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It takes a Village to reach out to seniors

Transportation is only one option provided by volunteers



Frank Toomey of Milton gets help from Village volunteer Donna Hutten as he finishes volunteering at Lewes Presbyterian Church in Lewes. Toomey, 88, has become to rely on Village transportation services because he rarely drives due to poor eyesight. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO

By Ron MacArthur - February 27, 2017

The Greater Lewes Community Village lives up to its motto of "Neighbors Helping Neighbors."

Story Location:

16686 Kings Highway
Lewes Delaware

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With a network of more than 80 trained volunteers, more than 115 senior citizens benefit from the services offered by the organization operating from an office on Kings Highway.

While transportation is the foundation of the Village, services go way beyond to include assistance with household chores, minor handy-work, visits and respite, running errands, telephone check-in and even help with household electronics and computers.

The Village also offers a book club, luncheons, "Village Happening Sessions," health programs, day trips and laughter yoga classes.

Executive Director Jackie Sullivan says the mission behind the Village is to keep seniors 55 years and older in their homes living independently as long as possible. Village members pay a \$500 annual fee and receive up to 25 hours of service a month offered Monday through Friday.

Transportation is provided by volunteers for a variety of reasons, including medical appointments, veterinarian appointments, trips to pharmacies and grocery stores, and social and cultural events.

"Some still have their keys, but their driving is limited," Sullivan said. "They can reach a point where they stop driving and let us do it."

She said 96 percent of seniors over the age of 70 want to stay in their homes. But aging in place can present problems – transportation and isolation top the list.

Sullivan said that's where the Village can step in. "We can help people get out and socialize and avoid depression that can set in," she said.

At the same time, she said, it's important that members remain in charge. "It's whatever they want. We want them to be the boss. We tell them they are not losing anything but paying for a service that volunteers are glad to give them."

Sullivan said a good example is shopping. Some members appreciate volunteers who help in the store while others only require a ride to the store. "Services are one-on-one, and what takes place depends on the individual," she said.

Frank Toomey, 88, relies on Village volunteers to drive him to appointments and to Lewes Presbyterian Church, where he volunteers twice a week. "The volunteers are amazing and wonderful," he said. "I miss driving, but I'm not going to take a chance to hurt someone or myself. I'm trying to get used to it."

Sullivan said technically, drivers are supposed to limit trips to 25 miles one way for appointments and 10 miles one way for shopping. But, she said, there are times when medical trips go beyond those limits.

Currently, the Village serves seniors in the Lewes and Milton Zip codes, but Sullivan said plans are in the works to expand the program. In addition, she's working to recruit more volunteers.

The Village, based on Beacon Village in Boston, began offering services in November 2013. The nonprofit organization is managed by a board of directors and advisory council.

For more information, phone 302-703-2568 or go to greaterlewescommunityvillage.org.

The important role of Village volunteers

The Village website contains the following information for its volunteers:

Transportation program: Driving members to medical appointments, social or cultural events; hairdresser or barbers; grocery stores; and running errands. You will assist with grocery shopping, clothing and gift shopping, and picking up



prescriptions.

In-home support: Minor household organization; pet care; plant care; assisting with managing accounts and balancing checkbooks; and minor household chores.

Friendly visits: Provide conversation and companionship; offer respite for a caregiver; make check-in phone calls; assist with puzzles or play games; share stories, photos and memories.

Home maintenance: Change hard-to-reach light bulbs; hang pictures; check smoke alarms; move outdoor furniture; handle simple repairs; and do minor yard work.

Technology: Minor computer and electric gadget assistance; set up email and simple computer tasks; and program thermostats, TVs and remote controls.

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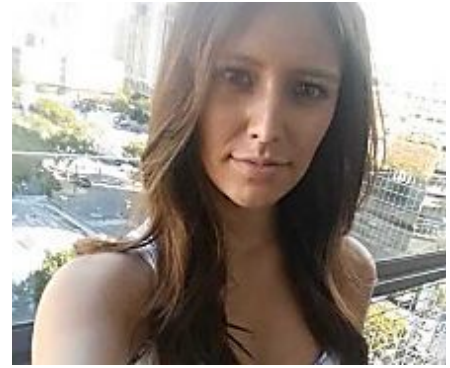
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