

Eskaton launches social networking site for residents

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The early adopters - all 75 or so of them - are already wired into Eskaton Village Carmichael's new eLiving resident portal, a self-contained social networking site.

"We've been impressed with the excitement over this," said Eskaton's research vice president, Sheri Peifer.

Through eLiving, the name Eskaton uses for its new online platform, residents at three of the senior living provider's Northern California properties can connect for free with their families and one another, post profiles and photos, keep track of their medications and access not only their residence facility's activities calendar but also movies and audiobooks.

But in a larger sense, eLiving is evidence of a growing trend: Seniors communities across the country are realizing that computer-savvy residents expect personalized online connections specific to them and their own community.

It's all about them.

The stereotype of older adults as computer illiterate, standing on the sidelines of the digital revolution, has been smashed by the growing sophistication of many seniors, who in increasing numbers embrace social media as a way to stay instantly in touch with loved ones.

More than 11 percent of Americans 62 and older were on Facebook in 2010, according to Online Marketing Trends, up from only 2.3 percent a year earlier. Almost three-quarters of participating seniors reported using it to connect with relatives and friends, as well as to share photos. Another 20 percent said they like to go on Facebook to play games and poke people.

"With our resident portal, residents can upload their profiles and use it as a mini-Facebook," said Peifer.

Several of the Sacramento region's Sunrise Senior Living facilities also have a version of a personalized digital platform, allowing online access to calendars of events and classes. Other seniors communities, from Florida to Michigan to Arizona, have adopted in-house social networking as well.

Experts on aging say that staying connected with others is a key means of overcoming isolation and depression, which left unchecked can lead to a downward spiral for the elderly, and they say they hope that increased use of social media will foster seniors' greater connection with their communities.

"Our independent living residents tell us that there's so much going on here," said Peifer. "When they're first here, it's like going back to [college](#) for them. How do they make personal connections and figure out what to do? This is one way.

"And families are requesting more private portals to connect to their family members."

The eLiving feature will eventually be offered to 2,700 residents at regional Eskaton facilities, she said, but access has been limited so far to the Carmichael campus, Eskaton Village Placerville and the Parkview, an assisted living and memory care facility in Pleasanton.

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