

## Optimism abounds at seniors' residences



**Matt Del Vecchio**  
Seniors and Aging

As the third wave gains strength and increased cases of new variants continue, there remains a sense of calm in senior living communities. I was recently providing a tour at a retirement home to a lovely woman who was looking to transition herself and her husband from their condo. The atmosphere was electric as we were walking around the common areas. Residents and employees had smiles on their faces and there was a buzz in the air.

It was something I had not seen for more than a year. Many were excited about the reopening of their main dining room. The government had just announced the reopening of dining rooms in seniors' residences where 75 per cent of the residents or more received their first dose of vaccine at least three weeks ago.

This was just one small step forward to some form of normalcy. Behind it all is the fact that vaccinations were prioritized for those living in seniors' residences. The majority of the 40,000+ living in long term care homes (CHSLD's) were vaccinated in December and January. This was followed with vaccinations to those living in retirement homes. These are referred to as Résidences Privées pour Aînés (RPA's). There are approxi-

mately 1,800 RPA's in Quebec with more than 130,000 residents. The vaccination campaign continues in these senior living communities with the vast majority having received their first dose.

The vaccinations along with improved infection prevention and control measures have resulted in a drastic reduction of new cases of COVID-19 in seniors' residences. Daily new cases in seniors' residences are in the single digits across the entire province, a marked improvement from even just a few months ago and far better than schools, workplaces, and individual homes where community spread continues. Some are even arguing that it's safer to be in a senior's residence these days than being at home. Add the mental health effects of loneliness and isolation, and you can see why residents in retirement homes are almost giddy with enthusiasm and optimism.

We are not out of the woods yet. We still need to be vigilant and responsible with our individual actions. However, the future is looking bright. Activities are slowly being opened up and people are starting to get reacquainted with friends and neighbours.

There is also a significant increase in inquiries from people looking to move into retirement homes, particularly where increased care is required. Many families chose to stay at home when the pandemic started. The original thinking was that family could help out for a few



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES / RIDOFRANZ

The vaccinations along with improved infection prevention and control measures have resulted in a drastic reduction of new cases of COVID-19 in seniors' residences.

weeks to ride out the pandemic. Well, a few weeks have turned into more than a year and some people, especially caregivers, are exhausted and overwhelmed. Residences offering assisted living are extremely popular these days as they provide the benefits of care services while still being able to live an autonomous life in a non-institutional setting.

There is probably no better time to consider a senior living community. It is an extremely competitive industry. As a result, some retirement homes are offering incredible promotions, service

offerings are being enhanced and health and infection control measures make it a safe environment. Sure it will still take time to gain the confidence of the public but there is no harm in exploring your options.

*Matt Del Vecchio is a Certified Professional Consultant on Aging and founder of Lianas Senior Transition Support helping families with their life transitions. He is also the co-host of "Life Un-rehearsed" on CJAD800. For more, visit [mdevecchio@lianasservices.com](mailto:mdevecchio@lianasservices.com)*

## The art, as well as the friendships, keeps members coming back

### YMCA NDG Rendez-Vous watercolour program continuing virtually

By Jennifer Cox  
The Suburban

Eight years ago, the YMCA NDG launched a watercolour group as part of their Rendez-Vous Program for Seniors, which provides accessible programming to seniors for just \$20 a year, gaining them access to all kinds of cultural, educational, and artistic activities being hosted by the Y.

The initial watercolour sessions were given with professional instruction, and when the teacher was no longer able to spearhead the group a few years ago, the members continued to meet to paint on their own. Even with last March's lockdown, they found a way to continue to get together once a week and then, further into the pandemic, twice a week when a member volunteered to help organize a second session.

"This group has done several years of painting instruction and developed very close relationships and friendships through these watercolour sessions," said Galia Benatuil, who is the coordinator of teens and seniors programs at the YMCA NDG. "They didn't just learn how to paint but how to present their paintings to each other because the teacher explained how to discuss art in a constructive way. They get to paint together and interpret the same subject together, and they do a lit-

tle vernissage at the end of each session to discuss their artwork and give each other feedback."

Linda Shear of Hampstead has been a member of the watercolour painting group since it started almost a decade ago. There are 16 members in all. It was actually her very first attempt at painting in watercolours.

"I was newly retired and looking for different things to do to fill up my time," she said. "Watercolours is the kind of thing where you get results right away, and I found it was very encouraging."

When the pandemic hit, the watercolour classes were immediately moved to a virtual platform, and while the members had access to the internet at home, many of them were new to video-call platforms like Zoom. "At the beginning of COVID, they didn't feel totally comfortable with it, so I did some coaching and met with a few people one-on-one to teach them how to navigate the Zoom platform," Benatuil explained.

Now they meet twice a week, taking turns deciding on the type of painting they'll each replicate, and they then discuss each other's work afterward. Despite the fact that they can't physically be in the same space, Shear said she almost prefers doing the sessions online.

"I really enjoy it because we have time to talk before and after," she explained.

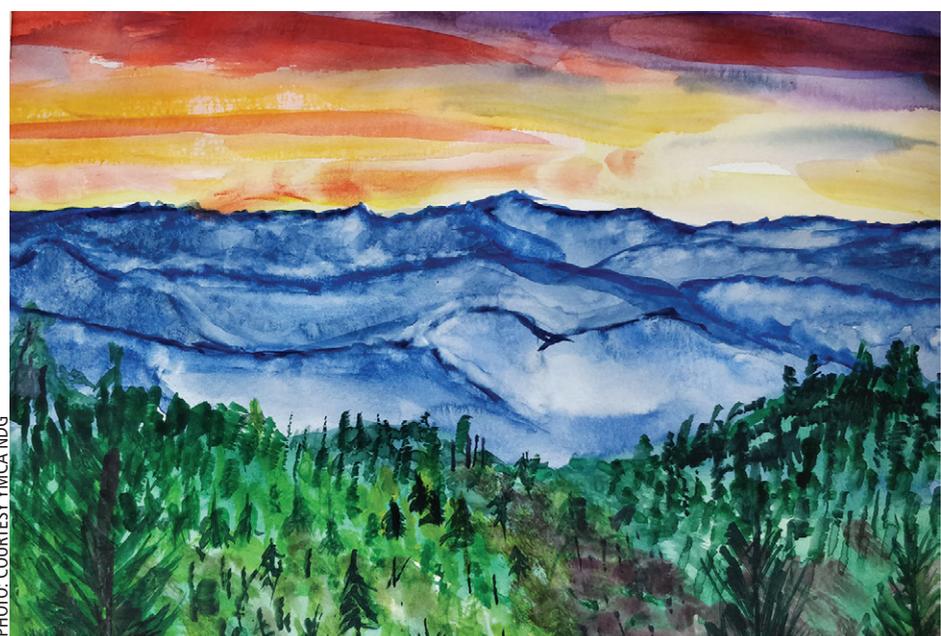


PHOTO: COURTESY YMCA NDG

A watercolour painting by Hampstead's Linda Shear, who has been a member of the group since it started almost a decade ago.

"When it was in-person, I don't know if I got to know the people as well as I feel I know them now."

The meetups have played a big role in helping the senior members stay socially engaged.

"For a lot of the members, this is the only time in their week in which they're able to have this type of human connec-

tion with friends," Benatuil said. "A lot of them have done art most of their lives but they're not motivated to do it alone, so having the group environment encourages them more. They get inspired seeing others' paintings, they share a lot of resources, and they support each other. They have an opportunity to connect while doing art together. And they learn a lot." ■