

# ALC planning major expansion for assisted living unit

by Beth Kraft

Since opening its Hillview Senior Living assisted living facility in 2012, Mondovi's American Lutheran Communities has seen demand for rooms in the community-based residential setting increase—even after a 2015 expansion project doubled the number of rooms.

Now a second expansion for the facility could be coming soon, ALC reps say, in order to utilize existing open space and capitalize on a rising trend in elder care.

"The belief is there's some need for some additional assisted living units in Mondovi," commented Michael Christensen, CEO of ALC.

Yet this expansion project won't add to the building's square footage as the last one did. Christensen says the facility's rehabilitation unit was moved into available space on the second floor a few months ago, and ALC leaders have since considered options for the open wing—conveniently located down the hallway from the existing Hillview Senior Living facility.

Preliminary plans for the expansion—recently approved by ALC's Board of Directors—include a renovation project for the former rehab rooms to create 12 new assisted living rooms with private bathrooms, bringing the facility's total up to 36.

As long as ALC obtains state approval for the project and the bid process goes smoothly, Christensen said renovation work could begin this winter with the goal of opening the new wing in spring of 2018.

Christensen says Hillview's initial 12 rooms "immediately filled up," and the expansion project two years ago also drew a packed house. The assisted living facility as a whole continues to maintain high occupancy, he said, kicking off conversations on another expansion.

Yet the trend of rising demand for assisted living space isn't exclusive to Mondovi, says Christensen, who holds 40 years of experience in the healthcare industry, including 18 years of involvement with the Mondovi facility.

"There has been a shift—and a very fast shift—from



American Lutheran Communities recently announced preliminary plans to expand Hillview Senior Living in Mondovi. The possible expansion project, which will seek bids and state approvals in order to move forward, calls for turning rehabilitation rooms into 12 additional assisted living rooms with private bathrooms.

the skilled nursing to assisted living," he said. "It's the preference of the seniors."

Elderly people who were traditionally cared for in nursing homes can now have their needs met via assisted living, and some traditional hospital patients now live in nursing homes.

It's all part of a "societal shift" in senior care options,

explained Christensen, which has also resulted in more elderly people opting for home health care over skilled nursing facilities.

"Home care is much more prevalent now than it was years ago," he said. "Now the family has options. There's not that automatic jump to the skilled nursing facility."

Christensen said moving ALC's rehab rooms to open space in the nursing home was a "financial decision" aimed at adjusting to decreased demand for those nursing home beds.

Many changes have come to pass at ALC of late, igniting rumors that the facility is struggling, but Christensen stressed the

making changes so we don't close."

Skilled nursing care just steps away is also a key asset for Hillview residents should they require a stay in ALC's nursing home for a short time, part of an overarching "campus approach" touted by ALC leaders.

"That continual care really benefits the operation in