In terms of senior living facilities, the Hinsdale area's King-Bruwaert House isn't typical by any means—and that was by design. First of all, the expansive, whitewashed brick Georgian mansion and surrounding acreage and cottage homes are a beautiful throwback to a bygone era. The homes and gardens are meticulously maintained. A greenhouse is filled with fresh flowers, grown from seedlings by residents, and they will soon adorn the tables in the main dining room. There are staffers at every turn—nurses, physical therapists, and maintenance crew workers. It almost feels like there's more staff here than residents.

This was all the vision of Suzanne King, a Chicago socialite who late in life met (at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair) and married Edmond Bruwaert, the French Consul General to the United States. They traveled throughout Europe, where they learned a lot about health and senior care. They never had children, and after her husband’s death in 1927, Suzanne King-Bruwaert became focused on helping women find a place for long-term care as they aged, influenced in large part by the places she visited in France and elsewhere that would eventually serve as models for the King-Bruwaert House.

Suzanne King-Bruwaert died in 1928, but not before detailing in her will her plans for a home for “women of genteel birth with little or no means.” Her nephew and other appointed trustees carried out her plans, purchasing the 35-acre land on which King-Bruwaert House sits today. Using her $2.5 million estate (the equivalent of $35 million today), the King-Bruwaert house was constructed and completed in 1933, welcoming its first residents in April of that year.

It’s been 83 years since the King-Bruwaert House opened, and though many things have changed at the facility, the focus on exceptional service has not. (KB House still operates as a nonprofit, as well.) Terri Bowen joined KB House two years ago as CEO, and she plays a major role in determining how to improve the home and services without compromising the founders’ original vision.

“We know we need to modernize our activities, programs, services and facilities,” she says. “My role has been to mold our team and lead them in new directions.”

She and her staff spend a lot of time focusing on how resident needs are changing. KB House has 100 residents living in the main home for continuous care (assisted living, memory care, and skilled nursing), and more than 100 people living in on-site independent living units both in the Woods at King-Bruwaert House cottages and at Godair Park, a nearby senior living community that KB House acquired almost 40 years ago. “We're trying to meet people's individual needs now,” says Bowen. “We have five residents who are more than 100 years old, and they have very different needs from our 60-year-olds.”

Bowen and her staff say that the KB House population is more focused on active living, exercise, and pursuing hobbies than ever before. Julie Ryan, who serves as senior director of admissions and community development, has been with KB House for more than 12 years. “Our residents are very interested in keeping in contact with what's happening in the community,” Ryan says, especially since most of KB’s residents have lived in the Hinsdale area for a large portion of their lives. KB House provides transportation for residents to attend local events and take part in charitable activities in town.

KB’s latest plans to modernize include construction on a new bistro across from the main dining area that will have both indoor and outdoor seating, designed to be like a French bistro. The main house will also be getting a facelift by way of a new front entrance, which has not changed much since the house opened in 1933. “It's charming but not very practical,” Bowen says. Construction begins in August or September, and it will likely take six months to complete.

“We're very conscious of making sure we keep things historic in nature,” Ryan adds, and that—coupled with KB House’s insistence on exceptional, individualized service—continues to help the facility stand out among the rest. “We understand that for our residents, and where they are now, that there's so much more to them. They tell us our stories, and we have the time to listen.”

King-Bruwaert House is located at 6101 S. County Line Road in Burr Ridge, 630-323-2250, kingbruwaert.com.