging for Canada," Mr. Znaimer has spearheaded the campaign for better housing for zoomers.

His message? The zoomer purchasing power should not be underestimated. This April, Mr. Znaimer's Zoomer magazine will explore, in-depth, the relationship between this underserved segment of the population and real estate -- a category of property innovation that is about to explode in the marketplace: "It's hard to imagine a better opportunity for developers to communicate directly with this massive, affluent and real-estate savvy demographic that many of them have yet to fully appreciate but will inevitably discover and covet," Mr. Znaimer says.

Many Ontario developers have already anticipated the trend. Sophie's Landing, created by Signature Carleton, is one of the first such "lifestyle communities." Located in Orillia, 70 minutes north of Toronto, Sophie's Landing is a gated community that is both residence and resort.

A series of 84 Muskoka or French Country-styled custom bungalows with high ceilings, full basements and attached garages are dotted along the 2,000 feet of private Lake Simcoe waterfront. Prices begin in the low \$300,000s for a 1,000-square-foot bungalow.

Says Kathleen Timko, Sophie's Landing's director of sales and marketing: "Adult lifestyle living isn't necessarily about retirement. These are often people in their late 50s or early 60s who want to downsize and to be in a community with like-minded people."

The advantages of lifestyle stomping grounds like this allow a new type of freedom as well. Residents are able to remain homeowners with detached houses, lawns and garages, yet pay into a monthly fee for staff to shovel snow and perform other maintenance tasks. At Sophie's Landing, maintenance fees are \$125 per month.

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