

# The best revenge is living well(ness)

**'Wellness' communities attract affluent residents.**

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Where you live can have a big impact on your health. It's not just the air you breathe, the water you drink or the germs around you. Locations can foster all sorts of lifestyle choices - good and bad.

For those who want to achieve or maintain healthy lifestyles, there are now planned "wellness" communities springing up around the United States.

They create atmospheres where regular exercise, nutritious diets and avoiding unhealthy habits is the norm.

The trend is still in its infancy, but there are many more new developments on the planning board that will offer comprehensive programs to maintain the health and happiness of their residents. Target customer? Just about everyone, from families to empty nesters to retirees.

## Comprehensive approach

"Wellness" communities go beyond just having facilities such as golf courses, spas, gyms and biking trails.

These new places hire trainers, nutritionists and wellness directors who lead workshops on avoiding disease, put together work-out regimens and diets, lead hikes and biking trips, teach rock-climbing and show residents how to get the most out of their workouts. They act as gurus as well, leading spiritual exercises and demonstrating stress-reduction techniques.

"What we've tried to do is create a wellness culture," says Sam Varner, director of wellness for the Cliffs Communities, a series of new developments built near Asheville, North Carolina.

While the U.S. population is aging and overweight, at the same time longevity is increasing and more Americans are leading active lives deeper into their old age.

Wellness communities seem uniquely positioned to capture the demographic of Americans who would like to fully immerse themselves in a life-prolonging culture of health and (no small point) have the means to indulge that desire.

## Origins

At one time a healthy community might be one centered around a golf course augmented by a pool and tennis club with some open land around it.

Then some communities and resorts, such as Canyon Ranch, began to add elaborate spa facilities complete with personal trainers and nutritional advice.

Now, wellness communities involve soup-to-nuts programs that address your life holistically.

At Montesorro, a community being developed in Borrego Springs, Calif., "the first person you'll talk to will be a life-assessment director," says Greg Perlman, the developer. "He'll ask, 'Are you inactive, heavy, stressed? Do you want to get better at tennis or another sport?' He'll offer medical

services, like a cholesterol check or a bone density test."

Based on those factors, the staff will design a plan to meet your goals.

The approach at The Cliffs is always to accentuate the positive. "Society focuses on things like weight loss," Varner says. "But we have an obesity program here where we never mention weight loss. The program never touches on body weight or food. Instead, it emphasizes fun activities that foster weight loss naturally."

One retiree came from New York overweight and out of shape. He was put through a complete full-body age assessment and, although he was only 58, his "body age" was in the 70s.

"We hooked him up with a full program of training, exercise and nutrition and he lost 90 pounds in less than a year - and has kept it off," says Varner.

Some aspects of wellness sound very left-coast, touchy feely. Take the Lodges at Calistoga Ranch, a fractional residence club in the Napa Valley.

One of the activities there involves taking residents on a hike to a lovely, private spot in a grove looking out on the valley. The leader then hands out parchment paper and calligraphy pens so everyone can write haikus.

"The coming into nature has a calming effect," says Sean Zimmerman, its sales director.

Other pastimes there include doing ai-chi, a water movement and relaxation exercise, in the pool; breath control in the mountains; and light meditation. Staff members also lead hikes to a cabernet vineyard.

It also emphasizes good eating, making local, organically grown produce and free-range chicken available to residents, and offers salads and other light fare at its restaurant.

### **Wallet wellness required**

Wellness will cost you.

At the Lodges in Calistoga, a one-tenth ownership fraction for a 2,500-square-foot luxury home starts at \$429,000.

Prices at the Cliffs start at \$750,000 for a one-bedroom cottage and reach \$5 million for a 4,000-plus-square-foot, four-bedroom house.

Montesoro, on the other hand, is more reasonably priced, at least by West Coast standards. A 2,000-square-foot house starts at \$525,000 and a 4,300-square-footer goes for a little over a million.