

## **Living the high life, family-style: Kid-friendly condo building makes growing up in the city a walk in the park**

By Kari Richardson, Special to the Tribune

December 16, 2011

Source: *Chicago Tribune*

For Anna Shilov Sterk and her two boys, 21 months and 4, growing up in Chicago means play dates and tricycle rides on the sun deck of their 35-story South Loop condo building, frequent visits to museums and Chicago attractions and the freedom to walk almost everywhere they need to go, from parks to restaurants.

"We enjoy the hustle and bustle of the city," said Shilov Sterk, who lives with her husband and sons in a 19th-floor, two-bedroom condo that offers views of the Willis Tower and Lake Michigan. "The parks and the lake are our front yard."

The Sterks and other Chicago-area parents have discovered that condo living, and all the perks that come with it, can be a good match with the demands of family life.

When Shilov Sterk needs to leave a package for someone, she drops it with the doorman and forgets about it. There's no mowing, shoveling or weeding, leaving more time for playing with the kids. And dirty diapers are promptly deposited into the garbage chute outside the Sterks front door, making an unpleasant parental chore a little easier.

No dinner? No problem. Dozens of restaurants are a short walk away.

But the best part of condo living for Shilov Sterk may be the chance to get to know a diverse group of neighbors at building social functions and in the hallways each day.

"I like seeing the diversity and many talents and backgrounds of our neighbors," she said. "We are exposing our kids to people of different cultures, ages and life stages, all while riding the elevator together."

At Magellan Development Group's 28-acre Lakeshore East community, a mix of rental and privately owned properties in Chicago's Loop, residents vary from CEOs to college students to empty nesters, said community relations director Vanessa Casciano. Families with children are a growing part of this melting pot.

Building a community Casciano began her job by organizing book clubs and pub crawls, which were popular with adults, but she quickly saw demand for kid-centered activities. Now, a well-attended play group meets twice each month in one of the development's party rooms, and children take swimming lessons at indoor and outdoor pools at Aqua, a mixed-used building with a hotel, rental properties and condos.

This fall, a preschool opened on the ground floor of Magellan's The Tides apartment building, and more than a dozen residents have enrolled their young children there, Casciano said.

"We really want to make it a community here," she said. "We're not a developer that's going to build one development and be gone."

In north suburban Lincolnshire, the 62-unit Lincolnshire Place on the Village Green condominium development has attracted couples ready to downsize, but who still have a child at nearby Adlai E. Stevenson High School. Divorced parents who share custody of their children have also purchased units, said its developer, Helen Weiss.

Bedroom and bathroom sizes are "as large or better than" many single-family homes, Weiss said. Families also like the floor plans, which allow teens to have their own bathrooms and private space away from their parents' rooms.

Susan Zolno and her husband moved to the community in June after selling the Long Grove home where they had lived for 16 years. Their family includes four adult children. Although her youngest child, 21-year-old daughter Rachel, initially wasn't pleased to have her parents leave the neighborhood where she had lived since childhood, she grew comfortable in the new, 2,300-square-foot condo after spending the summer there, Zolno said.

Rachel has her own bathroom and bedroom, and an on-site storage unit holds the trophies and other childhood mementos from her old room.

After many years of living in an isolated suburban development, the Zolno family is happy to be able to walk to restaurants and coffee shops, Susan Zolno said.

"The first thing my 24-year-old son did after we moved in was walk to Starbucks, just because he could," she said.

### **Cultural attractions**

Easy access to cultural attractions, restaurants and parks is a prime attraction for families who live in condos. Kiyoko Binosi, sales executive at Trump International Hotel & Tower Chicago, said the building's close proximity to Millennium Park, museums and Navy Pier is enjoyed by all residents, but particularly those with children.

"We don't keep track of how many children live here, but I see them coming and going all the time," she said, adding that many residents also host grandchildren for visits. Children who live in the building or visit relatives who live there enjoy the gym and pool. Teens can participate in on-site yoga or Pilates classes, she said.

Susan Rafaeli, her husband and their 13-year-old twins have lived in Trump Tower since it opened in 2008. Rafaeli said her condo's three-bedroom, four-bath layout gives family members sufficient space. Each room has its own bathroom and is separated from the rest of the condo by an 8-foot corridor. When her children have friends over, they have privacy, and she has a noise buffer.

Living in the building provides "the opportunity to enjoy yourselves beyond your home," Rafaeli said, whether that means having a drink in the bar or biking on nearby park trails. Rafaeli's daughter uses the ballet barre in the workout facility to practice dance moves, and the pool provides "another thing to do on a wintry day."

The Rafaelis are such fans of the property that they will host their children's coming bar and bat mitzvahs there.

"It's something their friends will remember their whole lives," Rafaeli said.

### **Play dates**

Jenny Whitney, who lives in Dearborn Tower in the South Loop with her husband, Freeman and their three young children, also likes being close to Chicago landmarks. Whitney said her kids are spoiled with frequent trips to the Shedd Aquarium and Navy Pier, far different from her own childhood.

"When I was growing up in the suburbs, we went to the Shedd once a year on a field trip," she said.

Her kids also have easy access to play dates with children who live in the building and a special bond with their doorman, who coined nicknames for each of them.

The downside of condo living: lack of storage space. Whitney scrutinizes each toy and book she brings into her family's 1,100-square-foot residence.

Lack of storage space is also a challenge for Shilov Sterk, who has stacks of belongings in her parents' basement in the suburbs. As much as her family enjoys condo life, "We're at a crossroads right now" and considering a move, she said.