

Aging in Place— in Paradise

Kisco Senior Living's focus on local branding, a continuum of lifestyle options, and inclusive amenities and practices has led to Ilima at Leihano, its first property in Hawaii

by Brian Justice

HAWAII IS UNQUESTIONABLY BEAUTIFUL and popular, but when it comes to property development, it remains one of the most statistically underserved markets in the United States. The high costs of land acquisition, construction, and labor—along with difficult regulatory, political, and entitlement processes—make for a limited supply of homes and unique building challenges, and many major players in real estate would rather just not bother with the

whole state. Andy Kohlberg, though, is not among them.

The former ATP-ranked professional tennis player is now the president and CEO of Kisco Senior Living, and though the career transition may seem unusual, he says the lessons he learned as an athlete—preparation, discipline, focus, and understanding the competition—often come into play in his current venture. Starting with his first purchase of a Virginia Beach community in 1990, he has



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grown his company and developed more than 20 properties across the country, including, recently, Kisco's first in Hawaii: Ilima at Leihano on the island of Oahu.

This newest location is emblematic of the company's specialty: developing properties in hard-to-enter markets. The 84-unit community, designed by Group 70 International, is scheduled to open in 2015, and it's establishing itself in the area by conforming to regional styles and ideals.

Like those of the firm's other communities, Ilima at Leihano's identity as a Kisco property is secondary. “We really believe that each community is a local business and that its identity is not as brand-driven as other residential or hospitality businesses such as hotels,” Kohlberg says. “Generally, our properties are known by their local name and not by a corporate brand, and at the end of the day, residents and their families choose Kisco because we have better-trained people and a warm and friendly environment. It's really a local, hands-on business where the quality of the on-site staff is a key factor in determining success.”

A prime example of the high quality of the on-site staff is the full-time wellness director, which each Kisco community has. The wellness director is responsible for that community's health and wellness programs; the company encourages its residents to participate in a wide array of programs designed to help them live healthier, happier, more active lives. One such program is Stand Strong, designed to improve balance and reduce falls in order to help seniors stay mobile.

Kisco communities also tend to be large-scale campuses—for a variety of reasons, but mainly because the company is dedicated to offering multiple lifestyle options, including independent living, assisted living, and memory care. “Residents and their families want them to age in place and move through the continuum,” Kohlberg says. “It's a more difficult operational challenge, but we've done well from a resident perspective.” Residents also want the comfort of knowing that, as their needs change, they can remain on the campus, in the community that becomes their home and around the friends and staff they come to know. Finally, larger communities enable Kisco to hire better executive

◀ Kisco Senior Living's Ilima at Leihano community, on the island of Oahu, is the company's first in Hawaii. It's scheduled to open in 2015, and it will have 84 units and conform to regional ideals and styles.



directors and staff and update, improve, or add additional amenities such as multiple dining venues because costs are spread over a larger number of residents.

Kohlberg sees the future of senior living being driven by the vastly different lifestyles and expanded expectations of the next generation of retirees. “The generation that’s coming through now lived through the Depression,” he says, “and they did not have a healthy lifestyle, exercising regularly or doing yoga, meditation, or tai chi. The next generation will be a very different group of customers. They are going to want more choices, they’re going to be willing to spend more money on themselves, and they’re going to expect more in terms of variety and quality of services.”

Frequent site visits and focus groups are key to maintaining the quality of Kisco’s communities, and they are, in fact, among the things that Kohlberg enjoys most about his role. Meetings with residents and front-line associates give Kohlberg insight into areas that need improvement, into the changing needs of residents, and into their expectations. “One of the questions I ask is, ‘Why did you choose to move to this community, and where did you move from?’” he says. “It gives me a good sense of what prospects and their families are really looking for when they’re moving to a community and what things we can do to continually improve our communities and services.”

One of Kohlberg’s big goals for Kisco is to double its number of units from 3,500

to 7,000 within five years. “We’ve been very successful ... because we been selective and responsible in our growth, and I want to keep doing that,” he says.

“That’s really our strategy, to just continue to implement and execute and evolve what’s been a successful strategy. ... What differentiates Kisco is our warm and friendly environment. It’s part of our principles and values and beliefs, and when I ask residents why they chose one of our communities, 90 percent say, ‘The first time I walked in the door, I got a warm and friendly feeling. That’s why I chose to live here.’” ■

▲ Ilima is large and equipped to house residents as they move through the aging continuum. The company also encourages health through a series of wellness programs.

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