



Next Gen Residents Will Not “Go Gentle Into” Your Community

By Susan Saldibar

Have you heard the term “Eldertopia”? It was coined by author and geriatrician, Dr. Bill H. Thomas. Dr. Thomas will be speaking at the Residential Assisted Living Convention in Phoenix, October 3-5. (You can get more information about it [here](#).)

I learned about Dr. Thomas from Gene Guarino, President of RAL Academy (Residential Assisted Living) recently when we talked about the upcoming conference and featured sessions and speakers. While the conference is geared towards those who own, operate, or invest in residential assisted living, it includes speakers and sessions geared to better understanding the next generation of assisted living residents. And that has got to be of interest to all senior care providers.

Gene referred me to an article written by Dr. Thomas which explores the concept of “Eldertopia”, defined as follows: “A community that improves the quality of life for people of all ages by strengthening and improving the means by which 1) the community protects, sustains, and nurtures its elders and 2) the elders contribute to the well-being and foresight of the community.”

Like the term, Eldertopia or not, its underlying concepts are worth looking at. From the standpoint of an aging boomer, I agree with much of this. And I don’t think I’m that unusual,

so it's probably safe to say that other future residents of independent and assisted living communities might agree as well.

In a nutshell here are some of the points (I've paraphrased a few) Dr. Thomas makes that you operators really should consider as you prepare for the influx of new (and very different) residents coming of senior age:

- The 78 million people that make up the baby boomer generation will break the traditional boundaries of what senior living is all about.
- This new emerging "elderhood" brings with it a revolutionary and liberating developmental potential. With it comes a challenge which will revolve around a new definition of elderhood and a new level of worth assigned to aging.
- The notion of having respect for our elders should no longer be considered a charitable act. Elders have much to contribute to their communities.
- We need to recognize the value of intergenerational interdependence and the central role our elders play within it.
- This new generation of elders will drive the wheel of intergenerational cultural transmission.

Heady statements to be sure. And while you can agree or not with them, few would argue that the culture of senior living will need to change dramatically to attract boomer seniors. And that's a big part of what Gene has created with the RAL Academy and the RAL National Association that sponsors the RAL National Convention.

The conference has many other speakers of note as well. They include Harry S. Dent, Jr., author of New York Times bestseller, *The Demographic Cliff*. His books center around generational consumer spending patterns, as well as providing financial market insights. Among other things, he has written about the decrease in consumer spending as baby boomers retire, and the potential downturn in the economy that may lead to a decline in the value of financial markets. Interesting stuff.

So while the conference is centered around educating RAL owners, operators, and investors about the growing residential assisted living market, it aspires to do much more. And Gene is eager to engage with senior living operators, investors, entrepreneurs, and anyone else who is interested in serving a growing segment of older Americans who may be opting for different, more meaningful care environments.