Jeanne Clark Scarmon: Virtual village for seniors can make a difference

July 20, 2017

Do you want to stay in the place you call home as you age? If you are nodding yes, you're not alone

About 90 percent of Americans 65 and older want to stay in their homes for as long as possible. Most do not want to rely on children,

Yet more than 25 percent of Americans live alone. Twenty-eight percent do not know their neighbors. And 33 percent have fewer friends than they did a decade ago.

How can we address these compelling trends? The Sierra Foothills Village, now in development, is part of a 15-year-old nationwide movement of "virtual villages" that is helping people remain safely and comfortably in their homes and communities as they age. Often, all that is required is occasional assistance with transportation, home chores, technical advice, shopping or other tasks.

Or an easy way to make social connections

Or help trying to understand and navigate the amazing array of resources that already exist in our community. As we age, our capacity or interest in finding neede resources can wane. We may already be relying on friends or family — sources of caring support that can diminish as we age. Local resources constantly change. It may be difficult to find help the ways we always have.

This is where villages can help. The Sierra Foothills Village is a nonprofit membership organization. It will know our changing local resources and serve as a membership organization. It will know our changing local resources and serve as a gateway, providing members with a single phone number or web portal to use when help is needed. The Village will know every member, keep track of requests and services used. It will also provide support for family or friends trying to help. It is there to offer assistance when a person decides he or she cannot or does not want to navigate local resources to find the help they need — by themselves.

The first village Reacon Hill began 15 years ago in Roston. This "silver tsunami" of energetic seniors were committed to maintaining their independence and reconstituting community. They ignited interest in a nationwide movement that is redefining what it means to age

Today, there are more than 200 operating villages in most states of the nation. There are another 150 villages, like Sierra Foothills Village, in development. Sixty villages are in California, where a grant-funded coalition is developing materials, resources and support to help villages throughout the state.

How will Sierra Foothills Village fit in? Every day people are discovering our website. now win seirar routinis vinage in in zevery day people are uscroening our website thtp://www.sierrafoothillsvillage.org (http://www.sierrafoothillsvillage.org), where you can learn how our village will work. You can sign up for our email list. You can volunteer, fill out surveys and lend your ideas and talent to this important effort.

Strong support has been received from the Village to Village Network (http://www.vvnetwork.org (http://www.vvnetwork.org)), a national organization that offers mentoring, forums and ready-to-use materials to establish a non-profit village. These resources are being shaped to the unique

culture of our community.

Villages are very much in the news. They have been featured on PBS, the New York Times, and in books, such as Dr. Atul Gawande's "Being Mortal," where he discusses how villages are improving the quality of lives of their members. Dr. Gawande will be celebrating Beacon Hill Village's amazing journey during a special live presentation on Sept. 25 that will be streamed to member villages and their guests. Visit our website to get more details about this event as it approaches.

The strong beating heart of all villages are volunteers, a good fit in Nevada County communities that richly support volunteerism. We are looking for helpers in many areas to join our growing volunteer corps to advance the emerging village

Once we "launch" and have members, we will need volunteers to provide services — from transportation, grocery shopping, and pet walking to IT and gardening help. Neighbor helping neighbor to improve quality of life.

Aging is a fact of life. By percentage we live in a county with one of the highest aging populations in the state. According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, by 2030 one in five Americans will be over 65, representing 20.3 percent of the population. We need to plan now for that future.

Please join us July 25 at the Madelyn Helling Library in Nevada City, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., to learn more about Sierra Foothills Village We will be sharing an overview of the village, our progress to date, hear testimonials from established villages via their members, staff and volunteers, and more.

Jeanne Clark Scarmon is a member of Sierra Foothills Village.



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