

# ON TOUR

One way to cut through the seemingly complex maze of shopping for a senior living community is to enlist the help of a senior living specialist. These individuals become the family's advocate as they shop communities. Paul Markowitz is the owner and founder of Dallas-based Senior Living Specialists. He says families appreciate the personalized—and organized—approach an expert can bring to the table, and best of all...it's free. "We do the leg work for you by completing a questionnaire with you and then referring you to the top two or three facilities or care homes that best meet your needs," he says. "We coach you on what's important to look for at each facility and develop a strategy on the best way to go about touring. You will quickly find that each place has its own personality." Markowitz offers the following tips when starting the process of touring senior living communities.

**Tour the entire building.** While the care you currently need may be all that interests you, remember you may need a different level of care in the future and want to be sure you like all aspects of the community.

**Be comfortable with the size of the building.** Do you want to live on first floor, or would you be fine with living on the third floor? If the building seems overwhelming in size, you probably won't be comfortable there. Be sure to ask about availability of apartment homes near activities and the dining room.

**Tour during a meal time.** This gives you the opportunity to try the food and review the menu for the entire month. Most communities now offer restaurant-style dining where you have a server and never have to tip. This also gives you the opportunity to bring up any dietary restrictions and food preferences and see how well they can be accommodated.

**Tour at the most chaotic time of day.** You want to see how things run when the community is busy, not during a slow time of day. This is most likely around mealtime.

**Tour twice.** Go unannounced the first time, and go unannounced the second time. Tour during different times of the day each visit.

**Meet the executive director.** This position is more like the CEO of the community. Make sure you're comfortable with him or her, and ask about their experience leading a senior living community.

**Talk to people around you.** Stop and ask current residents of the community what they think about living there. While research online is helpful, remember your situation is unique and communities can

change from year to year. You want a current assessment of what it's like to live there. Try to meet several residents when touring who can later become your welcome group or lunchtime table group based on similar interests, backgrounds, and care needs.

**Activities.** View the activity calendar for the entire month. If you don't see your favorite activity on the list, ask if it's something they would be willing to develop. Make sure to find out if they offer outings outside of the community as well.

**Talk Money.** Ask about the yearly increase of the rates over the past three to five years. Ask what is included in the rent, if there are any additional charges, and any level of care charges. Also know what you'll be required to put down as a deposit to secure an apartment.

**Learn about the staff.** Ask about the staffing ratios from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Inquire about staff and caregiver turnover, as well as what level of training is provided for them. Also ask for permission to interview a caregiver.

**Location.** For future convenience, make sure the community is within a 10- to 15-minute drive of where other family members live.

**Safety.** Be sure to ask about community safety efforts and when the doors lock each day.

**Make the decision when you're ready.** Don't feel pressured to put down a deposit after your tour, even if they only have one apartment open. Remember that it's rare to find communities with a long wait list today, due to the amount of available communities in this market.

Source: Paul Markowitz, Senior Living Specialists, [seniorlivingspecialists.com](http://seniorlivingspecialists.com)

