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Potomac Community Village's rides program offers much-needed transportation for seniors.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

One of the biggest challenges that 93-year old Randy Kurkjian faces is mobility. While he is in good health and walks with the assistance of a cane, he cannot drive. He needs transportation to medical appointments and social engagements, which help him live independently, stay active and avoid isolation and loneliness.

Kurkjian, who is a member of the Potomac Community Village (PCV), receives free transportation through the organization's rides program.

"My other alternative would be to take a cab, which can be expensive. Without this service I would be very helpless," said Kurkjian. "My son and daughter help me but they are working and don't always have the time."

The service offers seniors who no longer drive transportation to doctors' appointments, physical therapy, social activities and other events. Potomac Community Village volunteers say the program is vital to helping seniors stay happy, healthy and connected to the community as they continue to they live in their own home.

"One of the most important needs for people as they age, but want to stay in their existing community, is transportation," said Sheila Moldover, PCV Communications Chair. "The [village rides program] is one of the most important volunteer services that our village provides for those who can't drive anymore."

Recruiting volunteers and let-



PHOTO COURTESY OF POTOMAC COMMUNITY VILLAGE

Potomac Community Village's rides coordinator Sheila Taylor is also a volunteer driver.

ting seniors know about the service are PCV's top priorities for the program. To ensure safety, volunteer drivers receive training, undergo a background check and an examination of their driving record. "They can't have points on their records," said Sheila Taylor, who coordinates the rides program for PCV.

The rides program is structured to offer flexibility and protection for those who choose to drive. For example, drivers cannot provide medical assistance and are instructed to call 911 in case of an emergency. "We don't offer hands-on care, like helping somebody in and out of a wheelchair. You pull up to a house and as a courtesy, you might get out of the car, open the door and help the senior get in," said Moldover. "You can choose when you want to drive, there's no obligation as to the amount of time you spend."

In addition to transportation,

social connections are a critical part of the rides program and are essential to the overall well-being of local seniors.

"A rides volunteer is a neighbor who's friendly, who cares about you and will remember when you talk about your children and grandchildren," said Trey Johanson, who coordinates several local rides programs through the Jewish Council for the Aging. "They provide neighbor-to-neighbor human kindness. We're providing rides and friendly visits."

The volunteer drivers say the program is rewarding for them as well. Moldover has driven Kurkjian to doctors' appointments and says they are both enriched by the experience.

"It's a neighbor helping a neighbor, as opposed to a professional relationship where they pick you up and you never see them again," she said. "Randy, for example, does things to help the village.

He's gotten up at our events and talked about his experiences. He's a very interesting person."

Rides programs offer a service that public transportation cannot meet, says Johanson. "A senior with a walker can't walk a quarter mile to the nearest bus stop. That's like asking them to run a marathon," she said. "If you use a walker you might be served by Metro Access, but it can take all

day to run to the bank."

PCV is also hoping that local businesses will post signs in windows or other visible places to get raise awareness of this service.

"Like any volunteering [opportunity], you're giving back to the community and helping to build something that you hope will be there when you need it," said Moldover.

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Photo by Ed Knepley

Senior Living

Luxury Condos are a Growth Market for Seniors

Active retirees seek options for independent living, including condos in Alexandria, Arlington, Tysons, Reston, McLean, Bethesda and Chevy Chase, among others.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

When Joyce and Don Lipman decided to move out of their Potomac, Md. home, they opted for a high-end townhouse instead of a retirement community. They gained a cosmopolitan environment and lost the burdensome maintenance of a large home.

"My husband always hated taking care of the grounds and he didn't want to pay someone to do it, and we weren't ready for a retirement community," said Joyce Lipman, who is 71. "Now I can walk to the shopping center and to my doctor's office. I couldn't believe it the first time I was able to go without my car. It was like a new lease on life."

When another active retired couple decided to downsize and move out of their home, they opted for a high-end condominium instead of moving to a retirement community. They enjoy traveling and own a beach home where they often spend time. When it came time to design their new living space, they sought the help of Kelley Proxmire of Kelley Interior Design in Bethesda, Md.

The couple wanted "a pretty, yet practical home and also a place they could lock and leave on a moment's notice," said Proxmire.

Condominiums and townhouses are growing in popularity for midlife couples because unlike large homes, they don't require a lot of maintenance, and they offer opportunities for living independently.

"In the next three to five years, luxury condominiums are going to be extremely popular with that age group, those who feel the colonial home is too big and they don't want the ... mentality of retirement communities," said Debbie Miller, an Arlington-based associate broker with McEneaney



PHOTO CREDIT

Kelley Proxmire designed plush interior for a retired couple who downsized from a larger home into a luxury condominium.

"In the next three to five years, luxury condominiums are going to be extremely popular with ... those who feel the colonial home is too big and they want the freedom of locking and leaving their home."

— Debbie Miller, McEneaney Associates

Inc. who specializes in the 55 and over real estate market. "Luxury condominiums provide a great option."

Miller says that in addition to proximity to shopping, dining and public transportation, amenities such as a 24-hour concierge

service that can handle requests such as meal delivery and grocery shopping make high-end buildings sought after among well-heeled retirees.

The buyers Miller works with are looking for condos "that provide a 'lock-and-leave' advantage for residents who ... like to travel or who spend six months here and six months elsewhere."

Such condominiums are prized and often hard to obtain.

"There are some that are very exclusive and [others that] don't come on the market very often," she said. "I sold a unit in the Rotonda [in McLean] a year ago and had multiple offers that were all cash."

ONE REASON THAT retirees opt for condominiums over retirement communities is freedom without restrictions, such as the frequency or length of stay for overnight guests. "In a retirement community, your

grandchildren might only be able to visit for two weeks. Condos provide more of an independent feel," said Miller. "Owning a condo allows them the opportunity to pay the condo fee and come and go as they please and someone else takes care of the maintenance."

Another reason is proximity, with a condominium community more likely than a retirement community to be in an urban environment like Arlington, Reston or Tysons.

Among the most favored luxury condominium properties in Northern Virginia, says Miller, are The Palladium of McLean, Midtown at Reston, the Porto Vecchio in Old Town Alexandria, and the Turnberry Tower in Arlington.

"There are many other high-rises that appeal to the 55 and older crowd due to convenience and lots of amenities and that are walkable," she said.

Gerontology experts offer perspective for retirees who are looking to buy a new home. "The main thing is to consider safety," said Beverly Middle, DNP, RN, Assistant Professor of the College of Health and Human Services in the School of Nursing at George Mason University. "Communities where there are other older adults tend to have services in place to support them."

Middle recommends using evidence-based design when creating dwellings suitable for seniors. "It's a new science that's geared toward older adults and is very specific to their needs," she said.

Addressing retirees' desire to live a vibrant and active life that takes freedom and safety into consideration, some retirement communities are working to broaden their appeal to a wider group of seniors. For example, Sunrise Senior Living, based in McLean, created a Live With Purpose program which offers residents structured programs that include activities for volunteering and learning.

"No matter your age, each of us has interests, desires and activities that make us feel whole and help contribute to a meaningful, healthy life," said Rita Altman, senior vice president of Memory Care & Program Services for Sunrise.

Tax Relief Could Help Seniors Stay in Their Homes

Legislation that could enable many seniors 65 and older to defer increases on property taxes was presented in Montgomery County Council this week.

Lead sponsors Montgomery County Council Vice President Roger Berliner, Councilmember Sidney Katz and Councilmember Hans Riemer, along with co-sponsors Council President Nancy Floreen and Councilmembers Marc Elrich, Nancy Navarro and Craig Rice, today introduced legislation that would provide seniors with tax

relief and help them meet their property tax obligations in Montgomery County.

Expedited Bill 10-16 would enable seniors 65 and older, with individual or combined gross incomes of \$80,000 or less, to defer increases on property taxes on their principal residence until they sell their home. Interest on the deferred taxes would accrue at a 0 percent interest. Under the income threshold of \$80,000, which is the senior median income in Montgomery County, the eligibil-

ity criteria would capture approximately half of senior households in the County.

The legislation is modeled after similar programs in Howard County; Washington, D.C.; Boston; Minneapolis; Boulder County, Colo. and King County, WA.

"The County Executive has asked our Council to significantly increase property taxes, a request that my colleagues and I will be grappling with over the course of the next several weeks," said Council Vice President Berliner in

a statement. "But we know that most seniors live on fixed incomes and they worry that property tax increases will force them out of their homes and out of the county. We want our seniors, the fastest growing demographic in our county, to be able to stay in their homes as long as possible. This legislation would promote that goal by giving seniors the option to defer increases on property taxes until they sell their home."

Councilmember Katz is aware many seniors are considering re-

maining in Montgomery County, and in their homes, rather than retire elsewhere. He wants to make sure they are in a better position to have that option.

"Many seniors are disproportionately affected by the current tax structure," said Councilmember Katz. "This legislation is one way to address this and help our seniors to be able to continue to enjoy their home."

More information about Bill 10-16 is available at <http://tinyurl.com/h2cml6d>.