

High-Profile: Facilities Development News

# Revitalizing Assisted Living Facilities

by **Bryan Kelly**

Facilities managers in charge of maintenance and improvement programs for assisted living properties know their work is influenced by a unique circumstance: the residences they oversee will almost always be occupied (and sometimes fully so) throughout the construction process.

This circumstance sets a high standard for new construction, improvements, and repairs. At the same time, traditional standards of quality, timeliness, and economy must be observed in anticipation of outcomes meeting expectations.

Thus, a process that can be noisy, dusty, and even highly intrusive must be carried out while elderly and even frail individuals

are living in close proximity to the worksite. Accommodating such circumstances while maintaining site safety, overall cleanliness, and respect for the living circumstances of residents requires meticulous planning, a deft hand, and calm leadership under what fairly can be called “challenging circumstances.”

And while site management skills are a significant factor contributing to the success of assisted living improvement programs, they are by no means the only ones. Daily contact with site managers (sometimes minute-to-minute) typifies the construction phase of a project. But before work can even be considered a comfortable, open liaison with architects, engineers, and interior designers must be established.

A clear recognition on the part of the vendor team that residents and their families are part of the process, too, will help assure the patience and even generosity of spirit necessary to traverse the bumps that inevitably occur during any project.

The need to plan, coordinate, facilitate, and execute – sometimes involving multiple facilities and time frames ranging from a few days to many months – requires painstaking preparation, well-established communications, and clear lines of authority, with the facilities manager securely seated (beside management) at the head of the table.

Projects vary, especially as a challenging economic climate limits construction of new facilities. Facilities managers associated with established properties find they are challenged to undertake build-outs, reconfigurations, and rehabilitations never anticipated in original building design or construction.

Imaginative architectural and engineering designs, realistic time frames and solid financing comprise the underpinnings of such undertakings, but reality intrudes in the form of old construction and obsolete building systems that must give way (often grudgingly) to new construction and technology. Any general contractor seeking to manage the many challenges accompanying such an exercise must have an encyclopedic understanding of the revitalization process.

Consider the range of materials, trade skills, contingency management, and human resources skills your GC must possess in light of the work at hand. From new resident rooms and bathrooms to kitchens, therapy centers, hallways, atriums, lobbies, and foyers – the range of tradecraft and supervisory know-how must be vast.

Exterior envelopes present another set of challenges. Roofing replacement and flashing schedules hold unique challenges of their own, while the success of siding, window, and door replacement often hinges on reliable vendor relations and clever sourcing.

When allied vendors like plumbers, electricians, and HVAC specialty firms become part of the project team, which is invariably the case, a general contractor must represent a range of logisti-

cal skills of the highest order, lest delays and miscues drive costs beyond planned ceilings.

Another factor to be considered: Does your general contractor employ trained personnel with experience in carpentry, painting, and allied trades that represent a high standard of craft skills combined with human skills? A fair quotient of common sense combined with good manners is always a factor in facilities where the elderly and infirm may be present.

Underpinning the whole set of variables associated with assisted living facilities improvements are questions you already know but will need to answer before formalizing an agreement with any general contractor: Are you comfortable with the principal(s) and senior project management staff of the bidder? Are proposed suppliers and materials consistent with your values and intentions and representative of real value?

Are project management tools readily accessible online and explicit in the presentation of milestones, slippage factors, and terminal goals? Are timelines aggressive to the extent you’ll meet your goals, yet sufficiently flexible to allow for the workarounds and slippages that invariably accompany any assisted living renewal project?

A few thoughts in closing: Smart GCs run their punch lists like a good coach manages a winning game plan. Matching skill sets and personalities to work crews and tasks, lending support and direction when unexpected problems are encountered, and being recognized by all members of the team as a problem-solving resource can contribute to progress in all sorts of ways.

All that and more are guarantors of quality for your project and a calling card your general contractor is glad to leave behind in anticipation of the next assignment.

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Bryan Kelly

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