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Senior Living

Creating Livable Community For All Ages

County and local organizations seek to find and meet seniors' needs.

BY ALEX McVEIGH
THE CONNECTION

People over 55 make up approximately 30 percent of Fairfax County's population, making them the largest population group. Many of that group have chosen, or plan, to spend their later years in Fairfax County, but as they age in place, there are certain services and resources needed.

According to Fairfax County the population of those over 50 is expected to grow by 32 percent by 2020, so the county is laying out plans to accommodate those people now.

Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville) has been exploring the concept of "a livable community for all ages" by finding ways for people to age in place if they desire.

"The concept represents our goal to allow residents to remain independent for as long as possible regardless of disability or age, living in homes of their choosing," he said. "A livable community...will provide appropriate, accessible and affordable services."

A TASK FORCE was created after an October 2011 forum hosted by Foust to find out what the priorities and needs for people are as they age in place.

In McLean, this led to the opening of the McLean Senior Source, a help desk staffed



Students from the Reston Community Center's woodworking class donates handmade toys to Al Fatih Academy.

by volunteers designed to help seniors wade through massive amounts of information that can be found online.

"I think the Senior Source is a great idea, if only to have a real human being, not a recording or web page, help you separate

good, accurate information from scams," said Amy Davis of McLean, whose mother says she wants to remain in her home for as long as possible. "Having someone to talk to on the phone, or even at the McLean Community Center, is a huge step in making my family and I comfortable with making these huge life decisions."

In the summer or fall, an exchange will be created to allow direct interaction to a network of businesses and services designed for seniors.

Aging in place is a priority for many seniors in the area. Harold Irvin of Herndon said one of his top priorities is to be able to stay in his home for as long as possible while he ages, which means making sure his residence has the necessities needed for older people.

"My biggest concern with aging in place is making sure I'm living in a place where that's possible. That means the main parts of my house, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, need to be accessible without the use of stairs and other obstacles," he said. "I've also



Judy Seiff discusses options and needs for the McLean Senior Task Force during a meeting at the McLean Community Center.

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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-views 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.

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 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.”

More

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

blackened-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.”

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.”

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

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.”

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 at the beach,” she said. “I know we’re going to have a great time.”

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



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

Volunteering Gives Seniors a Sense of Fulfillment

Shepherd Center network provides opportunities for seniors to help others.

BY DONNA MANZ
THE CONNECTION

Kathy Tugendhat chairs the Adventures in Learning organizing committee at Shepherd's Center of Oakton-Vienna (SCOV). She teaches conversational ESL at Patrick Henry Library, one-on-one. On Wednesdays in the summer months, Tugendhat tells stories and leads songs for youngsters on the grounds of the Little Library. She sings with the Vienna Choral Society because she loves it. "It keeps me young," said Tugendhat.

She's also 80 years old.

"I like people," said Tugendhat, who taught at a bilingual school in Venezuela for 35 years before returning to the U.S. and Vienna in 1998, joining the Vienna Choral Society that same year. She came to Vienna because her son and her grandchildren live here. She's been active ever since.

"I can't imagine not being busy,"



Casey Tarr, Kathy Tugendhat and Jean Bastien, volunteers at the Shepherd's Center of Oakton-Vienna, man the SCOV tent at ViVa! Vienna! over Memorial Day weekend.

Tugendhat said, manning the Vienna Choral Society booth at ViVa! Vienna! on Memorial Day.

On the airwaves and in print, you hear that 60 is the new 40.

The problem with that analogy is that

most 40-year-olds do not have the breadth of experiences the 60-year-old does. Nor does the 60-year-old have the breadth of experiences an 80-year-old has. It isn't that you get smarter as you get older. It's that you have had a longer history of experiences.

Many seniors are aware of the wealth of knowledge they bring to the table. They share their experiences — work and life — with family and with others, younger and older, as well. They are friends in-need, and help when help is necessary.

ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE SHEPHERD'S CENTER build on a lifetime of experiences and skills.

"[Retired] people have more time to give, and they have experience caring for aging parents or relatives," said Barry Wickersham of Fairfax City.

Wickersham, who did intelligence work for the Department of Defense and the CIA for 38 years, serves as vice-chair of the Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke (SCBF). He's been doing volunteer work for SCBF for more than 6 years now.

"Volunteering gives you a sense of accomplishment, a sense of contributing," Wickersham said. "And you get to experience gratitude from those you are serving. Volunteering is an efficient use of your time."

Wickersham said he has two primary motivations for his work with SCBF, one altruistic, the other more selfish. The first, Wickersham said, is to provide services and assistance to seniors. The second motivation is more personal. "Some day, I may need these services for myself."

Some SCOV volunteers, such as Casey Tarr of McLean, say they have volunteered throughout their lives in some manner. Tarr uses her background in nursing in her role of SCOV's volunteer health advocate. She gives talks to seniors in the community, mostly to church groups, and women's and

civic clubs. She provides practical tips and tools on how to get better health care and how to reduce the chances of medical errors in their health care. She schedules health and wellness classes for the Shepherd's Center Adventures in Learning curriculum. What she tries to do, she said, is to improve a person's quality of life.

"I try to give back to the community," said Tarr. "I feel really good and worthy doing this. I don't need an award; I do it for the response."

The Shepherd's Center empowers seniors to give back to the community as volunteers and use their knowledge and skills, Tarr said.

If there is a common thread among the seniors who do volunteer work, it is the sense of fulfillment and reward they get from their contributions to the well-being of other seniors.

"Volunteer service provides us with a sense of value to the community," said Jean Bastien of Oakton, who retired as a Department of the Navy systems analyst.

Bastien translates her skills to tasks at SCOV. For 13 years, Bastien has been a Jack-of-all-trades in the SCOV office, maintaining computerized mailing lists, creating fliers and posters. "That's what I like best about SCOV," Bastien said. "They match your volunteer opportunities to your talents."

Bastien said she volunteers because it makes her feel good to help others, and it's also a social outlet.

"Age is just a number," said Bastien. "No matter how old you are, you can always help the community."

THE FAITH-BASED Shepherd's Center nationwide network of more than 50 senior resource centers offers learning experiences taught by seniors for seniors, social luncheons anchored by a prominent speaker, caregiver retreats, and most significantly, the opportunity for seniors to lend a hand to seniors not as mobile or independent, from handyman services to a drive to doctors' appointments. Its motto is its mission: living a life that matters.

SCOV says its primary purpose is to "provide services to assist older adults to continue to live independently in their own homes and to offer programs which supply opportunities for enrichment, learning and socialization."

SCOV vice-chair Bill Kirby, a former career diplomat with the Foreign Service, feels Shepherd's Center fulfills its commitment. "That's what the Shepherd's Center is all about, utilizing the experiences and skills of senior citizens for the good of the community."

Go to www.SCOV.org or call 703-281-0538 to learn more about volunteer opportunities and resources and programs at SCOV. You can also email them at office@scov.org.

To learn more about the services and activities of the Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke, go to www.scfbva.org or call 703-323-4788.

PHOTO BY DONNA MANZ/THE CONNECTION

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‘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.



Baker

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



PHOTOS 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.

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.



Grab bars in shower and easy access help set the stage for seamless aging in place.

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 be-

Creating Livable Community For All Ages

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been reading up about things like wider doorways, wooden floors and hardware in kitchens and bathrooms that will make basic functions possible, even as it gets harder to move around.”

The Town of Herndon approved the Vinehaven development in March, which will consist of 17 single family detached homes. Beth Clifford, president of the Beltway Investment Group, who is the developer, said the homes have features for those in their 50s who are interested in aging in place, including a first floor master bedroom.

Another priority for seniors is staying active, both mentally and physically. The

Reston Community Center hosted their annual Celebrate Your Bonus Years event last week, featuring speakers, health screenings and other information.

“As far as communities go, I think Reston is very aware of their seniors and their needs, which is why they host events like this,” said Margaret Tarplin of Reston. “Because as you age, even the basic things, like cooking a meal or driving to a doctor’s appointment, can’t be taken for granted, and I hope ways to connect seniors to those types of services remains a priority for our community.”

She said as it became harder for her to do things like run or play tennis and racquetball, her usual exercises, she has still been able to stay active walking on Reston’s

paths and swimming at the community center pool.

“Seniors can still be active, we just have to be more careful about it,” Tarplin said.

KEEPING SENIORS ACTIVE and involved is the main reason the Great Falls Senior Center was created after a 2011 survey by the Great Falls Citizens Association revealed the desire from the community for more senior-focused activities.

In 2011, the county spent \$70 million on activities for senior citizens, but none in Great Falls. After Foust told the GFCA “if you don’t ask, you don’t get,” the Senior Center was formed, using a rotating setting such as churches and parks for their monthly events.

“I participated in events at the Herndon Senior Center, which I found were very valuable in keeping me active and social, which I believe are keys to warding off mental decline,” said Luis Bernheim, who just moved to Great Falls to stay with her daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren. “I remember visiting elderly relatives in homes when I was younger, and they seemed to spend a lot of time alone by the TV, and that can’t be good for an aging mind.”

Bernheim said she hopes to start attending Great Falls Senior Center events.

Bob Lundegard, one of the founders of the group, said the Senior Center is laying the groundwork this year to make the center sustainable, which includes getting a 501(c)3 status and electing officers.

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