



MAKERS

Duracare Seating Strong in Senior Market

FURNITURE NEEDS TO BE STURDY, SAFE, STYLISH AND EASY TO CLEAN AND MOVE. DURACARE SEATING IS ALL OF THOSE.

by Rob Kirkbride

At a time when the office furniture market has matured and the “hot” residential or residential/commercial market is showing small gains, the assisted living market is experiencing a compound annual growth rate of more than 19 percent from 2018-2027, according to a report on the sector. The global assisted living market is expected to reach \$13.74 billion by 2027.

Yet there are few options for furniture, especially when residents at assisted and senior living facilities demand more stylish and comfortable surroundings. Enter Duracare Seating, which specializes in the market and makes a growing line of furniture that ticks off all the (specialized) boxes needed to make products for the segment.

Furniture needs to be sturdy, safe, stylish and easy to clean and move. Duracare Seating is all of those. And it comes from a third-generation family owned business committed to quality and product design.

Before you drop everything in your market segment to chase the assisted living business, understand it has different challenges than those in office furniture, health care, hospitality or education, according to Abe Praver, national sales manager.

“Our chairs have to be geared toward the sensitivity of seniors,” said Abe Praver, Duracare president. “I may be able to sit in the chair, and it’s comfortable for me, but I’m 5 feet, 10 inches tall and 180 pounds, as opposed to the typical senior who’s not. We always have to come out with styles, comfort and design that are built for the senior living market and specifically for the seniors themselves.

“We may come out with the new product, and to the naked eye it looks like a typical chair when in actuality, it’s not typical because it’s been tested for comfort, size (of seniors).”

Sharp edges are one of the issues the company needs to be careful with, Abe Praver noted. “The typical banquet chair (may have) a sharp edge, which is not really sharp, but it has to be soft for a senior living facility,” he said. “It can’t even be in the middle so to speak. Those are the typical things we look out for specifically for senior living as opposed to maybe a banquet chair.”

Safety and function are paramount, but styling is an increasingly important consideration for senior facilities. Clunky wooden furniture that would look more at home in the 1980s is out, Abe Praver said.

What Duracare Seating has seen lately are clients who want something that looks contemporary and modern. They don't want something that will give the space "a grandmother look." A modern look isn't designed to help make the seniors feel young, but they do want a space that looks young, new and refreshed.

Duracare Seating works in aluminum, but has products that use the technology behind a three-step heat transfer process to give its aluminum chairs a wood-grain appearance and feel of wood with better durability and a lighter scale.

"The aluminum wood look frame is something fairly new," Abe Praver said. "It is something that we came out with for the senior living market. When you have an aluminum chair, it's more of a clean look. It's more straight. It's not as curvy. It's not as traditional looking. It's more modern looking."

The aluminum wood-look frame looks like wood, but it's not. The laminate over the aluminum gives it the wooden look.

"We've had customers walking by our booth when we do various trade shows, and we've asked them to comment about our product," Abe Praver said. "They told us they're already familiar with wooden chairs. They may be looking for something different. We told them 'Absolutely, this is not a wooden chair, it's an aluminum chair that looks like wood.' They are quite shocked when they actually feel the chair. When they look at it more closely, and they see that it's not a classic wooden chair that they've been seeing for the last 30, 40, 50, years. They are surprised."

There's a reason Duracare Seating works in aluminum: It is more light-weight than wood. When you have staff at skilled living facilities or assisted living facilities moving the chairs in and about, it makes their jobs much easier. They're not too light — no one's tipping over — but it gives workers and residents a greater ability to move the chairs.

Another advantage to aluminum is its durability. No hardware connects the chair's joints together, so there's less of a chance it will come apart. Everything is welded. Welding is stronger than a screw. Over time the chairs will stay intact.

The company's products are getting better in terms of the quality of the weld. When Duracare entered the senior market about a decade ago, the welding on the frames was more visible. Today, the welding is invisible.

"We shave down the welding so well and ... finish it with the laminate on top," Abe Praver said. You literally cannot even tell that there's any welding there at all. It's literally a ghost. That's how it is. That's one of the reasons that clients, when they look at the chair, they think it's a wood chair



because they can't even determine where the welding is. How is the frame being held together? That's another great point in regard to an aluminum chair to a wooden chair.”

Another very popular feature of Duracare Seating products is that most of its dining chairs have stacking capabilities, said Jack Prawer, Abe Prawer's brother, who is the company's chief executive officer. “It's not always needed in the field, but many times in a dining room or an activity room or a common area where they need to move them over to the side or put them in storage, it comes in handy,” he said. “I would say at least 75 percent of our dining chairs have the stacking capabilities, and it makes it very handy for the facilities.”

Duracare offers 17 different wood grain finishes and 12 powdercoat finishes. The company takes its design cues directly from the architecture and design community, Jack Prawer noted, which, in turn, is informed by the hospitality market.

“A lot of our styles and features that we offer are based off advice from designers,” he said. They see a trend of designers trying to incorporate more of the hospitality into senior living. “Instead of offering institutional products, they're trying to make it more hospitality geared, even though it's in a senior living facility,” Jack Prawer said. “That's where these chairs come in as well because they're obviously more hospitality geared. It's just the fact that they're with arms, and they're incorporating them into into senior living use, which has become very popular.”

Duracare Seating is finding a great niche in the senior care facility markets. Jack Prawer said there are “tens if not hundreds of facilities at any time being built.” And that is new construction only; not counting renovations.

“Obviously, we feel that this industry will just keep on growing,” he said. “We feel just endless possibilities ... as this market continues to grow and grow yearly.” **BoF**