

A Quaker Retirement Community in Florida

The History

More than forty years ago, SEYM established a committee to explore the construction of a Quaker Community in Florida. The vision was for a retirement community, a potential site for Yearly Meeting Gatherings, a retreat center, and an educational center. The concept was to begin with a retirement community, and potentially also with a YM Gathering site, then the two most pressing needs.

Monthly Meetings and individuals donated money towards a fund to be used for a feasibility study, and other expenses. The committee had no paid staff. All members of the committee volunteered their time and paid their own expenses.

Two representatives from Kendall offered to partner with SEYM to build a retirement community, provided enough financial support could be raised for a required local match. Kendall was flexible regarding management of the completed facility.

On June 12, 2020, Lyn Cope, SEYM Executive Secretary during the history given above, provided this additional historical information:

“Forty years ago the effort got off the ground and retirement center existed for a short period of time. During my tenure as SEYM Secretary, we had land willing to be donated miles north of New College. We needed to raise 2M quickly and unfortunately the two parties interested died unexpectedly. That would have been 20 years ago.”

The Present

I believe the members and meetings of SEYM continue to hold the vision of building a Quaker residential community in Florida.

Susan and I are now living in a retirement community called “The Cloisters,” in DeLand, Florida. (<https://thecloistersretirement.org>) The physical facilities are attractive, well-designed, unique in DeLand, and rare, elsewhere. Yet this facility is poorly maintained and managed. Occupancy

is well below capacity, staffing is inadequate, poorly-trained, and under-paid. Employee turnover is high. Morale, both among residents and staff, is low.

The Cloisters is owned and managed by Retirement Housing Foundation, Inc., a tax-exempt, non-profit, California corporation, managed, according to their Federally-required 990 disclosures, by highly paid executives.

Founded by clergy of the United Church of Christ, RHF owns and manages 197 communities in 29 States. For our facility, however, they are an absentee landlord, enforcing tight financial control, while authorizing little local discretion. Nationwide employee reviews for this corporation with respect to facility management, are generally poor.

The Future

Drawing from the vision from which Foulkeways was conceived and built by Gwynedd Monthly Meeting, Gwynedd, PA., Susan and I are looking for “a place where aging, retired people could live productive lives in comfort and security, in the midst of beauty and peace, finding persons of common interest and comparable age with whom to share the mature friendship and mutual support that only the rich experiences of a lifetime make possible.” (paraphrasing quotes from two of its founding members)

The Ask

Spurred by the shortcomings of our present retirement community, Susan and I accepted our responsibility to bring about the changes we seek. In doing so, we turned first to our Meeting, for clearness. At its Monthly Meeting for Worship, with a Concern for Business, Orlando Monthly Meeting approved the following minute:

2020.06-04 Orlando Monthly endorses the leading of Daniel and Susan Vaughn, to seek the appointment of a new SEYM committee for the purpose of assessing the support and commitment of SEYM Friends and Meetings to construct or acquire, or to recruit partners who would construct or acquire, an affordable retirement community in Central Florida, intended to be operated according to the principles, practices, and values of the Religious Society of Friends.

Lyn Cope, a current resident of a Kendall community, suggested that we approach Kendal again. She reported they had assumed management of an existing facility in San Francisco, formerly run by an order of monks. She also reported that Kendall's new director, located in Philadelphia, was very helpful.

If the Executive Committee senses its support for the creation of a new SEYM committee to explore bringing a Quaker retirement community to Central Florida, we are asking for a Minute to that effect. Such a minute might be expressed in the following manner:

“The Executive Committee approves the immediate appointment by the YM Clerk of a new SEYM committee to begin work as soon as possible to assess the support and commitment of Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups within SEYM, to construct or acquire, or to recruit partners who would construct or acquire, an affordable retirement community in Central Florida. The new committee may designate its name, identify its Clerk, and initiate communication with Meetings, Worship Groups, potential retirement community partners, and other interested parties. The committee may solicit contributions designated for its expenses, from SEYM constituent Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups, or from any other persons or entities. All members of the committee shall be uncompensated volunteers, who shall pay for their own expenses. The committee may expend any donated funds for its other reasonable and necessary expenses. It shall report its progress, contributions and expenses to the Executive Committee at its next regular meeting.

Peace,

Daniel and Susan Vaughen