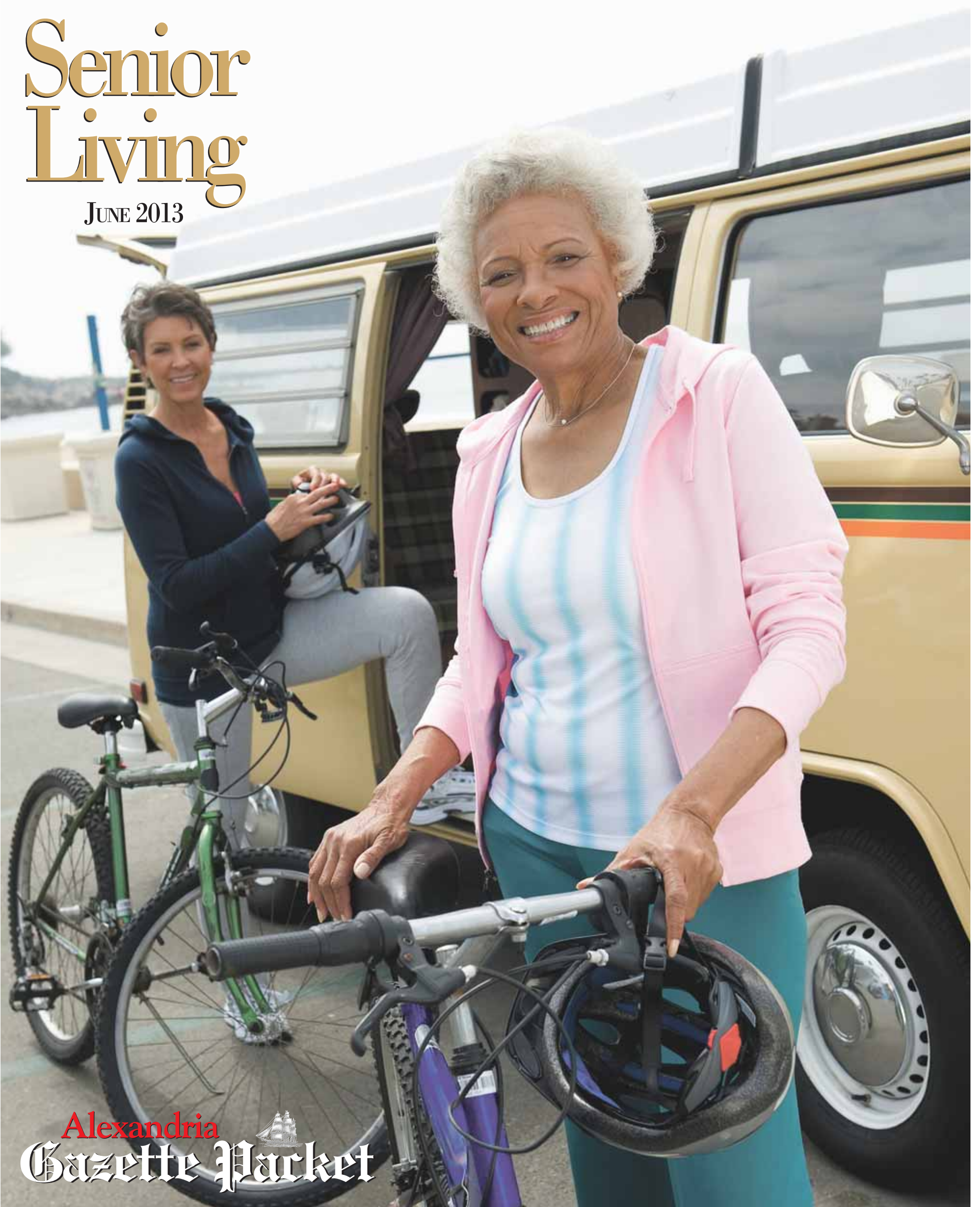


Senior Living

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Senior Living

Senior Services of Alexandria Provides Resources and Education to the Aging

BY COURTNEY M. MCSWAIN

If you ask the folks at Senior Services of Alexandria, a nonprofit organization that provides direct services and programs to the city's aging population, Alexandria is a great place to be a senior.

Both Janet Barnett, Senior Services' executive director, and Mary Lee Anderson, SSA's Senior Resource Center director, agree that Alexandria's government and nonprofit partners are committed to caring for the city's aging population. "We are a very caring community," said Barnett. "Alexandria is a good place to be and there are services available...it's a win-win for all ages."

SSA itself provides many of those services. Founded in 1968, SSA operates on an annual budget of approximately \$600,000 to provide direct support to Alexandria's senior citizens. For instance, SSA administers the City of Alexandria's Meals on Wheels program, which provides fresh meal delivery to senior citizens seven days a week.

The City of Alexandria provides subsidized meal delivery to medically certified homebound residents who are at least 60 years old. Those who are not homebound but have a need for home deliveries can pay out of pocket for the meals.

Additionally, SSA raises funds for services not covered by the City, such as special holiday-themed meals sponsored by the Ronald M. Bradley Foundation that are privately catered and delivered to Meals on Wheels participants during national holidays. One of the goals Barnett set in 2007 when she took the helm of SSA was to expand the Meals on Wheels delivery from five to seven days a week, which it now is.

ANSWERING THE NEED for transporta-

tion for seniors, SSA works with the City of Alexandria to administer the Department of Transportation's Paratransit program that provides transportation services for 1,600 residents with disabilities. The program is open to all ages and provides reduced cost car service throughout Northern Virginia.

Clients meeting medical criteria can receive rides within the City of Alexandria for \$3 each way and rides for travel outside of the city limits in Fairfax County and Arlington for \$5 each way. SSA takes reservations and coordinates scheduling for the program, which operates each day of the week.

SSA has also launched several of its own outreach initiatives, including its Friendly Visitors program, which it officially began in October 2012 after identifying companionship and socialization as one of the unmet needs of aging residents. Through the Friendly Visitors program, volunteers are matched with a senior citizen, and they visit for at least



Janet Barnett

"We retrieve so much from the seniors themselves. ... To hear their stories and for them to give back to us through words and teachings, that is a real gift."

— Janet Barnett

helps them continue to stay connected to the community. In addition, seniors are able to share their knowledge through stories about their life experiences, something that Barnett personally takes to heart.

"We retrieve so much from the seniors themselves. They come with so much experience and so many stories to share...they've lived their lives and they've had experiences that we haven't had. To hear their stories and for them to give back to us through words

and teachings, that is a real gift," Barnett said.

Not only providing services, but making sure seniors are aware of them has become

SEE SENIOR SERVICES PAGE 6

Senior Volunteers Help All Ages

BY COURTNEY M. MCSWAIN

Before heading to the home of the 83-year-old woman she visits each week, Diane Stoy calls to make sure her friend is up for a visit. The answer is almost always yes.

Stoy is a volunteer with Senior Services of Alexandria's Friendly Visitors program, which was established to alleviate isolation and loneliness among the city's aging population. Each week, volunteers like Stoy spend an hour with senior citizens building friendships and helping aging residents stay connected to the community. It's a program Stoy said she is privileged to be a part of.

Stoy began volunteering with Friendly Visitors because of her admiration for the care that Senior Services of Alexandria pro-

vides aging residents, especially those who are limited in their mobility. "[The program] tapped into a need that is often not addressed for those seniors who are homebound — to have someone to come and brighten their day, to engage in conversation [and] to distract them from medical concerns or their regular routine," Stoy said. Further, the experience is beneficial for Stoy as well.

"I look forward to the visit very much," Stoy said. "I have been able to build a friendship with a woman whom I admire greatly for her optimism and her outlook, despite her limitations." And as a senior herself, she is inspired by her friend's resilience. "Her ability to adjust to physical challenges and to illness is an inspiration. I think for everybody growing older is very scary," Stoy

one hour each week.

Since its launch, Friendly Visitors has provided one-on-one matches for 35 seniors and volunteers. According to Barnett and Anderson, the Friendly Visitors program helps alleviate loneliness for seniors and

said. Despite being bed-bound, Stoy describes the 83-year-old Alexandrian she has come to know as being clear and in control of her life. Plus, being around her imparts valuable lessons about appreciating in the small joys of life.

"We had a good talk about Memorial Day. Her family had a wonderful holiday meal together. They were able to get her out of her bed, and she was able to sit on the porch and enjoy the air and the comfort of her children," Stoy said. "Isn't that what life is — just these simple beautiful things?"

Bonding with her senior friend was something that came naturally to Stoy. As a self-described extrovert and organizational development consultant, Stoy has plenty of

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Senior Living

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Active and Prepared

Aging-in-place solutions aid senior's decision to stay put.

BY JOHN BYRD

"My mother spent the last two years of her life in a nursing home," said northern Virginia native Connie Sorrentino, who recently turned 70. "You never know what's ahead. I spent a couple of years looking at retirement homes, then decided that the immediate problem was adapting my current house so it's easier to use."

Sorrentino, who lives alone, practices yoga and observes a strict vegetarian and fish diet, said she has "no stiffness" and is quite active in local church and civic groups.

"Still, since I've decided to stay put, I'm making changes that will make it easier for me to sustain myself happily for years to come," she said.

Along these lines, the retired economist has been working with Mindy Mitchell, certified aging-in-place specialist at Burke-based Sun Design Remodeling, planning out the future of a home in Arlington she's occupied for more than 30 years. Recently, the design-build firm remodeled several rooms in Sorrentino's four-bedroom ranch; she was pleased with the outcome, and gratified to



PHOTOS BY BETH WALTERS

Counter high drawers instead of overhead cabinets; cabinets pulls and sharper more focused lighted are among the simple but effective aging-in-place solutions that have made it easier for Sorrentino to use her kitchen.

learn that the firm's expertise includes re-designing homes to meet aging-in-place requirements.

"We're seeing many more seniors exploring ideas that will help them continue to live independently in their own homes," said Mitchell. "Sometimes we're called in when mobility issues have become inescapable. But it's always easier when you plan ahead."

Mitchell said that an aging-in-place design is far more economical and practical when it's rolled into an already planned remodeling project — which is the course Sorrentino is following in the current makeover of her kitchen, several bathrooms and other parts of the circa-1950s rambler.

"I'm remodeling several high-use spaces; it's a plan that makes it easier for me to do



More

Sun Design Remodeling frequently sponsors workshops on Aging-In-Place solutions. Call 703-425-5588 or visit www.SunDesignInc.com.

Connie Sorrentino, 70, (center) re-introduces aging-in-place innovations into her kitchen and several bathrooms with Sun Design Remodeling's Mindy Mitchell (left) and designer Kim Kruskamp.

everything I need with minimal challenge," said Sorrentino.

Mitchell said that the changes can seem discrete to outsiders, but they "make all the difference in reducing the ergonomic exertions of daily life."

In place of overhead kitchen shelves, for instance, Mitchell is recommending counter-

high pull-out drawers for regularly-used items, reducing the need for out-of-reach overhead cabinetry. Small hard to grasp knobs will be replaced with cabinet pulls. Sharper, more concentrated lighting in key locations provides the visual support needed to move about confidently.

In two bathrooms, plans call for precisely located vertical and horizontal grab bars. The shower will have

a lower curve for easier access. Traditional and handheld shower faucets simplify bathing. The faucets themselves feature adjustable levers rather than knobs. The floor will be surfaced in non-slip tile.

"Working out the details is fascinating," Sorrentino said. "The best part, though, is interior design that perfectly integrates all these new features. I don't want the house to look 'senior-friendly'—just pretty."

More

Staff at Foster Remodeling Solutions periodically offer workshops on home remodeling topics. Call 703-550-1371 or visit www.FosterRemodeling.com.

blacked-out large sections of Fairfax County for five memorably hot and humid days.

"We were actually out of town when the power failed,"

said Rogers. "But when I walked through my front door two days into the outage, my generator was on, the house was cool, and all the electrical systems were working just fine."

The rest of the neighborhood was another story. "My neighbor's basement flooded when his sump pump stopped," said Rogers. "People were dealing with spoiled food, no lights, no phone — and no air conditioning during some of the hottest temperatures in years."

Ever the good neighbor, Rogers organized a relief effort at once, supplying power support where needed, even clearing refrigerator space so nearby friends could preserve their frozen foods.

"We'd invite neighbors to sit in the air conditioning, and watch the news or check their emails. We were like a local community center," he said.

The larger satisfaction to Rogers, though, is that his computer, internet and security systems continued to perform as usual. "It's a relief to know that you're connected to the outside world — especially in an area-wide emergency. Five days is a long time to be cut off."



Wanda and Ted Rogers in front of their remodeled home.

days a time without need for refueling.

"The call for a generator in a retirement dream home struck a chord with me" said Foster. "We have a sizable seniors clientele, so I've been steadily servicing the growing demand for this type of application — absorbing the learning curve just as the problems with the power grid have become ap-

parent to everyone."

In Rogers' case, Foster specified a state-of-the-art unit, one powerful enough to run all of his client's electrical needs for about a week without changing gas or oil.

And the timing couldn't have been more perfect. Shortly after the project's completion in spring 2012, the now-infamous derecho in early July

Finding Joy, Fulfillment in Golden Years

Mental health experts share factors that contribute to contentment.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

On most evenings, 96-year-old Dorothy "Dot" Brown can be found

playing Scrabble or a game of bridge. A retired nurse who relocated to Virginia from Pennsylvania 11 years ago, Brown makes it a point to walk at least one mile each day and takes two Zumba or low-impact aerobics classes each week. She attends services regularly at St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Annandale, volunteers her time for projects like cooking and serving meals for others, and says her wide circle of friends and close-knit family are her greatest sources of strength.

"I moved here to be closer to my daughters in Annandale, who are 68 and 71," said Brown, who also has five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. "My family is so important to me. We have so much fun together and now we all live within a half-hour of each other. There isn't a week that goes by that we don't get together."

While Brown partly attributes her well-preserved mental and physical fitness to genetics, she says her lifestyle and attitude also play a role. "You have to keep busy and active and you have to persevere," she said. "There are days when I don't feel like getting out, but I have to push myself. I am glad to be 96 years old and still able to walk without any help."

In fact, experts say many of Brown's daily activities are common among seniors who report contentment with their lives. "Everybody is unique, but overall happiness comes if people continue to do things that they have done over their lifetime that have brought them joy and strength," said Ioana Boie, Ph.D., an assistant professor of counseling at Marymount University. "Find out what brings you joy and happiness and takes you out of your routine."

FINDING A DEEPER MEANING in life and having a sense of purpose can also affect one's outlook. "Seniors are dealing with multiple issues like their own spirituality and what that might be," said Frederic Bemak, Ed.D., a professor of counseling and development at George Mason University in Fairfax. "One might ask: 'Who am I at this moment?' Have I done things that are in-line with my own value system and beliefs?"

Discovering new outlets for self-expression can lead to a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as well. "What someone does with their own creativity can be rich and fulfilling," said Bemak who lives in Fairfax Station. "Through physical activity and creative arts, seniors extend a sense of their creative selves that they might not have had time to do in their younger years."

Meanwhile, Brown is making plans for a weeklong summer vacation with her family. "There will be 22 of us in one house on the beach," she said. "I know we're going to have a great time."

STRONG FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS such as Brown's are another factor in one's overall sense of well-being. "Reconnecting with family members can bring happiness," said Boie. "That's also sometimes tricky because it can

bring up unresolved issues in the family. Long-lasting tension in the sense of premature loss. Try and work out unresolved tensions and issues with family members."

When frequent and meaningful contact with family members is not possible, Boie says that even family memorabilia can offer inspiration. "Create an album of memories and insights to share with future generations," she said.

Intimacy is also important. "If a person has lost their spouse and sex was part of their life, that is a big part of who they are and will impact happiness," said Boie. "Just because a person is older doesn't mean that they don't need to experience intimacy, although they might not experience it in the way a person who is 25 would. We should alleviate some of the tension around talking about this issue."

In addition to human social connections, relationships with furry friends can also gratify. "Pets can bring a lot of joy," said Boie. "It is a very rewarding relationship. I know people that are connected to a parrot or cat or dog."

Rogers' Retirement Dream

Aging-in-place remodel required a generator, much to relief of their neighbors.

BY JOHN BYRD

Ted Rogers, 73, recently completed a senior-friendly makeover to his home, with the help of a master builder to meet his often challenging technical requirements.

Rogers, a former Navy pilot, had lived in 18 houses all over the world before settling in a circa 1960s ranch in Vienna with his wife and children in the early 1980s. The traditional brick rambler had previously been owned by a local farmer whose family had worked a nearby spread for generations.

The house was conventional, but solidly constructed. Still, as Rogers and his wife, Wanda, settled into their 70s they recognized several aspects of the home that wouldn't be ideal in retirement.

"We were looking for long term comfort and security," said Rogers. "That meant the usual wish-list — upgraded kitchen, larger

master bedroom suite."

Then, too, the master shower would be a "roll-in" design, suitable for a wheelchair if needed.

Doors and hallways would be wider, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act specifications. There would be convenient grab bars near the tub.

"But I also insisted on a way to keep our systems operating in the event of a power failure," said Rogers. "We're a bit off the main road and have been through long outages. You want to avoid this kind of thing as you get older."

Complicating matters were several technical questions. For instance: what was the appropriate size and performance capability of a home generator adequate for powering the substantially enlarged home the Rogers now envisioned?

"The more I looked into it, the more I realized that there are a lot of issues with home

generators that have to be worked out between the contractor and the gas company," Rogers recalled.

"I was aware of plans like mine that hadn't worked well for the homeowner. I wanted enough power to keep the house running for days at a time, but the technology is still evolving and relatively few contractors have mastered it."

Then Rogers met David Foster, president of Foster Remodeling Solutions in Lorton, a veteran builder with a track record in home generator solutions.

"David came highly recommended, but it was meeting him that proved decisive," said Rogers. "His love of building impressed me. As we started walking through the house together, I could see that he understood my vision."

THE STARTING POINT: a 2,553 square-foot, three-bedroom ranch on two acres, and a conversation regarding the best options for accommodating a master bedroom suite, a spacious gourmet kitchen, a two-car garage with a second floor studio and a home generator adequate for powering everything for

Senior Volunteers to Help all Ages

FROM PAGE 3

experience building relationships with new people.

THE NEW JERSEY NATIVE was first introduced to Northern Virginia in 1974 when she and her daughter

“I have been able to build a friendship with a woman whom I admire greatly for her optimism and her outlook, despite her limitations.”

— Diane Stoy

moved to Arlington County and the working mother attended George Washington University. After receiving her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, Stoy relocated to Minneapolis, Minn., where she was offered a full-time professorship at University of St. Thomas.

There, she created a doctoral program in organizational development. As Stoy recalls, when she moved to Minneapolis, she knew no one. However, when she left

eight years later, she had a large community of friends, many of whom were the doctoral students she advised. “My students and I are still very close,” Stoy said. “Once you’ve gone through a doctoral program together, there’s a bond.”

After leaving Minneapolis in 2003, Stoy returned to Northern Virginia, this time settling in Alexandria.

“Over these 10 years, I have come to feel that it’s a wonderful blessing

to living in Alexandria.”

Stoy has solidified her connection to the city by volunteering with Friendly Visitors and multiple food banks. She also serves as a commissioner on the City of Alexandria’s Economic Opportunity Commission, where she represents the Parent Leadership Training Institute of Alexandria. The Parent Leadership Training Institute trains parents in civics and advocacy skills, and Stoy previously served as a facilitator for the program. She was recommended by the Parent Lead-



Diane Stoy with her grandsons.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANE STOY

ership Training Institute’s executive director Fay D. Slotnick for a seat on the commission because of her reliability and care for the city’s vulnerable. “I knew if there was work to do, she would do it and do it well,” Slotnick said.

STOY’S GENEROSITY and caring nature is also something that friend and fellow volunteer Linda James said drives Stoy’s inclination to constantly connect with people. James met Stoy while the two were

volunteering at the Christ House food kitchen in Alexandria. “We became fast friends,” James said. “There’s a drive in her to be professional and to serve whoever is in need at that time.”

Stoy herself sees volunteering as an extension of her vision of living in a community. “I very much believe in our city as a village of people who are here to live together and care for one another,” Stoy said. “To me, the definition of a community is that we pull together — those who have can give.”

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Senior Services Provides Resources and Education

FROM PAGE 3

an especially important goal for SSA. Through its Senior Resource Center, which has been operating for three years, SSA provides a call-in service that allows anyone to call in and ask questions about programs or resources available for seniors in Alexandria.

Receiving questions on issues ranging from Medicare to transportation and legal services, SSA’s Senior Resource Center has amassed information on a wide range of topics that it now tries to actively share with the community.

“We quickly found out that people were not aware of the resources available for seniors,” said Mary Lee Anderson. “We’ve

More

Visit www.seniorservicesalex.org or call 703-836-4414.

become more proactive in getting information out.”

TO MORE ACTIVELY SHARE information, SSA’s Senior Resource Center organizes a monthly Speaker Series featuring local experts who speak on topics like finding employment or avoiding financial scams.

The panel discussions, which are held at the Charles E. Beatley Jr. Central Library, have become popular within the community, garnering between 85-100 attendees,

according to Anderson. SSA also manages Senior Information Corners at each of the City of Alexandria’s public libraries, which are stocked with literature from the Speaker Series events as well as organizations like AARP and the National Council on Aging. Barbara S. Anderson, the immediate past president of SSA’s board of directors, said programs like the Senior Resource Center have been positive signs of the organization’s expansion.

“It’s been a wonderful experience to see the great strides that this organization has taken over the past five or six years. The majority of the programs that SSA had when I first started were really managing contracts for the City of Alexandria. We’ve really branched out in a number of areas to

providing direct services,” said Barbara Anderson whose second term on the SSA board of directors ends in June.

Making sure SSA continues to see steady improvement and expansion is something Barnett said she and her colleagues are deeply committed to because of the personal rewards they receive in doing their work.

“Personally, sometimes I feel like I get more out of this than the seniors get,” Barnett said. “It’s good to give back and that’s our job right now...it’s important for each generation to know the value of giving back and caring for those who came before them. It’s a wonderful feeling. We’re very proud of what we do.”

'Age in Place' to Satisfy Evolving Needs

BY JOSH BAKER
FOUNDER, BOWA BUILDERS

Your family may be approaching a transitional time in home ownership. Perhaps the kids have already moved out, or your "nest" is nearly empty as your last child contemplates going off to college. Or maybe you're craving a living space that is more comfortable and convenient as it becomes more difficult to move around. There are many reasons couples choose to "age in place," or modify their home to meet changing needs rather than purchase a new property.

WHERE THE HEART IS

Many people have spent years making memories in their home and have grown to be deeply connected to their neighbors and the property's ideal location. So instead of uprooting and leaving their home's rich history for a new property, couples are seizing the opportunity to transform their beloved home into a space that fits their specific short- and long-term needs. Sometimes this decision involves revamping existing space or incorporating a user-friendly residential elevator into the home. In many cases couples opt to add ground-level space in a way that complements the home.

A 'SUITE' ADDITION

The most common "aging in place" transition involves adding a more accessible second master suite to the first floor. This convenient change allows a couple to go about their day-to-day lifestyle without navigating stairs, yet still have ample space upstairs for visiting children and guests. This type of remodeling project is ideal because it is often unobtrusive, allowing homeowners to remain living in their home during construction with minimal disturbance.



Baker

DETAILS THAT MATTER

When making renovation plans, especially for a person using a wheelchair or walker, ensure there is enough space. Wider doorways and hallways, as well as large curb-less showers with grab bars and handheld shower heads are common features even for families without a disabled member. Other popular requests with noted value include

appliances with lever doors, varied countertop heights, and minimal steps through passageways. Creating a five-foot turning radius can greatly improve maneu-



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOWA BUILDERS

The addition of a main-level master suite with easy access to outdoor living space paves the way for aging in place and family entertaining.

verability for someone with limitations, but also feels a bit more spacious for the active family.

It's a reality that many people will endure some kind of temporary mobility challenge in their life, perhaps from surgery rehabilitation or an accident, so it makes sense to design your home in a practical, universal way to accommodate such unpredictable circumstances. If needed, first-floor laundry facilities and outdoor ramps also add convenience to the new space. With all of these changes, it is important to maintain the current look and feel of your home as much as possible, so consider choosing materials and colors that match the style of the rest of your home.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

In instances when a small lot or zoning restrictions hamper the ability to add on square footage for a master suite or other area, there are alternative options to help a family stay in their home. There may be seldom-used space on the first floor that can be reconfigured into a cozy master suite with the expert eye of a design-build team.

Regardless of emotional attachment to the family home, homeowners being involved in the remodeling process allows them to create a space that best mirrors their individual needs to age gracefully and with less stress. Transforming a home to accommodate the later years in life creates a place that is easier to manage without giving up the opportunity to reminisce, or surrendering the cherished role of hosting distant family and friends.



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