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fter six years of searching across the country, from New England to California, for the right life plan community, Keith Hicks and Ina Downey took only five minutes to know they had found the perfect home to spend their older years at Rydal Park & Waters.

On their first day at their new two-bedroom cottage, the married couple was watching their moving van being unloaded in the driveway when the first visitors arrived. It seemed as though half the neighborhood had shown up.

"We probably met a half-dozen of our neighbors right away," Hicks recalls. "They just came over and introduced themselves and started chatting. I haven't felt more warmly welcomed anywhere."

"And we've moved a lot during our careers," Downey adds. "This has been the greatest place yet." They are far from alone in feeling that way about Rydal Park & Waters, a life plan community that is part of the nonprofit organization known as HumanGood. Situated on 55 acres in Jenkintown, Rydal Park & Waters offers all-inclusive independent living options with access to levels of living, including memory care, for older adults.

Whether residents arrive as part of a long-term plan, such as Hicks and Downey, or are more reluctant to relocate from their prior home, like Natalie Dyen or Jackie Pickering, most end up with just one regret: that they hadn't done so sooner. With multiple dining venues, picturesque grounds, wonderful amenities, cottage and apartment living, and a wide range of activities, Rydal Park & Waters above all else has an environment in which it's easy to be independent and thrive.

"The thing I like about being here at Rydal is you have so many bright, talented people," Pickering says. "You start talking to people and they feel like your next-door neighbor, and then you find out that they had an incredible career. One woman was a concert pianist, another was an opera singer, somebody else was a famous artist in this area, and there are all these incredible financial people. It has opened up a whole new set of friendships to me."



## The Only Logical Choice

Dyen and her husband, Jim, have spent their entire married life in Montgomery County. With no children living in the area, the couple decided when they reached their 80s it might be time for a life plan community. They didn't have to look very far.

"At a certain age you realize you're going to need some support," Dyen says. "So I said to Jim, I'm only interested in one place: Rydal Park. The first reason was, before I had even visited, I knew I wanted to stay in the neighborhood, because it's so much easier when you have your friends, your support systems, your doctors—everything—close by. The other thing was, when I actually visited, it turned out I already knew a few people here, and I was impressed by the look and feel of the place."

The couple moved into an apartment in September 2024. Despite having lived only in single-family houses previously, they have adjusted just fine. Natalie, who is more of an introvert, has enjoyed getting to know her neighbors, and has made new friends. She loves to swim in the community's indoor heated pool, and is a big fan of having her meals prepared for her, whether it's in the formal dining room, the café, or the pub.

Jim, a retired orthodontist, experienced a few medical problems shortly after moving in. The easily accessible care and rehabilitation on site have been a godsend.

Natalie, a French teacher who then transitioned into a career as a technical writer for computer companies, has discovered a more creative side during retirement. She continues to pursue it during her time at Rydal.

"I got a novel published when I was 80, so that was exciting," she says humbly of her book, *Locked in Silence*, a work of historical fiction. "I had been writing short stories up until then and I really enjoy it. I discovered late in life what I really love to do, so I'm doing it here at Rydal."

## A Blessing in Disguise

Pickering, a longtime resident of Chester County, never considered a life plan community. When her nephew's in-laws moved into Rydal, he encouraged her to think about it, too. Because her husband had recently passed and they didn't have any children, her main concern was not becoming a burden on her niece and nephew as she got older.

Sure enough, a few months after moving into an apartment two and a half years ago, Pickering was diagnosed with lung cancer. Fortunately, she was able to easily access her care at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, with help from the Rydal staff when necessary. Now cancer-free, she knows if any other health concerns arise, she will be well taken care of.

At 76, she initially thought she was too young to move into a senior community. She has dived into the opportunities available at Rydal. She took a job at the gift shop to meet



people, became the head of the Environmental Group, moderates special events, and frequently attends weekly movies and guest lectures on historical and cultural topics. Like Dyen, she also loves the food.

"It's weird when you move here and you don't know anybody, but people would stop by and invite me to dinner with them," says Pickering, a retired vocational consultant. "I did things that got me out and about with people, and that's what I would recommend to someone going into senior living: Get active. For example, my friend is a retired nurse, so she goes to the retired nurses group meetings. Just find your niche, and you'll get to meet people who you have things in common with."

## Early retirement

At age 66, Hicks and Downey are on the younger side for a senior community. Having seen the mistakes their parents had made when they were aging, they decided to plan ahead. They previously lived in Northern Virginia near Washington, D.C., as they both worked for the federal government and military, but were willing to move elsewhere given the right situation.

Many things appealed to them about Rydal, including being within walking distance of a train station, restaurants, a grocery store, a gym, and medical and dental offices. They also liked having an ADA-compliant home and advanced health care on the same campus as

their cottage if and when they should need it.

"When we went looking for the last six years, we did our due diligence and we had a spreadsheet of what was important and what wasn't," Downey says. "There would always be something that one of us wasn't happy with. [Rydal Park & Waters] was the first one where we both stepped into the community and said, 'This is it.' We both came to a quick agreement, which was unbelievable."

Since moving in on April 30, the couple has joined several exercise classes and a Monday-morning hiking group. They like to watch the movies offered, attend on-campus concerts, and otherwise spend time with their new friends.

"We've only been here five months, but we feel very much at home," Hicks says. "Last week, we went back to D.C., and we knew our way around, but I didn't feel like I missed it. It felt like this was home, here at Rydal." ■

