



# A PLACE TO CALL HOME

By Joan Rupert-Barkley

A place that once was furnished with desks, blackboards, basketball nets and lockers is now furnished with modern kitchens, walk-in showers and a big screen TV. This place is called BonLen Place. It is an independent living facility for people age 55 and over, and is owned by Bonnie and Leonard Belanger.

When student enrollment declined at North Edwardsburg Public School at 903 County Road 21 in Shanly, the school was closed and the kindergarten to Grade 3 students were sent to a larger school in Spencerville. The school had been built in the late 1960's and was vacant for about 2 years when the Belangers, who lived only 5 kilometers

away, decided to purchase and renovate the building. By the time the couple purchased the building, the play structure, flagpole and a portable classroom had already been removed from the 6-acre property.

The only souvenir the Belangers saved from the school was the plaque. However, they were quick to note that they gave the plaque to nearby neighbours who lived in the original schoolhouse that was built in the 1800's.

"My wife and I were born and raised in the country and we did not want to retire in the city. This here is country living," said Leonard Belanger.

The couple, who owned and operated L.J. Home Improvements for 25 years, were ready to get out of business and live a more relaxed life. They already owned an apartment building in Spencerville, so being landlords was not new to them. The renovation project took approximately seven months, at which time new windows, plumbing, heating, wiring, and insulation, among other things were installed. A 20 ft. by 20 ft. sunroom was added to one end of the building. The Belangers live in one of the units.

"We did keep some of the windows from the school, they are the windows in the sunroom," commented Bonnie.

The original floor and the cement block walls in the hallway were also kept from the school and part of the gym floor can be seen in the utility room.

The owners believed there was a need in the rural community for an adult independent living facility. They said there were a lot of people who did not want to retire in the town because, like the Belangers, they had lived their entire life in the country.



Although BonLen is centrally located to places like Cardinal, Spencerville, Prescott and Kemptville, Mr. Belanger explained that transportation to these places to get groceries or attend church does not seem to be a barrier for the residents who do not drive.

"People have told me that their son or daughter-in-law would pick them up when they lived in town because they could not walk to church because it was too far," commented Belanger.

In fact, when they first advertised for residents, they received approximately 50 applications from various locations. Belanger did add that residents are always eager to help each other if any transportation problems do arise.

They do stress however, the facility is an independent living facility. There is no health care provided and everyone prepares their own meals.

BonLen Place has a total of eight 2- bedroom suites and one 1-bedroom suite.

The one-bedroom suite is a handicap unit. Each suite has stainless steel appliances, cherry cabinetry, walk-in tub/shower units and is carpeted. There is a storage room in each unit.

There is a large fully furnished community room that includes a fireplace, sitting area, 119 inch satellite projection TV, stereo system, piano, craft and games area, as well as a full kitchen, complete with dishes and dishwasher. This room is also backed up by



a generator for emergencies. Residents are encouraged to book this room for family gatherings, game nights or whatever activity draws a crowd. The community room was originally part of the gym when the building was still a school.

Other special features in the facility include; a common laundry room with high efficiency washers and dryers that can be used free of charge. There is an abundant amount of parking at the front of the building. The parking at the back of the building can accommodate motor homes, 5th wheelers and boats during the summer months. There is also a large barbeque and outdoor activity/relaxation area and a security entrance. The building is also smoke-free and small pets are allowed.

All the apartments are on one level and this gives the residents lots of opportunity

to mingle with each other. The Belangers describe the residents as a community that looks out for each other. Whether they are enjoying a movie in the sunroom, or having a glass of wine at the table or sitting at the front entrance watching the snow accumulate outside, the residents truly enjoy each others company. One resident looks after planting the flowers around the property. Some of the residents are from as far away as Ottawa and still work part time.

The monthly rent includes heat, air, hydro, satellite TV and internet. The only extra cost is telephone and Bell Expressvu. The entire building is wired for internet. **LH**

For more information on BonLen Place contact (613)341-1195 or visit their website at [www.bonlenplace.com](http://www.bonlenplace.com).