

BUSINESS PROFILE

Care is based on the sanctity of life at Shell Point

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@floridaweekly.com

Peter Dys once planned to become a pastor, but has instead focused those Christian values — in particular, he said, “the sanctity of life” — to create a vibrant haven for the elderly or aging.

Although Shell Point Retirement Community is one of the largest “continuing care” developments in the nation, the buildings are neatly hidden down Shell Point Boulevard, along the brackish end of the Caloosahatchee River, near Sanibel and Captiva islands.

In his 23 years as president of Shell Point, Mr. Dys has built something that leans more toward a small, utopic city than a nursing home: a place where everything is taken care of in the golden years.

“When I could see all the practical things that could be done that would increase the quality of life (for older people), that’s why I came here,” he said. “I think most people coming here recognize this is their last home on this earth. I think the reasons are social, emotional and physical.”

There are three independent neighborhoods there, with a population of more than 2,100. Residents enjoy a hotel, salon, café and restaurant, a chapel and an 18-hole championship golf course, a small beach, kayaks, resident’s private gardens, a park with mature Banyan trees along the river, as well as medical care from nursing to hospice. Planned activities and events abound, such as boating trips or concerts by the Southwest Florida Symphony.

“The retiree today is interested in amenities,” Mr. Dys said. “That’s why we sell life care as well as lifestyle. You name it, we’ve got the activity here. The (baby boomers) want education, ongoing learning, places to volunteer, health and wellness — it’s all because of that desire to learn.”

The community compensates for what he calls “the continuum of loss,” in which independence, friends and money tend to decline with age.

Most residents choose to pay an entrance fee of about \$75,000 to \$350,000, which is incorporated into a monthly payment, and covers an apartment and nursing for life. To meet the demands of tighter financial times, there are several contract options.

“If you came in today and had a massive stroke, Shell Point takes care of nursing for the rest of your life,” Mr. Dys said. “In essence, we are selling an insurance product. In other words, peace of mind. We’re able to intervene, and take care of little incidents quickly, so they don’t become a cascade of physical decline.”

Shell Point is the largest continuing care facility in the state, recognized by the Continuing Care Accreditation Commission since 1993. It also received a coveted five-star rating from the federal government for its Larsen Pavilion, the on-site nursing facility, akin to Michelin stars for a chef.

“That’s not a small achievement when you consider a nursing facility is one of the most regulated in the nation, right behind atomic energy and NASA,” Mr. Dys said. “You can lose a star for a minor service item like not opening a milk carton.”



Peter Dys

COURTESY PHOTO

The faith-based Christian and Missionary Alliance owns Shell Point. Mr. Dys has served on the board since 1980.

He was also careful to point out the residents’ diversity: they come from 39 different states, 19 countries and 26 religious denominations.

“You’ve got every background, interest, skill, religious and political view you’d want to have,” he said.

Mr. Dys’ own background revolved around a family of five outside Grand Rapids, Mich., where his parents had a small turkey farm. His father was also a laborer at General Motors.

Mr. Dys, 64, went to college with the intention of becoming a pastor and graduated from West Virginia University in 1972 with a master’s degree in social work. But during the summer of his junior year, he was charged with volunteering at a small, rural nursing home in Iowa. He returned again on his own the next year, charmed by the stories some of the residents shared. One woman told him about her husband’s experience in the Civil War.

“These are the people that made America what it is,” Mr. Dys said. “We fail to take advantage of their knowledge, skills and ability, just because we don’t ask.”

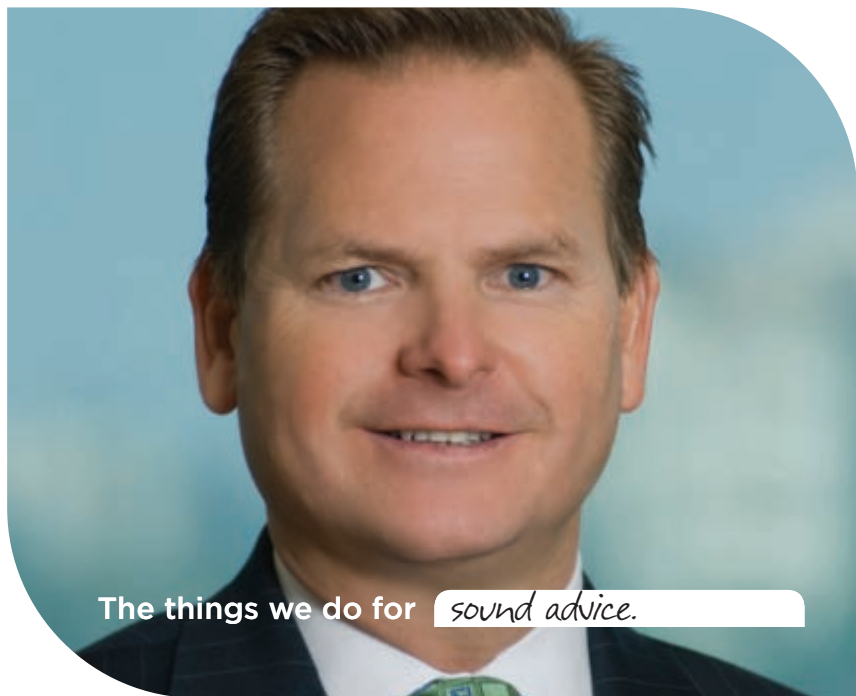
In graduate school, he worked at the United Mine Workers Medical Offices. Mr. Dys went on to serve as executive director of the Lancaster County Office of Aging in Pennsylvania before coming to Shell Point.

Gov. Charlie Crist reappointed him to the Governor’s Continuing Care Advisory Council last year.

“We as a society are so age biased,” Mr. Dys said, “that we don’t even want to be around older people. We dye our hair, get Botox injections. I contend we haven’t dealt with our own aging process. We want to ignore it. We want it to go away. We try to make old people look young, and there’s nothing uglier.”

As the population in Lee County continues to grow, Mr. Dys is looking to the future. He expects to build more on to Shell Point’s 800 acres, a large part of which is undeveloped.

“If the market continues to grow, we have the capacity to expand,” he said. ■



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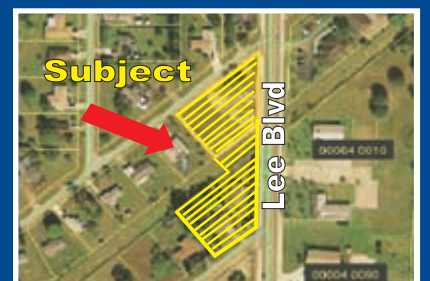
Commercial Property FOR SALE



Property Details:

- Zoned CN-3
- 1 Acre +/- (321 feet of road frontage)
- D.O. In Place
- Busy intersection
- Near Hwy. 82 & Daniels Parkway.

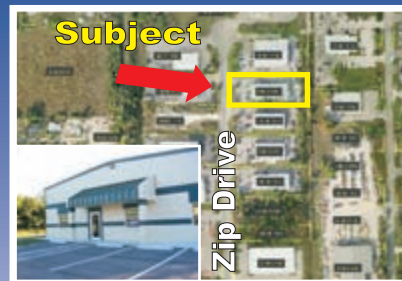
Was: \$385,000 NOW: \$308,000



Property Details:

- Lee Blvd. frontage approx. 470 ft.
- Zoned CS-1
- 71,431 Sq.ft.
- Water & Sewer
- 2 homes w/ conversion potential
- 700 Taylor Ln. Lehigh Acres

Offered at: \$750,000



Property Details:

- Zoned C (Industrial-Business Park)
- Billy Creek Commerce Center
- Multiple Tenants
- Building & Land ■ 8,246 sq.ft.
- 5881 Zip Drive

Offered at: \$925,000



Cape Coral

Property Details:

- Located on Gulf access canal
- Duplex with commercial zoning (P1-W)
- 1,034 sq. ft. under air
- Single car garage each side.
- Great opportunity in a great SE Cape

Offered at: \$369,000



John McWilliams Broker 239-841-0570
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P: 239-466-9411 F: 239-225-6124
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