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How Presbyterian Villages of Michigan built a model for senior care

WINNER

By [Sherri Welch](#)



Photo by Jacob Lewkow Presbyterian Villages of Michigan took on the complexities of developing an affordable senior community with a continuum of care and on-site health services. Left to right: Paul Miller, president, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation; Gloria Robinson, chair of the Thome Rivertown Senior Housing Board; and Roger Myers, president and CEO, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan.

The affordable senior living community **Presbyterian Villages of Michigan** spearheaded near Detroit's east riverfront was a challenge right from the start.

Planning for the **Edward N. and Della L. Thome Rivertown Neighborhood** began to take shape in 2008, just as the recession took hold of Detroit and the rest of the country.

Financing obstacles, early concerns about an affordable development near the city's ripe-for-development east riverfront, unexpected environmental remediation needs, cost overruns and other issues arose along the way.

But Southfield-based PVM pushed through them, developing a community for low-income seniors that offers a continuum of care, health clinic, dental care, therapy, rooftop garden, salon and other services for hundreds of seniors in the community and surrounding neighborhood.

It's a project that's been lauded as potentially a national model.

For tackling the complexity of meshing an affordable senior community with increased access to health care and related services for seniors in the surrounding neighborhood and collaborating at high levels to do it, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan is *Crain's* 2016 Best-Managed Nonprofit.

To bring the community to life, PVM collaborated with Chelsea-based **United Methodist Retirement Communities**, bringing it in as co-general partner of the community and managing partner of the affordable assisted living there. And through a joint venture with **Henry Ford Health System**, it brought in the Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly.

The continuum of care and coordination of individual benefits that makes the community affordable is enabling seniors who have spent their lives in Detroit to live out their years in their hometown. And those living in the surrounding community can remain in their own homes thanks to the in-home health and therapy services and transportation to the PACE center on the Thome campus.

The integrated approach to care is reducing hospitalizations and emergency room visits for seniors in the neighborhood.

Located two blocks south of Jefferson Avenue, at McDougall Avenue and Franklin Street, Thome Rivertown has become an anchor for redevelopment in Detroit's Rivertown neighborhood.



Photo by Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Planning for the Edward N. and Della L. Thome Rivertown Neighborhood began to take shape in 2008, just as the recession took hold of Detroit and the rest of the country.

the neighborhood.

It's taken eight years to complete the first two phases of the \$45 million project and more than 20 different sources of funding to meet capital costs.

And it's not completed yet.

Two Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Green Houses are expected to open near the end of this month, providing an alternative, home-like setting to nursing home care. And a community center and café is set to open next year, providing a social space for seniors and a beacon for the community as a whole.

"As we were looking at this broadly integrated campus, it was an idea a lot of people struggled with," given the complex layers of financing and numerous organizations taking ownership of the various parts of the project, PVM President and CEO Roger Myers said.

Early on, the **Detroit Economic Growth Corp.** also had concerns about whether an affordable senior community was the correct economic development strategy for

"At that pivotal point when we needed to push through what could have been some opposition ... the (**Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan**) was extremely important ... in helping with a broader understanding of the need for the project ... and what an asset (it) was going to be to the rebuilding of the neighborhood," Myers said.

The Rivertown neighborhood is a very strong anchor on the near-east side of Detroit, Mariam Noland, president of the Community Foundation, *told Crain's* in 2014. It provides a safe environment for elderly people in the city, makes "first-class services" available to low-income residents and could be a model for other parts of the country, she said.

The Community Foundation made a \$2 million grant in support of the project, which spurred funding from other foundations, including the **Kresge Foundation**, **Edward N. and Della L. Thome Memorial Foundation** and **Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation**.

Financing also included individual donors, low-income housing tax credits from the **National Affordable Housing Trust**, HOME funds in the form of a forgivable loan from both the city and the **Michigan State Housing Development Authority, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** subsidies for the independent living apartments, and brownfield funding from the state.

"Getting the tax credits was one thing, but finding a financial institution to buy the credits was a real challenge, at a time when there was a lot of retrenchment on the part of financial institutions," Myers said.

The project included the rehabilitation of two former **Parke Davis** buildings fraught with environmental remediation concerns, construction of a third building, and ongoing coordination of individual benefits ranging from Medicaid vouchers to HUD housing vouchers through the **Detroit Housing Commission** and meal assistance from the **Detroit Area Agency on Aging**, a piece UMRC is deftly navigating.

The 80 units of assisted living for low-income seniors and the PACE health and wellness center opened in one of the renovated buildings in 2013. The PACE center provides health and related services for over 300 people, many from a 30-minute drive in the surrounding neighborhood, Myers said. The program provides transportation to the PACE center on the Thome campus, at-home services, primary health care, therapies and other clinical services and day care to allow aging seniors to remain living in their own homes.

Also opened in the building: a pharmacy, beauty salon and large commercial kitchen for meal preparation for residents.

Three hundred people were on a waiting list for the 50 units of independent-living senior apartments opened in October 2014. The units were fully leased within three hours, and there's been a waiting list hundreds of names long ever since, Myers said.

Late this month, the two Weinberg Green Houses will open in the second, renovated building. An alternative to nursing home care, the "houses" will provide a home-like setting, with 10-12 private rooms for senior citizens, a communal kitchen and living areas, social programming and 24-hour nursing care. The renovated building will also include a rooftop garden and a community center and café, which is set to open on the ground floor next year.



Photo by Presbyterian Villages of Michigan
David Simpson draws in the lobby of the Thome Rivertown Senior Apartments.

"The property values adjacent to and in the surrounding area have clearly increased," Myers said. "It has stabilized an area and we're seeing new business right across the street," where the **Detroit Denim Co.** has opened, along with other development happening in the neighborhood.

PVM, which operates 30 senior communities around the state and is operating on a \$27.2 million budget, didn't have a presence in Detroit until the mid-'90s. Since then, it's invested over \$100 million to open 10 senior communities in the city. All but one have been affordable projects.

The Thome Rivertown development was, by far, the most complex project PVM has ever done, Myers said.

"But things that are worth it are not generally easy."

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