

New Home at Wheaton 121 “In the Cards” for Local Couple

Posted by Taylor Johnson

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WHEATON - For Craig and Rita Christensen, the number 21 has always been a lucky one. Each has a birthday that falls on the 21st, and they were married on the 21st, too. So when Rita saw a sign advertising luxury apartment rentals at Wheaton 121 just as the couple began plans to downsize, she knew it was meant to be.

“My husband and I had been living in neighboring Carol Stream in a larger house, and since our children were grown, we thought it was time to consider a small place,” said Rita. “I commute daily into Chicago from the Metra station along Front Street in Wheaton and saw the sign announcing a luxury apartment community coming soon. And when I saw the name – Wheaton 121 – I knew that “21” meant we had to check it out.”

So the Christensens joined the community’s preview list and were among the first to see its floor plans – and also among the first to sign a lease.

“We could tell it was going to be a great development, so we signed a lease for a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment before the building was even built. And once we were able to see the completed community and move into our new apartment, we were not disappointed,” Rita said. “The quality of the construction and finishes is very impressive. And we also quickly noticed how energy efficient our apartment is. Even with the winter we’ve had, we have barely used our heat.”

Developed by Chicago-based Morningside Group, Wheaton 121 is located at 121 N. Cross St. in downtown Wheaton. The six-story development offers 306 luxury apartments ranging in size from 558-square-foot studios to 1,509-square-foot three-bed, two-bath plans. All homes feature 9-foot ceilings, granite countertops in the kitchens and baths, stainless steel appliances, kitchen islands, wood floors, ceramic tile in the baths, high-end plumbing and light fixtures, individually controlled gas forced-air furnaces and central air-conditioning, in-unit washers and dryers, and private outdoor space.

Wheaton 121 also offers several amenities, including a second-level courtyard with a heated swimming pool, BBQ stations, fire pit, lounge areas, a dog run and a bocce court. The building also offers an upscale community room with a catering kitchen, separate business center and conference room; a state-of-the-art theatre room; and a fitness center and yoga area.

Additional features include a concierge service, heated indoor garage parking with elevator access to units, security monitoring cameras, controlled entry access, resident package receiving, on-site maintenance staff, car wash and tire fill station, dog washing station, heated indoor bike storage, and individual storage lockers for each unit.

“The amenities were a big selling point for us,” noted Rita. “I appreciate having the fitness center right downstairs as it makes it easier to get in an early morning workout. And we’ve even taken advantage of the community room to host our family’s Christmas party.”

Rita also added her five-year-old grandson will enjoy the outdoor pool when it opens this summer.

However, her favorite amenity at Wheaton 121 is the location. “I love having the train right out my front door

for my commute or going into the city on weekends. And we've also enjoyed all of the shops and restaurants in downtown Wheaton. There is no shortage of things to do, and with the V.I.P. program offered by Morningside Group, we even enjoy extra discounts."

The V.I.P. program, developed by Morningside Group, offers exclusive discounts to Wheaton 121 residents at many downtown Wheaton businesses.

Rita said she and her husband also like the sense of community at Wheaton 121. "The staff is wonderful and very outgoing, and our neighbors are all very friendly," she said. "The management team hosts parties every month or so and they have been a great way to bring all of the neighbors together, as there is a wide variety of people living here."

David Strosberg, president of Morningside Group, said the range of floor plan options – 16 in total – contributes to the diverse mix of residents. "The large plans are great for families, the single-level living is appreciated by empty-nesters, and the modern studio and one-bedroom plans appeal to professionals seeking an alternative to living in Chicago."

He also noted Wheaton 121 offers lofts zoned for live/work occupancy with private, street-level entrances. "It's a unique offering for those who have their own home-based business or practice, like a photographer, attorney or insurance agent."

Wheaton 121 is steps from the Metra station, Prairie Path trail, library and Adams Park.

For more information, visit www.Wheaton121.com or visit the leasing center and decorated models located at 121 N. Cross St. in Wheaton. The building is open Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m.; and Sunday from noon until 5 p.m.

About Morningside Group:

Founded in 1993, Morningside Group creates premier multi-family, retail and mixed-use developments in cities throughout the Midwest. The diversity of Morningside's mixed-use development portfolio has given the company broad experience in a wide variety of applications. The firm has developed residential communities, retail centers, office space, museums, public transportation facilities, parking structures and public plazas. As a vertically integrated organization, in-house expertise ranges from planning and architectural design to leasing, property management, and construction management. For more information, visit www.MorningsideUSA.com. Village trustees unanimously approved final plans for the project May 13, in an anti-climactic non-event that had been foreshadowed for months through various preliminary approval decisions.

They also approved a \$4.9 million note to the developers in tax increment financing money – from increased property taxes that will come in only as a result of the development – to pay infrastructure and other costs that theoretically would otherwise prevent the property from becoming profitable.

Here's how the TIF funds are split up: about \$2 million for traffic improvements; \$200,000 for an "entryway feature;" \$760,000 for relocating Zengeler Cleaners and \$1.9 million for site preparation for the retail portion of the land.

The TIF payments were approved earlier by local school districts and other involved taxing bodies.

Even now, after the formal approvals, however, there are a few more approvals yet to be made. The bank and bread store, which, unlike the other tenants, will own their own buildings, haven't finished their planning, Nort-

man said. Trustees had previously approved zoning variations for the buildings' drive-throughs and other zoning changes conceptually, and weren't worried May 13 about letting that go until later.

A few other items are also yet to be approved, including the Northbrook "entryway feature." The Northbrook Appearance and Planning commissions differed over its look, and more meetings will be scheduled to come to a conclusion.

The development agreement between the village, Crossroads and its partner, Morningside Group, requires a decision within 60 days.

Another incompletely-approved facet of the project is the placement of sidewalk bollards to prevent errant cars from injuring shoppers.

The doomed Center of Northshore, on basically the same property, also was approved, in 2008, despite missing facets of project paperwork. But that project never got a penny of the \$2.1 million in TIF money agreed upon because the developer did not live up to the agreement then in place, similar to the one Village Attorney Steve Elrod drafted this time.

"Among those conditions is that the developer acquires the property, that all of the construction loans be in place, and at least 75 percent of the retail space be pre-leased," Elrod said May 13.

Nortman said May 15 that all the financing is in place, and that all but 4,500 square feet of retail space is pre-leased.