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# Wellings of Picton

by ROBIN BRUNET

If Kirk Hopper, owner of Nautical Lands Group Inc., hadn't visited Kentucky in 2014, arguably the Wellings of Picton age-in-place community wouldn't exist today – at least, not in its current form.

That's because during his visit, he saw a hotel whose suites faced a massive common public atrium, providing guests with a city centre-type of vibrancy without them having to leave the premises. "Kirk brought back that idea just after we'd sunk a lot of time and money designing Picton as a more traditional retirement community," says Kevin Pidgeon, Nautical Lands Group's president and COO. "But the idea was so strong that we agreed to write off a \$600,000 investment in design and engineering, and we started over."

To which Nautical Lands' senior architectural designer, Mark Williams, adds, "We literally withdrew our building permit applications for the old design on a Friday in May of 2014 and started fresh the following Monday."

The 102,000-square-foot Wellings of Picton, in the Ontario town of Picton, encourages active living while facilitating residents' transition into increasing levels of assisted living.

Phase one of the 144-unit development consists of 88 units; Pidgeon says the next phase of 56 units is "imminent."

Each spacious apartment includes climate control, a private balcony or patio, as well as a full kitchen, a walk-in shower and a washer/dryer unit. Picton amenities include a theatre and games room, fitness centre, bistro, pub, health-care centre, spa and a dog park.

From the outside, Williams, aided by Leonard Koffman Architect, designed a four-storey building with

a wing in the rear that exhibits the best elements of condo architecture: a pleasing blend of brick and siding with peaked rooftops, capped by a grand porte-cochere entrance.

But the real magic of Wellings of Picton is on the inside. Dominating the interior is an 8,000-square-foot atrium that many of the living units look onto. This grand gathering space is filled with trees, walkways and benches, and it borders the bistro, fitness centre and other common areas. "Residents can simply open their front doors and look over their railings to see all the activity below," says Pidgeon.

Better still, the atrium is covered, with solar tubes and LED lights casting a healthy mix of natural and controlled lighting onto the massive space.

Aside from having to shift design gears so suddenly, Williams was tasked with ensuring that the unique structure met fire code standards. "Normally you can't exit residents into a common space because of the possibility of smoke accumulating in such a huge area," he says. "So we designed the open corridors lining the atrium to be pressurized, and we designed the roof to have a large exhaust fan that, in the event of a fire, will evacuate the smoke and draw it away from the corridors and up to and out through the ceiling."

Another major concern was the atrium's potential for generating echo as well as noise penetrating the living suites. "The solutions were to go with increased STC-values in the walls and more sound dampening materials such as carpeting in the atrium," Williams says. "We also found that the open corridors acted as sound baffles, thus minimizing the echo effect."



**LOCATION**  
617 County Rd. 49, Picton, Ontario

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**  
Nautical Lands Group Inc.

**ARCHITECTS**  
Nautical Lands Group Inc. /  
Leonard Koffman Architect

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR**  
Nautical Lands General Contractors

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
TSC Engineering Inc.

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**  
RSG Engineering Inc.

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**  
Cadraw Corp. Electrical Engineering

**CIVIL ENGINEERING CONSULTANT**  
G.D. Jewell Engineering Inc.

**GEOTECHNICAL CONSULTANT**  
Inspec-Sol (now GHD)

**TOTAL SIZE**  
102,000 square feet

**TOTAL COST**  
Undisclosed

Nautical Lands is renowned for its high-quality seniors communities, and at Wellings of Picton the tiniest detail was carefully considered. "For example, we ensured that all cabinets in the kitchens were reachable, and the towel bars in the bathrooms serve double duty as grab bars," says Williams. "Additionally, in traditional communities wheelchair-accessible suites tend to be grouped together; but we created 15 accessible units scattered throughout the complex in the spirit of fostering integration." A 24-suite separate wing was designed for residents who prefer a more private living experience.

Nautical Lands initially set aside a generous amount of space for a ground-level medical centre, but when an agreement was reached for ParaMed to occupy that space, the home and workplace health specialists determined that they needed less room than anticipated. "This allowed us to expand the salon next door to include a massage area and a Mani/Pedi station," says Williams.

One of the biggest challenges of the construction process for Nautical Lands General Contractors was building the ceiling of the atrium. "The space required 70-foot trusses, and it was determined by our project management team that it would be a lot simpler and safer to assemble the trusses in sections while still on the ground, including the plywood sheathing rather than lifting single long length trusses four storeys into the air," says Peter Gregor, Nautical's VP of development.

Pidgeon credits RSG Engineering and Cadraw Corp. Electrical Engineering, working closely with the in-house NLG design and project management teams "for creating entirely new mechanical and electrical designs for Picton from the ground up. We

took an entirely new approach when designing this building, compared to our past residential projects."

The architect, builder and electrical engineer collaborated closely on the development of Picton's lighting system, which would be crucial to the success of the atrium. "The solar tubes provide enough natural light for the atrium during sunny days, but during overcast days LED lights are activated by photocells, ensuring a well lit vibrant space," says Williams.

To which Gregor adds, "Lighting placement and control was vital in creating a variety of ambiance in the atrium depending on the time of day or night – hence, the primary lighting is provided by ceiling mounted pendant LED fixtures and all the columns have LED sconces. Lower level lighting is used at night to create a street lamp effect, and the bistro has ambient lighting that imparts a sophisticated, romantic mood."

Although work continued throughout what Gregor describes as "a difficult winter that proved to be quite challenging," Wellings of Picton was completed on budget and on schedule and ready for occupancy by December of 2016.

And although Pidgeon and his colleagues are already busy with other new atrium-style developments, the success of Wellings of Picton has left a lasting impression. Gregor says, "I was on site when the first residents moved in, and I'll never forget one resident sitting in the atrium while his wife was exploring their suite: he said, 'I can't believe I'm moving into such a beautiful space.' That comment made all our time and effort worthwhile. We're very proud to have created such a unique community; we think we've set a new standard for seniors living in Canada." **A**