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**A 'golden opportunity': Excitement abounds over BHP takeover of Boulder's Golden West senior apartments**



Carol Gittes, seen during a break from Pingpong on Aug. 7, said she and other residents at Golden West Senior Living in Boulder had become accustomed to a more caring and attentive staff under previous management. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)



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Carol Gittes has lived at Golden West Senior Living for about two years and in Boulder for most of her life. She has family close by, she's in good health and her days are filled with activity. Visiting with her friends and taking the bus to the grocery store are highlights in her day. Gittes and many other residents at Golden West will tell you they love where they live. It's a social community of people who enjoy a full calendar of organized activities such as mid-day trips to the opera, in-house fitness classes, discussion groups and the popular Wednesday afternoon Pingpong games in the penthouse.



Sheldon Link, left, and Carol Gittes play Pingpong at Golden West Senior Living on Aug. 7. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)

Quite a few people, especially those who have lived there a while, will also tell you it's been a difficult couple of years. As Golden West has fallen on hard financial times, services and staffing at the complex have taken a hit, and people there say the sense of community doesn't feel the same as it used to.

Resident Kendall Scroll, who has lived there since 2016, said new management in the past few years has cut services, and costs and rents have gone up. The dining service also was discontinued. All these changes soured quite a few people on the experience of living there. But there is hope that a coming change of ownership and management could bring the start of a new chapter at Golden West. Boulder Housing Partners, the local public housing authority, entered a letter of intent to become the new owner and manager of the affordable senior apartment complex at 1055 Adams Circle in late June and is expected to take ownership within the next month or so.

Irene Hillson, a former Golden West employee who now delivers groceries there through [Cultivate](#), a volunteer service organization for seniors, has seen the facility at its best and its worst. And she's also seen and felt residents' optimism about the changes ahead. The video player is currently playing an ad.

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“I think a lot of them feel, when you’ve hit bottom, there’s no way to go except laterally or up,” she said.

### **Rough years for Golden West**

With two towers containing 253 independent living apartments, Golden West accounts for nearly 40% of the low-income senior housing in Boulder, and income-qualified seniors 62 and older are eligible to live there. The complex used to have a 56-unit assisted living facility called The Mezzanine on-site, but [it was closed in March 2023](#).



The Golden West Senior Living Apartments are seen in Boulder on July 16. (Matthew Jonas/Staff Photographer)

According to the [Golden West website](#), prospective residents can make no more than 50% to 60% of the area median income for their household size, a statistic set annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For one person in 2024, [BHP’s website](#) says 50% of the AMI is \$51,100, and 60% AMI comes to \$61,320.

To this point, Golden West, a private company, has owned and managed the facility. Residents have spoken glowingly of the facility’s management and staff — up until a couple of years ago. Doris Lederman, who’s lived at Golden West for seven-and-a-half years, said it used to be a “wonderful, vibrant place” and hopes it can get back to being that way. She recalls a time when there were many more staff and activities at the facility.

“At one time, we even had college students who would be here from 5 to 11 at night. If you needed help, they would assist you,” she said. “That was a nice thing, too. Don’t misunderstand,

things are lovely now, but I remember the old days, and we sit around and talk about the old days and how wonderful it was.”

A few changes over the years began to steer Golden West down a different path. In 2017, the apartment complex received a federal low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) from the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority. Golden West received almost \$25 million to put toward renovating the facility, which has been open since 1965 and was aging.

“We were at a point where we really needed to do some significant renovations to the towers. And we, in the process, also improved the assisted living building,” John Torres, executive director of Golden West, said.

The major renovations plus the start of the COVID-19 pandemic combined to create the “perfect storm” that the complex never fully recovered from, Torres said. During that time, occupancy was declining in the towers, as well as the assisted living building.

Eventually, The Mezzanine assisted living facility was losing money every month and it was not feasible for the company to keep it anymore, even though it was one of the only assisted living centers in Boulder County that accepted Medicaid. The 33 residents living there were given about 60 days’ notice that they needed to leave, which came as a shock to many.

The dining program, which many residents used, also had to be shut down. Lederman said that was a huge change for the community, in no small part because many residents don’t cook and instead rely on outside services such as Community Table or Meals on Wheels to get food.

“If food doesn’t appear because of a snowstorm, they’re out of luck. If we had our own food here, there wouldn’t be any problem,” she said. “People would be happy to bring their parents in, if they knew that there was food.”

In addition, Lederman said, the loss of the dining area made the community feel less convivial and more “fractionated” because people no longer gathered to have meals.

### **A change in management**

On top of all that, Golden West finally lost the ability to manage its own facility. The LIHTC program comes with strings attached because it lets private investors receive tax credits in exchange for subsidizing low-income housing. And according to Torres, the investors who funded Golden West’s tax credit wanted a management company to run Golden West, so Golden West was removed as the manager of operations and replaced with Silva-Markham Partners of Denver.

Silva-Markham, which still manages the facility, has been wildly unpopular with residents. Golden West used to have staff 24 hours a day, especially when the assisted living facility was still running, but now, there are no nighttime staff, leaving residents afraid for their safety and unsure of where to get help at night if they need it.

Karen Valentine, a resident at Golden West for six-and-a-half years, said it’s been “a really hard two years” since new management took over. She said it seemed their goals are to “fill apartments and cut staff” and that Silva-Markham “seems not to know how to work with this age group.” The whole atmosphere at Golden West feels different now, she added.

Gittes said people at Golden West had been accustomed to more caring staff who were more attentive to elderly residents’ needs.

“A lot of it is psychological, feeling cared for,” she said.

And Lederman said Golden West also used to have a dedicated person to organize activities for residents, but it no longer does. Overall, she said, it feels like a lot has changed under the new management.



Doris Lederman, a resident of Golden West Senior Living, poses for a photo on July 31. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)

“We have to do much more on our own, so to speak. We had many more activities available to us which we don’t have now, because Silva-Markham is not really able to participate in extensive resident events. So we do it on our own, more or less. It’s not quite the same. And we find that we’re somewhat adrift,” she said.

A representative from Silva-Markham could not be reached for comment.

#### **The road ahead: A ‘golden opportunity’**

Torres, of Golden West, said talks about a possible merger or affiliation with a larger organization began last year, after the assisted living facility was closed down. He said it was “exciting” when BHP, which builds and maintains low-income housing as well as managing the rental assistance voucher program in Boulder, emerged as a contender.

“They have the strength, financially, and the reputation and the experience with low-income housing to really keep the property going. So we made that decision” to hand the facility over to BHP, he said.

Ownership of Golden West will be transferred to BHP. The housing authority isn’t paying any money for the facility, but BHP is taking on operations as well as all of Golden West’s debt and LIHTC requirements. There is hope that BHP might redevelop the assisted living facility.

“People are very excited about this transition,” said Torres. “I think it makes a really strong statement to the community that Golden West is here to stay.”

BHP also sees the deal as a major gain. Jeremy Durham, executive director of BHP, said adding Golden West’s 253 apartments and empty assisted living facility will help the housing authority scale up to better serve residents and constituents. Between Golden West and several other affordable housing developments in the pipeline, BHP is anticipating 33% growth within the next year.

“Golden West has been a community-serving organization for (almost) 60 years,” he said. “... And BHP will just carry that torch forward without an eye toward profit. Our eye is toward serving the people that live there. And so that’s what we will be working to do.”

Durham said the deal is close to being finalized, and he expects BHP to take over management within a few months after closing on the property.

Residents who spoke with the Daily Camera gave universally positive feedback about the coming change. Gittes said she has always enjoyed life at Golden West and doesn’t feel things are bad now, but she “hasn’t heard one negative thing” about the new ownership.

Said Kendall Scroll, “I’m hoping things will be better (under BHP). Maybe we’ll get the dining room back.”

While Lederman has had thoughts of moving elsewhere, she said she loves being at Golden West and is excited for the future.

“I’m very happy to live here. I think Boulder Housing Partners is going to turn everything around,” she said. “We’re behind them 100%.”

And Hillson of Cultivate believes BHP has a chance to set the standard, not just locally but nationally, for how to run a senior living facility.

“BHP has a golden opportunity here, pun intended, to really set the standard for how a senior living facility can be run — to make the residents really live golden years, to really feel like they matter, and they’re cared for, and they’re loved.”

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