

It's a mother-daughter affair at Cherry Blossom Cottage

By Kelly Moyer-Wade
For Lifestyles Northwest

Passed down from one generation to the next, Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center, 11179 SE Cherry Blossom Dr., retains a nurturing, family oriented atmosphere and proves it's not just another assisted living facility.

It is a crisp day and several residents of the Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center are gathered in the front living room, talking to friends and taking in the morning sunlight. Outside, bent over a patch of new spring blossoms, 83-year-old Ruby Griffin tugs at unwanted weeds. Griffin's son founded this business nearly 15 years ago and her granddaughter manages the facility. Her presence adds to the feeling that family is always welcome here.

On the surface, with its onsite nursing staff, individual apartments and common dining rooms, Cherry Blossom Cottage

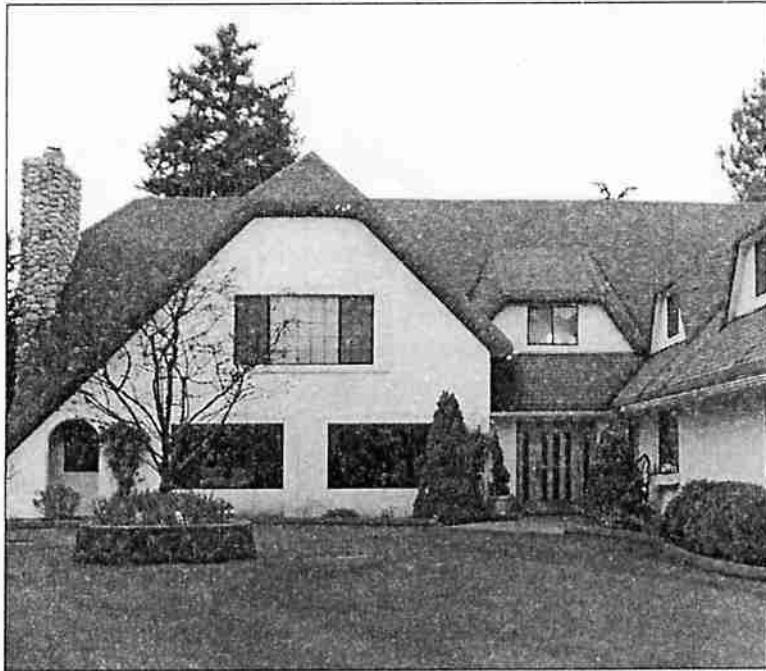


Photo Kelly Moyer-Wade

Owners of Cherry Blossom try to make their residents feel at home.

could be any assisted living facility in Portland. But a closer inspection reveals an unmatched personality.

"When my parents opened Cherry Blossom Cottage, they wanted it to have a very warm, nurturing atmosphere," said director Rebecca Meadowcroft. "They tried to make it feel like a home and the goal was to provide care to people who needed it with as much dignity as possible."

Meadowcroft, 25, took over the business' daily managerial responsibilities three years ago, after her mother, founder Sylvia Griffin, and was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Since then, Meadowcroft has struggled to

prove that she has what it takes to run the family business, look after the well-being of nearly three dozen residents, be on call all day and night and still retain her sanity.

It was the mid-1980's when Meadowcroft's parents first broached the idea for the Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center and assisted living facilities were a relatively new concept in America.

For Dr. John Griffin and his wife Sylvia, a registered nurse, the fusion of independent living and assisted care was a natural conclusion.

"My father started to see, in his practice, that there were a lot

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of elderly people who were losing the ability to do simple things. They needed more help than a retirement home could give them but they weren't ready to be in a nursing home," said Meadowcroft. "My parents' goal in opening Cherry Blossom Cottage was to provide a place where people could make a lot of their own (living) choices."

Twelve years old at the time, Meadowcroft saw her parents dream become reality and actually lived for a summer at the southeast Portland assisted living facility.

"To keep the costs down, my father continued with his medical practice and my mother ran things here (at Cherry Blossom Cottage). She was also taking care of four kids at the same time. Now, when I think about everything she was doing, I'm amazed," said Meadowcroft.

Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center proved to be a successful venture for the Griffins. They doubled the number of cottages from 20 to 40 within a few years and were able to finance college for all four of their children with the profits.

While in college, Meadowcroft imagined her future might be in broadcast journalism — or any-

thing that would take her away from her family's assisted care business.

"This wasn't what I wanted to do," she said. "But then, during my junior year in college, my mom was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Two of my brothers were doctors and my other brother was going to be a teacher. I was the only one who didn't really have a major plan at that point."

Meadowcroft returned to



Rebecca Meadowcroft

Portland from her college in Walla Walla, Wash., and spent the summer of her junior year working at her family's business. Realizing that her mother wasn't up to the task of running

an assisted care facility, Meadowcroft was faced with a major decision to allow the business to be sold or push aside her own plans to keep the facility under family control.

"I didn't want to make that choice," she said. "But I went



Ruby Griffin

back to college for my last year and I decided that I wanted to do this for my mom. We are commanded to honor our parents, so how could I go wrong?"

Her first week on the job was enough to send any new manager packing. There was an impromptu fire inspection, a

resident crashed his car into the building and then the police showed up looking for an employee accused of murder.

"It was so crazy. I went home every night that first week crying," said Meadowcroft. "But throughout all of this my parents never doubted that I could do

this, that I could make it work."

Today,

Meadowcroft knows she made the right decision. Business is good, residents seem happy and the young manager has learned to delegate responsibility.

"I came to the point where I could have made the choice not to do this anymore but I stayed for my staff and for the residents. I found that I wanted to take care of them. I wasn't just doing this for my parents," said Meadowcroft. "My employees are like an extended family and I chose to stay for them."

Having made this choice, Meadowcroft has brought in some extra help, including a

marketing director, Maggie Terrell, a director of nursing, Molly Fleischmann and a caregiver supervisor, Barbara Van Westrienen. The newfound freedom gives Meadowcroft a chance to live a relatively normal nine-to-five life and adds a new dimension to the business.

As for the future of the Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center, Meadowcroft and her staff are keeping the Griffins' dream alive. Residents are encouraged to think of the assisted living center as their home and can decorate rooms with their own colors, furniture and style. Guests are welcome and residents are free to come and go as they please. The staff is ready to handle minor medical emergencies and trained to ensure quality end-of-life care.

The facility is not equipped for respirator-dependent residents or those needing major medical attention. "But there's not much we can't do as long as the resident's family is willing to be involved," said Meadowcroft.

Cherry Blossom Cottage Retirement Center is located at 11177 SE Cherry Blossom Drive. Meadowcroft encourages people to take a tour and talk to her and her staff before choosing an assisted living facility for themselves or their loved ones. For more information, contact Meadowcroft at 503-256-9777.