

Tahoe mom-child celebrate Mother's Day every day

By Michele Lynn

When Bonnie Clarke needs some motherly advice, she doesn't have to travel far. That's because she and her mom enjoy the unusual perk of having retired to the same community.

The two women are neighbors at ABHOW's Tahoe Senior Plaza in South Lake Tahoe. Mom has lived in the community for three years, while her daughter, also named Bonnie Clarke, became a resident in January with her husband, Paul Devers.

"It was a big decision to move here because I had a very busy life in New Hampshire, with 50 years of friends and 50 years of being in the same church," says the elder Bonnie, who was widowed in 2000. She put her name on the Plaza's waiting list in 2005 so that she could be closer to her three children, who live in California and Nevada, and moved into the community in 2009.



Two generations living retirement days at Tahoe Senior Plaza. Photo/Provided

Seeing how much her mother enjoyed life at the Plaza, the

younger Bonnie – who goes by Bonnie Del to avoid confusion – put her name on the waiting list for the community when she turned 62 last year. She and her husband received the news that they were in just a few months later.

It's unusual for a mother and daughter to live in the same retirement community, says Lauren Shaham, vice president of communications at LeadingAge, ABHOW's national professional association. She says that she hasn't heard of another family pair like the Clarke women.

Mother and daughter see each other daily, going on group outings together or checking in for a chat.

"If my husband is asleep or out of town, I might wake up in the morning and give her a quick call, or walk down the hallway and up the stairs to see her," says Bonnie Del. "We'll sit there and start to talk and then, all of a sudden, it's two hours later."

They have always been close.

"Throughout my life, most of my friends were surprised at the relationship that my mother and I had," says Bonnie Del. "We would do hikes together, go on shopping excursions, and bake together every Christmas."

When they lived in New Hampshire, a favorite tradition was their annual "Miss America trip." They would drive to Maine and spend the weekend "shopping, eating out, and then watching the Miss America pageant on a good television in a nice hotel," says the daughter.

They still enjoy many of the same activities.

"Just last night," says the mother, "I was in the living room area working on a puzzle when (Bonnie Del) came in. I asked her if she was going for a walk, and we went out and did at least four miles together."

Those regular walks are especially meaningful.

“It gives us the opportunity to do enough talking to solve problems,” Bonnie says. “I can talk to her and help her with the things that are troubling her.”

Bonnie is extremely active and youthful. In fact, says her daughter, “I’m only in my 60s and I’m trying to get in shape so I can keep up with my mother who will be 90 this summer. I had to start dyeing my hair so people would stop thinking that I was the mother and she was the daughter.”

Bonnie says that she is always excited when she’s out in the hall and her daughter appears.

“Just having her close has made me feel more secure,” she says. “As I’m getting older, it’s a comfort knowing that if anything happens to me, she’s there.”

Bonnie Del shares those feelings.

“In these years, it’s just nice to be able to spend time with her,” she says.

Both women share a strong faith and worship together every Sunday at Sierra Community Church in South Lake Tahoe.

“God opened the door for us to be together,” says Bonnie Del. “This is where we’re supposed to be at this time of our lives.”

Michele Lynn works for ABHOW, the company that runs the senior center.