

A TALE OF TWO RETIREMENTS



Left: Doug Bennett, 94, at Cummer Lodge, a long-term care facility. Right: Marny and Roy Loach at Toronto's Dunfield Retirement Residence.

JENNIFER ROBERTS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

ANNA SHARRATT

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What Canadians save for retirement has a big impact on their lifestyles in the golden years.

A serious medical condition requiring around-the-clock care most often means a senior will end up in a long-term care facility, and many private retirement

residences now offer assisted living options for less-extensive medical issues. Thus, the deciding factor for those who need less complex care is no longer just the state of their health – it's also money.

Unfortunately, many Canadians simply don't have enough saved. "Many people are not quite on track in being able to maintain everything in retirement," says Rob Stapleford, president of the Ottawa-based Canadian Institute of Actuaries. "Canadians need to be a bit better prepared."

According to research from Ontario's Ministry of Finance, approximately 35 per cent of households won't have adequate income to maintain their standard of living in retirement – even if they sell their homes. Most at risk are middle-income earners and younger workers.

"Owning a home does not necessarily prevent a standard-of-living drop in retirement," warns the report.

While those who save up may be able to choose where they live, those who can't afford the \$5,000 or \$6,000 a month for a private retirement residence or \$2,500 a month for a private bed in a long-term care facility have limited choices. Since room rates for semi-private and basic accommodation are capped in Ontario long-term care facilities and low-income seniors receive rate

reductions, seniors with few funds can often end up there by default.

To avoid this – and to ensure a comfortable retirement – “start at around age 30 and save 10 per cent [of your annual employment income],” says Fred Vettese, chief actuary of Morneau Shepell and author of *The Essential Retirement Guide: A Contrarian’s Perspective*. “You should be in pretty good shape.”

With that advice in mind, here are two retirement stories – and the kinds of lifestyles their savings allowed.



Doug Bennett, 94, says his “retirement days have been fantastic.”

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Doug Bennett's high spirits brighten a rainy, dreary November morning in North York, Ont. The 94-year-old WWII war vet, former police officer, tax fraud investigator and master storyteller is a resident at Cummer Lodge, a 391-bed long-term care facility operated by the City of Toronto. Bennett loves to regale his listeners with tales of his former pastimes: marathon runner, long-time volunteer, ballroom dancer.

And one thing he never expected: a retiree for an astonishing 29 years.

"I retired in 1986," says Mr. Bennett, "and my retirement days have been fantastic."

Mr. Bennett has been at Cummer Lodge, a 391-bed long-term care facility operated by the City of Toronto, for the past three years. He is lucky to have a private room – the waiting list for a semi-private or private room is anywhere from six months to two years, according to Leah Walters, Cummer Lodge's administrator. For basic rooms, the wait time is usually two to four years.

For his room, Mr. Bennett pays about \$2300 a month (\$27,600 annually), a rate set by the province. For semi-private rooms, residents pay between \$1900 and \$2006 monthly; for basic rooms, the fee is \$1731.62 monthly. Mr. Bennett says he considered a private retirement residence but felt \$6000 a month was too

costly (he travelled extensively after retiring and had no private insurance). He currently lives on a Canadian pension, a small pension from England and a veteran subsidy.

His room is a simple but homey. A hospital-style bed, overstuffed chair belonging to his former girlfriend, floral curtains, some books. Cummer Lodge encourages residents to create memory walls and display photographs, medals – anything that reminds them of home. Though it's no frills – the facility was last renovated in 2001 – the home is clean, airy and spacious, offering residents a small room for physio, a tuck shop, a games and crafts room. There's also a multi-faith chapel, auditorium and small hair salon.



Doug Bennett pays about \$2300 a month for his room at Cummer Lodge.

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Mr. Bennett's unflagging optimism is evident. "I accept everything that comes along," he says, waving towards the group of 30 residents, many in wheelchairs, silently watching a large TV just outside his door. He says he enjoys the grounds in the summer, and the quiet. "You're away from the traffic here."

But there are some things he's had to get used to, such as the difficult adjustment of moving out of his condo within 24 hours of being notified of a spot at Cummer Lodge (required for placement), and a new life on a floor with "59 strangers. The first few days are some of the toughest," says Mr. Bennett. "In my case I was lucky – my girlfriend was here."

But some challenges remain. Sometimes residents with cognitive decline become disoriented and end up at his bedside. "People can come in [to your room] at any time. All our apartments are not locked."

There are two assisted showers a week.

And Mr. Bennett misses the companionship of those with "a high quality of brain." But he keeps busy, acting as the head of the residents' association and putting forth any concerns residents might have. He enjoys patrolling the corridors with his walker, pointing out "the characters" with a grin, stopping to catch his

breath, the only indication that he's in the beginning stages of congestive heart failure.

Mr. Bennett's mood never dampens: "It's not for everyone – but it's good for me."



Roy and Marny Loach find plenty to do at Toronto's Dunfield Retirement Residence.

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At the Dunfield Retirement Residence in midtown Toronto, Marny and Roy Loach, 85 and 87 respectively, have spent the last six years enjoying a lifestyle which picked up where their pre-retirement years left off – and then some.

“Everything is sparkling,” says Ms. Loach, sipping coffee in the café that flanks the terracotta-coloured marble foyer. A former teacher, she enjoys being walking distance to the shops at Yonge and Eglinton as well as socializing with friends, singing in the Dunfield choir and participating in the exercise classes the home offers. At the moment, she’s excited at the prospect of a new Loblaws currently under construction outside her window. “I’ll be able to buy my baking supplies,” she says.

The Loaches are in good financial shape, having started RRSPs early and invested under the guidance of an investment adviser. They are also “savers,” owned a successful engineering business and sold several properties to fund their retirement.

Though financially equipped, the Loaches had never really thought about retirement homes until their son mentioned they should take a look. Mr. Loach, a former owner of an engineering firm, volunteers at Sunnybrook Hospital, five minutes away, and his son didn’t want him driving from his former home in the Beaches any more.

“We never thought of it – of a retirement place,” he says. “But we thought: ‘Well, maybe that will be sort of fun.’” After a tour, “halfway through dinner the decision was made,” recalls Mr. Loach. The couple sold their condo and moved into a 569-square-foot one-bedroom

unit, which has a full kitchen, bathroom, ample closets and large windows.



Marny, left, and Roy Loach relax in their room at Dunfield Retirement Residence.

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Unlike long-term care facilities which have their rates set by the province, retirement homes have varying price tags. And prices can run the gamut.

At the Dunfield, one-bedroom units cost \$5,700 a month or just under \$70,000 a year; a two-bedroom is \$8,900 and a studio \$5,100 – these rates include meals, weekly housekeeping and an emergency health-care necklace that alerts staff to trouble. If the Loaches need additional care in the future, units on the

memory-care or assisted-living floors are extra. The home doesn't accommodate those with extensive medical issues that require specialized care. There's currently no waiting list for independent units.

At the 177-room Dunfield, The Loaches' social calendar is filled with cultural and fitness activities, bused excursions to malls for holiday shopping and trips to theatres out of town.

Mr. Loach plays billiards three times a week in the retirement home's games room. And both enjoy movies in the theatre on the second floor, which screens two films a day. There's also a spa, two pools, art classes, an oak-panelled library and two full-service dining areas serving three meals a day on tables covered with white tablecloths.

What they enjoy is being able to socialize with other residents – on their own terms. “You can come down whenever you want,” says Mr. Loach, “and people are sitting and chatting. They would otherwise be sitting by themselves.”

On this frigid day at the end of November, the Loaches are looking forward to spending the evening at their son's home listening to jazz and sipping wine. “We love being part of this community,” says Mr. Loach. “It's so much better than living on your own.”