



# Senior Living

JUNE 2013

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# Senior Living

## Active and Prepared

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

BY JOHN BYRD

**“M**y 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 in Arlington, 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



PHOTOS BY BETH WALTERS

**Connie Sorrentino, 70, (center) reviews plans to introduce aging-in-place innovations into her kitchen and several bathrooms with Sun Design Remodeling’s Mindy Mitchell (left) and designer Kim Kruskamp.**

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 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,”

SEE AGING-IN-PLACE, PAGE 7

# Arlington Centers Keeps Seniors Active

Office of Senior Adult Programs promotes fitness for all aspects of senior life.

BY ASHLEY SIMPSON  
THE CONNECTION

**W**ith six different senior centers, senior citizens (considered ages 55 and older) of Arlington County have plenty of opportunities to exercise their minds, bodies and souls. From basketball teams to organized trips, Arlington is the perfect place for seniors to develop new interests as well as hone skills and hobbies they have been practicing for years.

“The Office of Senior Adult Programs has six senior centers, a strong sports and fitness program, travel, social events and volunteer opportunities,” Program Manager Cheryl

## More

To register for a 55+ Pass, call 703-228-4744, visit a senior center or online at [www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us), search ‘55+ Pass.’ For a complimentary copy of the “55+ Guide,” call 703-228-4721 or email [jmassa@arlingtonva.us](mailto:jmassa@arlingtonva.us).

Johnson said. “With the six centers combined the Office of Senior Adult Programs provides over 155 programs per week.”

Johnson said that her office is a part of the Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation.

She said although the centers are run by staff, an impressive number of volunteers keep the activities up and running.

“Last year we had 4,765 individuals registered with the OSAP and 308 volunteers,” she said.

Collaborating and partnering with other businesses and senior organizations like

AARP also keeps certain classes and activities available at the Arlington centers. The Office of Senior Adult Programs, for example, has a partnership with the Educational Theater Company to enhance arts appreciation classes.

Johnson said although all the sessions and events are well attended, the most popular activities are those that involve exercise.

“We either have instructors for fitness programs, qualified instructors that teach a variety of sports and fitness programs, like aqua, yoga, tai chi, Pilates, seated exercise, cardio boxing, mediation and zumba,” Johnson said. “One of our most popular sports is pickleball.”

Vicki Florian is one Arlington resident who takes full advantage of what her hometown has to offer.

“I am currently doing the co-ed volleyball at Langston-Brown [Senior Center] and that is fabulous,” Florian said. “My husband and I have done the spinning classes at [Thomas Jefferson Community Center,] as

well as the pickleball at [Thomas Jefferson Community Center]... We have really done a variety of stuff.”

SEE ACTIVE SENIORS, PAGE 6

**“Last year we had 4,765 individuals registered ... and 308 volunteers.”**

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# 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."

It was at this juncture that 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



Wanda and Ted Rogers in front of their remodeled home.

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 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 apparent to everyone."

## More

Staff at Foster Remodeling Solutions periodically offer workshops on home remodeling topics. Call 703-550-1371 or visit [www.FosterRemodeling.com](http://www.FosterRemodeling.com).

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 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."

# Happiness and 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."

Mental health professionals say the keys to happiness as one gets older include involvement in social activities or community and reli-

gious groups, maintaining a network of friends and regular exercise. Lisa Jackson-Cherry, Ph.D., a professor of psychology and chair of the department of counseling at Marymount University in Arlington, suggests "taking up a new hobby or seeking out a career change that brings a sense of meaning."

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."

**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 family can lead to sadness 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 ten-

sion around talking about this issue."

In addition to human social connections, relationships with furry friends can also provide gratification. "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. Animals can be warm, reassuring parts of an elderly person's life."

**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



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Dot Brown, 96, holds two of her great-grandchildren, Harper and Eamon. Mental health experts say that strong familial relationships contribute to one's overall sense of well-being.

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 at the beach," she said. "I know we're going to have a great time."

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# Arlington Centers Keeps Seniors Active

FROM PAGE 3

Florian said she belongs to other private recreation centers, but she finds that she gets better value at the senior centers of Arlington County.

"When I tell people what is offered, they are just astounded - they cannot believe what a good value it is," Florian said. "It is the best kept secret in Arlington. I know it's not a complete secret and that a lot of people know about it, but I am amazed it is not totally overrun."

Florian said her activity at private gyms has waned as her involvement with the county programs has increased.

"We do belong to another recreation center, but we just don't go there so much any-

more," Florian said. "The people are just so friendly and welcoming. With group activities, it is organized in a way so it gets you going there. With other places, you have to initiate yourself. With the senior centers, it is structured and that keeps you coming back when you find an activity to do and a time to go. It's just excellent value."

The cost of an annual membership for Arlington residents is \$20, and for non-Arlington senior citizens, the cost is \$45. People can register for classes online or in person, depending on the nature and popularity of the activity.

The six senior centers, not including the community centers, are Arlington Mill, Aurora Hill, Culpeper Gardens, Langston

Brown, Lee and Walter Reed. They are spread throughout Arlington. The newly renovated Arlington Mill is due to open this summer.

"So, you sign up with Office of Senior Adult Programs," Johnson said. "After that, you can come and partake in some of our classes at discounted rates. Some are free, some are fee-based. [The travel programs and trips are] another popular element. Then you get the '55+ Program Guide.'"

Florian said she has yet to find an activity for any age group that is not available in Arlington.

"You can definitely find challenging things for you, whatever your fitness level is," she said. "There are even basketball teams for 80-year-old women. It really helps you meet

your goals, keep you fit and keep you staying sociable as you age."

Johnson said the Office of Senior Adult Programs sets out to fulfill senior citizens' needs and keep up quality of life standards.

"We strive to provide Arlington seniors with programming and resources to stimulate their minds and talents, keep their brains and bodies active, make social connections, expand their horizons through learning and travel, and have fun," Johnson said. "The 55+ Guide' is 36 pages packed with programs, services and events, some free and some fee-based. We encourage people to go out and explore programs at different centers, meet new people and most of all enjoy life and have fun."

## Crafting a Wheel-chair Friendly Master Bath

Accessibility designer inspired by personal experiences.

BY JOHN BYRD

"We are seeing more seniors choosing to stay in their homes than ever before," says aging-in-place specialist Russ Glickman.

"This is partly a function of the fact aging-in-place solutions are improving, but

we're also learning — as a society — that good universal design well-integrated into the home can work for the entire family."

Glickman points to ramps and walkways perfectly integrated into porches and veranda; wheelchair friendly dining counters that double as serving stations and clean-up stations when needed; wider doorways

and grab bars that prove convenient for everyone.

Of course, there can also be challenging technical considerations. In an assignment completed just last month, the remodeler collaborated with an occupational therapist in designing a master bathroom for a Lorton-based senior who had recently transitioned to a wheelchair.

"Here we have an individual who has lived in the same house for 25 years," Glickman said. "His son occupies the same residence, so there was really no thought of moving into a nursing facility. My goal was to execute a plan that enables a capable mature male — who happens to be in a wheelchair — to live a fully independent life in his own home."

Glickman, who has operated Glickman Design/Build for 30 years, understands such household challenges first-hand. When his son, Michael, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy almost two decades ago, Glickman set about acquiring several certifications in universal design specialties; after 15 years of enabling seniors and people with disabilities, his projects are frequent award-winners in an increasingly high-profile accessible living category.

### More

Russ Glickman periodically offers workshops on accessible living and aging-in-place topics. Visit [www.GlickmanDesignBuild.com](http://www.GlickmanDesignBuild.com) or call 301-444-4663

A critical component to the just-completed Lorton assignment was designing a wheel-chair friendly master bath that allows the homeowner to perform all his bathing and toiletry routines without assistance.

The result is what is known in the industry as a "wet room"—a completely water-proofed space that includes a curbless level-access shower, conveniently located grab-bars, and counter space designed for easy wheel chair maneuverability.

The key to a curbless shower design is floor grading and tile layout, Glickman says. The floor is framed to support a very gentle slope that keeps water flowing towards the drain.

A weight-tested, pull-down metal arm assists the owner in moving back and forth between the wheelchair and the toilet.

The wet-room's finishwork features skid-proof ceramic tile, an ADA-compliant doorway, a sink with a wheel-chair friendly L-shaped counter surface and plenty of barrier-free room to move about.

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# 'Age in Place' to Satisfy Evolving Needs

BY JOSH BAKER  
FOUNDER, BOWA BUILDERS

**Y**our 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.



**Baker**

the home.

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



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.**

cause it is often unobtrusive, allowing homeowners to remain living in their home during construction with minimal disturbance.

## 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 maneuverability 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.

## 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

## 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 be-

## Active and Prepared

### More

Sun Design Remodeling frequently sponsors workshops on Aging-In-Place solutions. Call 703-425-5588 or visit [www.SunDesignInc.com](http://www.SunDesignInc.com).

FROM PAGE 3

said Mitchell. "Sometimes we're called in when mobility issues have become inescapable. But it's always easier when you plan ahead."

**"I'm remodeling several high-use spaces; it's a plan that makes it easier for me to do everything I need with minimal challenge."**

to do 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

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



**Connie Sorrentino**

**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.**

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 hand-held 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."



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