

Senior Living

It Takes a Village

By Marilyn Campbell
The Connection

When Penelope Roberts, 73, of Alexandria, Virginia, had knee replacement surgery last month, she knew she would be out of commission for several weeks. Although Roberts is divorced and doesn't have any children, she had a network of support in place to drive her to medical and physical therapy appointments, pick up prescriptions and even return a library book.

Several years ago Roberts joined At Home In Alexandria (AHA), a local not-for-profit group, built on the "village" model of community-based aging. Villages are membership-based, nonprofit organizations, run by both volunteers and paid staff, that offer access to services from a network of volunteers like technical support, household maintenance and repairs, social activities and educational opportunities.

Need a new light bulb in your dining room chandelier? Want to see a play or discuss Jane Austen? A village volunteer can help.

"I bought patio furniture and after I struggled for an hour-and-a-half putting together one chair, a volunteer came out and put together all of my patio furniture in almost no time," said Roberts. "These are small things, but if you can't do them for yourself, you want to feel that you can call upon somebody and not feel embarrassed about it."

AHA is one of more than 48 villages around the Washington, D.C., area, according to the Washington Area Villages Exchange (WAVE). The movement, which began in Boston in 2002 with Beacon Hill Village, is on the rise as more seniors express desires to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible.

Volunteers offer services like home repairs and maintenance, transportation, social health and wellness programs, social and educational activities, and fulfill other day-to-day needs, enabling individuals to remain connected to their communities throughout the aging process.

"We can work on a leaky faucet or short-term pet care, we can take care of short-term plant watering needs," said Cele Garrett, executive director of AHA. "If they need IT support or if they're trying to get their DVR set up ... we can help with that." Garrett says the Washington-area has the highest concentration of villages in the country.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS are one of the most vital aspects of village communities. "It's really important for people not become isolated if you want to maintain a healthy outlook on life," said Sheila Moldover, communications chair, Potomac Community Village in Potomac, Maryland. "Social connections add flavor to your life."

In fact, village officials name the social



Photo courtesy of Potomac Community Village

Steve Lorberbaum, the owner of Assisting Hands of Potomac, speaks to members of the Potomac Community Village about aging in place.

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— Sheila Moldover

component as one of the most important aspects of their programs. "Our members want to get out and meet people and enjoy themselves," said Roberts. "That is a critically important role that we play."

Activities include trips to local museums, performances, concerts, and lunch and dinner engagements. For example, the Lake Barcroft Village in Fairfax County, Virginia, hosted an author talk with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Pat Sloyan, who discussed his book, "The Politics of Deception: JFK's Secret Decisions on Vietnam, Civil Rights and Cuba." Later this month, the Arlington (Virginia) Neighborhood Villages Opera Buffs group is hosting a happy hour and discussion of Verdi's "Othello." The Potomac Community Village is hosting a theater party at the Round House Theater in Bethesda, Maryland.

"Our social events are a great way to stay engaged and active because it's easy to get out if we've already made arrangements for

you," said Garrett. "All you have to do is sign on. You don't have to find an activity or someone to go with."

THE SERVICES OFFERED vary from village to village and are tailored to meet the specific needs of the local community. For example, in Mount Vernon, Virginia, transportation is a concern. Barbara Sullivan, executive director of Mount Vernon at Home says that her volunteer drivers provide an average of 100 rides to seniors each month.

"There are virtually no sidewalks and there are hills," said Sullivan. "Transportation is a huge issue for seniors who want to stay in their homes and remain active."

Roberts is in charge of the volunteer committee for AHA. As both a volunteer and a recipient of village services, she recognizes what a difference those who receive training and offer their services free of charge can make. For example, she assisted a fellow member with small tasks that were a big help. "I was able to put clothes in the washing machine for her, take a book to the library and change bedding that she couldn't change," said Roberts.

"One day soon we'll be making requests for the same help that we provide," said Steve Nelson of Del Ray, Alexandria, an AHA volunteer. "We've met such incredibly terrific and fascinating people that we never would have met otherwise. That's a great motivator."

"We have volunteers who can help with organizing, decluttering or cleaning out a closet," said Garrett. "What would a neighbor or good friend help with? They'd help you with these things, but you wouldn't ask a neighbor to help you to the bathroom."

Coming Up in Potomac

Next General Meeting: Thur. Oct. 22, 2015, 7 p.m.

Free and open to all

"Making Your Community Livable for All Ages" with Stephanie Firestone, Program Director of the Livable Communities Project, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Almost 20 percent of Potomac residents are now age 65 and up, and most of them want to age in place in their own homes.

How to help make this happen and make our Potomac community more livable for all ages, from children to seniors, is the focus of a free program on Oct. 22, at 7 p.m. presented by Potomac Community Village. The topic is "Making Your Community Livable for All Ages," and the speaker is Stephanie Firestone, Program Director of the Livable Communities Collaborative of the National Association of Area

Agencies on Aging.

Key to this is taking a hard look at transportation, since Potomac is very much a car-centric community.

The program, which is free and open to all, is part of Potomac Community Village's series of monthly meetings.

Bolger Center, 9600 Newbridge Dr., Potomac, Room 111, Osgood Building. Use Parking Lot #3; and enter the Osgood Building's side door directly from the parking lot.

Information:
info@PotomacCommunityVillage.org
Telephone: 240-221-1370

PCV's Appraisal Roadshow Sunday, Nov. 1, 2:30 - 5 p.m., Potomac Community Center Free and open to all.

Do you own an inherited piece of jewelry, a silver tea service, an antique clock, piece of art, or some other heirloom you're curious about? On Sunday, November 1st at 2:30 p.m., you'll have an opportunity to get a professional appraisal of its value and expert advice on what you can do with it.

Presented by Potomac Community Village, the Appraisal Roadshow will take place at the Potomac Community Center, 11315 Falls Road, Potomac. During the show, a gemologist from Paradigm Experts and a guest generalist appraiser will educate the audience about the market for these personal valuables while they assess the age and value of the items brought in. No more than one item per person appraised. Those wanting an appraisal must send a description and photo of the item to Roadshow@PotomacCommunityVillage.org no later than Wednesday, Oct. 28, in order to allow time for the appraisers to research items in advance.

Admission to the Roadshow is free, and is open to all, but it will help us if you reserve in advance so we have enough seating and refreshments. For more information about this exciting event and to reserve your seat, please contact Roadshow@PotomacCommunityVillage.org or 240-221-1370.

www.PotomacCommunityVillage.org