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## Downsizing a Perfect Fit for this Pair

By Cathy Tyson



Marvin and Lois Kay smile in their new home at Merrill Gardens in Lafayette. Photo Cathy Tyson

Although they looked all over the area for places to relocate, Marvin and Lois Kay couldn't be happier with their decision to move to Merrill Gardens in downtown Lafayette. About three years ago they had an opportunity to look at the building plans before ground was even broken on the project; a friend told them the two-bedroom penthouse with its own rooftop patio was one of the nicest units in the building.

The early birds were one of the first interested parties to put down a deposit to hold one of those units. They moved there in January. The one-and-a-half mile move from their previous home in Olympic Oaks, just across town, entailed a significant amount of downsizing.

It was a challenge to downsize from their 2,500 square foot home to around 1,000 square feet. They had to part with some furniture and belongings. Many pieces went to their children and some went to consignment.

But their brand new home features two bedrooms and two bathrooms with extra storage on their lovely patio, along with cabinetry for additional storage in the second bedroom that also serves as an office. Although the unit also has a kitchen, they don't use it much because meals are also offered in the Gardens' inviting communal dining area.

Located at the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Second Street, the newest outpost of the Merrill Gardens retirement home franchise has only been open since late 2014 and is not yet full. But an open house with local dignitaries on Feb. 5 may have already enticed more newcomers. And the Kays, who have lived in the East Bay for almost all of their lives, plan to have lots of friends stop by. Married since 1948, the newlyweds lived in Piedmont for 53 years before becoming two of the first to join the newly constructed Olympic Oaks community, where they spent another dozen years.

While acknowledging the building has had a few growing pains, the happy couple is thrilled with all the staff - from the front desk person to the handyman, and everyone in between - who "are so nice," said Lois.

It's apparent these two are well suited to the active social climate the facility provides. Exercise class, chess and dominos, bingo, Tai Chi and field trips via their van, most recently to see Beach Blanket Babylon, and movies in their own theater. The Lafayette Library is only a little over a block away, offering even more options.

Having returned just moments before our interview from a trip to Reno where they enjoyed a large Super Bowl party at the Silver Legacy Casino and visited with their son, a retired eye doctor. Marvin, who is not a gambler, said he won one dollar. Lois enjoys video poker. Their other son is a busy neuropsychologist, based on the East Coast.

Because they love to travel, having recently been to Cancun for a granddaughter's wedding and also back from a two-week cruise to France and Italy, the convenience Merrill Gardens offers is a real plus - housekeeping and maintenance are included in the monthly fee. "It's so nice not to worry about garbage cans and picking up the mail," said Lois, who is looking forward to settling in. Reviewing all of the many social choices, Lois adds, "What more could you ask for?" They have a car in the underground garage, adding to their sense of freedom. Looks like smaller is better for

this charming couple.

"It's such a pleasure," said Marvin about thoroughly enjoying his retirement, not missing work a bit. Lois worked full time once their youngest turned 14. Marvin's dad, Sam Kay, founded the Kay Chesterfield furniture business back in 1921, with Marvin starting his career there in 1945, retiring 50 years later in 1995. The business used to make and sell high quality furniture, then focused on re-upholstery; while the location near the Oakland Coliseum hasn't changed, the business retains the family name but is under new ownership. A few lovely pieces, at least 40 years old, re-upholstered of course, decorate their new home.

Merrill Gardens offers independent living, assisted living, and memory care options, spread out over 89 senior living units, in studios as well as one- and two-bedroom apartments. On the Mt. Diablo side, retail shops will soon be open to the public, once occupied. An underground garage with parking for shoppers, residents and visitors is easily accessible from the Second Street side. The roof top deck is open; it features a brand new outdoor kitchen with barbecue, tables and chairs, and several large raised planter boxes for residents to use. The common areas are spacious and stylishly decorated - there's even a grand piano for residents to enjoy.



This cozy living space leads to the outdoor patio. Photos Cathy Tyson



Lois Kay does some clipping on her patio.

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