

5 years young: Mirabella at ASU keeps redefining lifelong learning

By Tiffany Gonzalez, ASU News
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[Mirabella at ASU](#) celebrated its fifth anniversary on Jan. 22 with a progressive dinner party for its nearly 400 residents, marking how far the university-based retirement community has come since opening on Arizona State University's Tempe campus in late 2020.

Mirabella puts ASU's lifelong learning commitment into practice by integrating older adults into campus life. Its on-campus location gives residents access to ASU classes, activities, events and campus initiatives, as well as connections with students.

The community also creates opportunities for students to learn from and work alongside the people who call Mirabella home. Residents invite ASU students to lunch, mentor them, evaluate their projects and collaborate with staff at the ASU Child Development Lab on early learning.

Residents have also established a scholarship fund for students who work at Mirabella.

"It's an adventure," said Terrie Sanders, retired Arizona attorney and part of one of the first groups of residents at Mirabella. "What it means to me to be here is that it is special."

Mirabella opened on Dec. 28, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its grand opening took place on Zoom as the first residents followed strict safety protocols — staying in their units, wearing masks and having meals delivered. Despite the challenges, Mirabella quickly became a thriving, in-person community.

[Lindsey Beagley](#), Mirabella at ASU's senior director of lifelong university engagement, has been instrumental in shaping this vision, ensuring residents remain connected to the university's mission of learning and discovery.

"I feel that we've reached a point at which both internal and external stakeholders fully understand what this project is about," Beagley said.

Mirabella offers intergenerational and resident-driven opportunities, including pen pal exchanges, [Friendship Bench initiatives](#) and collaborations with ASU projects such as SolarSPELL.

"Usually there is somebody holding the key to your personal fulfillment and growth, whereas in this model, (residents) are responsible for co-creating, self-determining their experience," Beagley said.

For Karen Busch, 82, that sense of purpose and intellectual engagement drew her to Mirabella. Busch spent 30 years as a university professor, worked with the Peace Corps and owned a rehabilitation center before retiring.

“I’ve always been tied to a university,” Busch said. “My husband was a professor, and I always worked at a university. So I wanted to be in some place where there was a lot of intellectual stimulation.”

Busch moved to Mirabella on Jan. 6, 2021, after living in Michigan and visiting several retirement communities.

“People can get together and play cards, go to the gym or the pool anywhere,” Busch said. “But that connection to ASU is missing in most other places, as well as the team members we have: Lindsey, Becky and Sigourney.”

The Mirabella resident services team includes Beagley, Sigourney Schaffer, manager of the ASU Engagement Office at Mirabella, and Becky Owens, campus experience coordinator. The team is dedicated to assisting residents with campus life and bringing ASU programming to Mirabella.

“Early on, I had to make the case for faculty and students to get involved in our community and to come to our community,” Beagley said. “But now we have so many inquiries from faculty and staff who see the value of collaborating.”

New residents continue to move in, finding ways to learn and connect as Mirabella’s programs evolve.

Ron Hemmer, a retired agricultural economist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, moved to Arizona in 1990 and recently sold his patio home in Tucson to live in Mirabella.

“I’ve never been that social of a person, and I’ve been retired for quite some time now,” Hemmer said. “I’ve already got three dinners scheduled with neighbors in one week. I even already met my instructor for next semester’s class. I’m not used to this.”

Hemmer echoes a theme residents frequently mention: a stronger sense of community and connection at Mirabella.

The connections and Mirabella’s fast-paced, community-driven lifestyle attracted Kathie Zurfluh and David Scott to Mirabella during the pandemic after relocating to Arizona from Washington state. Both are former teachers — she taught elementary school and he taught high school — and they often invite students and professors to lunch when Zurfluh is not taking one of her seven classes.

“We like getting to know people who are lifelong learners. I know a lot of us talk about the community, but it’s just different from other retirement places. We have so many activities and choices,” Zurfluh said.

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One chance meeting over a love of dogs ended up forging an intergenerational circle of support between an ASU engineering student and two Mirabella at ASU residents.

In 2025, Mirabella earned two major honors: the ASU President's Award for Principled Innovation, recognizing employee-led projects, and the Generations United Intergenerational Innovation Award for creative approaches to connecting generations.

"When we get an award like intergenerational innovation, it means that we have succeeded in stitching together generations in meaningful ways," Beagley said.

5 years at a glance

In 2024, Mirabella at ASU became the first certified, university-based retirement community in the nation.

There have been 14 [artists-in-residence](#) since Mirabella opened. The program allows ASU graduate students in the School of Music, Dance and Theatre to live at Mirabella in exchange for weekly performances and activities on site; the program earned the 2024 LeadingAge Arizona Best Practices Award.

Residents have donated about \$500,000 for scholarships and awarded 38 scholarships to ASU student employees working at Mirabella.

Since launching the Friendship Bench in 2024, 66 residents have been trained in the Friendship Bench program, reaching 1,394 people on campus.

Residents contribute an average of 16.3 volunteer and mentorship hours per resident per week to support ASU programs, classes and campus initiatives.

Mirabella's occupancy grew from 40%–50%, to 93%.

In total, 96% of the units are reserved.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Mirabella at ASU residents Bill and Sandy Miller pose for pictures during the community's fifth anniversary celebration on Jan. 22. The facility currently has 350 residents and is at 96% capacity. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Mirabella at ASU resident Ruth Jones gets a new ASU Sun Card from Lindsey Beagley, the director of lifelong university engagement at ASU, upon moving into her new home during the opening of the community on Dec. 28, 2020. Photo by Charlie Leight/Arizona State University



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Gallery



Tom Dorough, Mirabella at ASU's executive director, chats with guests during the fifth anniversary celebration of the retirement community on ASU's Tempe campus on Jan. 22.



Artists-in-residence Michael Zheng and Grace Templeton perform at Mirabella's fifth anniversary celebration while resident Mae Rugg observes.



Guests wait for their pictures to be taken during the fifth anniversary celebration of Mirabella at ASU on Jan. 22.