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LaSalle developments target dementia sufferers

An Irving-based developer and operator of assisted-living homes for adults with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia plans to build facilities in Fort Worth and Denton.

Site work is under way and groundbreaking is scheduled for mid-November for the \$8.2 million, 26,000-square-foot Autumn Leaves home near Harris Methodist Fort Worth Hospital. The center at 7100 Dutch Branch Road will have 36 to 38 units and about 45 beds, and will open in June, said Mitch Warren, president of The LaSalle Group Inc., the project developer.

A similar-size, \$7.6 million Autumn Leaves community is planned on 4 acres LaSalle has under contract northeast of Brinker Road and Colorado Boulevard near Denton Regional Medical Center, Warren said. LaSalle plans to start building the Denton facility in March and open it in November 2009.

The two communities will bring LaSalle's number of Autumn Leaves-branded homes in North Texas to 10, with communities in Arlington, Carrollton, Flower Mound, Fossil Creek, Garland, Grapevine, McKinney and Richardson. The family-owned company also built and operates two Autumn Leaves homes in the Chicago area, with a third under construction there.

LaSalle is considering two in the Houston area and two more in the Chicago area as well, Warren said.

The demand for memory-care facilities such as Autumn Leaves is strong in the Metroplex because the area has a growing elderly population, some of whom are drawn by the warm weather, and relatively few developers build stand-alone facilities for residents with dementia, Warren said.

"We're seeing more people demanding better care," he said. "More people are requiring our services, and not many people have come and built here yet."

The Autumn Leaves facilities in North Texas charge about \$4,800 a month for private rooms and \$4,200 monthly for semi-private, he said. The cost does not vary with residents' changing level of care.

Nationwide, construction of assisted-living facilities has declined more than 80% since 1999 after heavy building in the mid-1990s, the American Senior Housing Association reports. Because of the slowdown, occupancy rates at assisted-living facilities have risen to the 88% to 94% range, according to the senior housing report.

The Dallas-Fort Worth area is one of the most active



AUTUMN'S ON THE WAY: The LaSalle Group plans to develop Autumn Leaves assisted-living homes in Denton and Fort Worth.

senior housing construction markets nationwide, with a

14.4% increase in assisted-living supply in the past five years, ASHA President David Schless said. More than 300 assisted-living units are under construction in the Metroplex now, including 145 memory-care units, Schless said.

Schless said he expects construction of all senior housing to slow to a trickle because developers are having difficulty getting financing due to the credit crunch. Warren said the financing for his two projects is in place.

LaSalle's Autumn Leaves brand of assisted-living residences are designed to be safe and secure while providing residents access to all living areas and outside courtyards, Warren said. The centers have gardening areas, greenhouses, game rooms and living rooms.

Each center employs about 45, including a full-time registered nurse. The centers are staffed with workers specially trained to care for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Residents receive help with bathing, dressing, laundry, housekeeping, hygiene, mobility and eating. On-site "enrichment coordinators" at each community plan activities to keep residents active.

About 5 million Americans have Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

In Texas, 340,000 people are expected to have Alzheimer's by 2010, a 26% increase from the 270,000 with the disease in 2000, according to the Texas Department of State Health Statistics.