

Vision

Not-for-Profit Leadership Brings Vision to Motown

by Roger Myers and John Thorhauer



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Just a few hundred feet from the waters of the beautiful Detroit River and less than a mile from one of the busiest international border crossings in the world, Presbyterian Villages of Michigan (PVM), United Methodist Retirement Communities (UMRC) and the Henry Ford Health System's Center for Senior Independence have collaborated, along with many others, to develop an integrated new affordable senior community. The project is also helping to transform a neighborhood and making a substantial economic impact in southeast Michigan.

The first components of this community open in December 2012. Ultimately, over 750 seniors will be served annually, along with many more of all ages. This is a story of collaboration and revitalization.

After 50 years of serving seniors in Detroit's suburbs, PVM turned its attention to Detroit in the mid-1990s and opened its first community in the city. That development has been followed by five more in other neighborhoods. PVM now serves more seniors in Detroit than in any other area of Michigan.

UMRC, based in Chelsea, extended its 100-plus-year mission to Detroit in the 1970s with the redevelopment of a large historic church into an innovative continuing care retirement community. Nearly 40 years later, in 2009 UMRC decided to divest of this community and reinvest resources elsewhere in Detroit to provide a greater impact in addressing increasing needs.

For many years, PVM and UMRC leadership, both executives and board members, shared mutual knowledge, respect and trust for each other's organization. These peer relationships led to periodic discussions and the sharing of respective challenges, opportunities and plans. At the same time, there was a growing appreciation that the missions, visions and values of both organizations were extremely similar and that there was great compatibility between the cultures and philosophies. Clearly, there was a solid foundation upon which to do something together.

At the same time that UMRC was deciding to pursue a major new initiative in Detroit, PVM was planning an affordable continuing care retirement community and engaged with the Henry Ford Health System (HFHS) to significantly expand the Center for Senior Independence (CSI) PACE. As site selection and other programmatic criteria were assessed, the organizations realized that tremendous synergy was possible through the co-location of multiple components that could be integrated to form a truly comprehensive, affordable continuum of services, health care and housing for modest- and low-income seniors. With that vision, a partnership was formed; and what is now known as the Rivertown Neighborhood, an Innovative Senior Community, was born.

A three-year collaborative development effort between PVM and UMRC, joined by HFHS, has resulted in a remarkable new resource for Detroit's frailest and most financially disadvantaged seniors. Rivertown Neighborhood includes:

- A CSI PACE Center that will serve 300 participants
- Eighty affordable assisted living apartments
- Fifty independent living senior apartments
- Two Green Houses®
- A community café and center
- Community gardens and a park

The project involves the adaptive reuse of a former pharmaceutical manufacturing building, construction of new housing, and planning with heightened community sensitivity and engagement. A complex mix of 22 different capital sources of funding, along with sustainable operating subsidies, has been leveraged. One of these sources, the National Affordable Housing Trust (NAHT), was created and sponsored by five LeadingAge member organizations. NAHT syndicated the tax credit equity for the affordable assisted living and is serving as the limited partner for that component of Rivertown Neighborhood.



PVM

A centerpiece of the Rivertown Neighborhood project

involves the conversion of a former Parke-Davis pharmaceutical manufacturing plant into space for a PACE, affordable assisted living apartments and common areas, including a pharmacy.

Beyond PVM, UMRC, HFHS and NAHT there are numerous other collaborators: other aging services organizations, advocacy allies, government agencies at all levels, development team members, generous philanthropic investors, and so many more. More than 150 agencies are involved!

The documented economic impact generated through the Rivertown Neighborhood is significant. The first component alone created over 500 jobs (a combination of construction-related and permanent positions) and represents a 10-year contribution to the regional economy of nearly \$278 million. Beyond responding to the enormous community need for programs for seniors, PVM and UMRC also gained a much greater appreciation for the broader economic benefits derived by meeting those needs. For some of the collaborators the economic benefits, both immediate and long-term, motivated their participation. For other collaborators it was the intentional integration into the surrounding neighborhood that was especially appealing, with planned intergenerational, cultural, recreational, business and volunteer relationships.

PVM and UMRC have learned many lessons from the Rivertown Neighborhood experience. The list would include the importance of:

- Great trust, confidence and communication among collaborators
- Clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
- Balancing the allocation of risks and rewards
- Mitigating risks in the planning and execution process
- Shared leadership and decision making
- Heightened innovation and creativity
- The economic and social impacts of the initiative
- Strong patience, determination and perseverance in the face of challenges and barriers
- Maintaining flexibility and openness to changing circumstances
- Valuing the development's broader community benefits

Based on the success of the development process to date, and the anticipated successful operation of the Rivertown Neighborhood, PVM and UMRC have already been approached by others interested in discussing replication of the project. PVM and UMRC representatives have been invited to share the Rivertown Neighborhood story before various groups on a local, state and national level.

PVM, UMRC, HFHS, and NAHT are extremely pleased to have partnered in this ambitious undertaking that has dramatically enhanced the options for seniors in Detroit, while also helping to strengthen and redevelop the community.

Editor's note: The Fall 2012 issue of Crain's Detroit Business includes an article on the Rivertown Neighborhood. [Download the issue](#) (PDF format) and find the article on p. 13.

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