

Neighborhood Falmouth: Part of the Village Movement

Silver Threads

A column created especially for people spending their golden years in Falmouth, written by these same senior citizens.

“Be it ever so humble.....”

By Jacqueline Webster

The nation-wide Village Movement, in which Neighborhood Falmouth is a participant, gives us a view of the way people will age in the future. The movement had its origins in Princeton, New Jersey in the 1990s, when an organization called Community Without Walls was developed. That organization emphasized the perspective of keeping control of our lives as we age, and earning our **independence** through **interdependence** on each other. They expressed a desire to overcome the idea that as we age, we would live in generic retirement villages and nursing homes. They believed that passionate people could become a community of stakeholders with the power to reshape our lives, first through voluntary exchanges among ourselves, and then by translating social connections and trust into economic and political clout.

A development that arose out of these ideas was the founding of Boston's Beacon Hill Village in 2002 by a group of aging adults who wanted to help each other. They didn't want to have to move to unfamiliar places, to retirement homes that held no memories for them. They wanted their homes to be their forever residences, and to maintain connections with familiar surroundings, activities and friends. According to Susan McWhinney-Morse, a founder of Beacon Hill Village, these are the characteristics of Villages:

- Grass root – created by us and for us
- Self governing – members run the organization
- Non-profit – self supporting through membership fees, foundation grants, and charitable donations from the general public
- Co-coordinator of services, using the best of what is available
- Care for the whole person -- a fully rounded functioning person
- Forming of strategic partnerships, e.g. hospitals, senior centers, home health care agencies, housing trusts

- Villages run on the empowerment of volunteer help

Ms. McWhinney-Morse made an interesting point that today one of our great issues is ageism – people don't want to be senior citizens. She maintains that it is up to us to change this, and how we talk about ourselves. Her leadership in founding Beacon Hill Village has helped to address this issue.

In fact, an article about the Beacon Hill Village, and its goals and organization, sparked Neighborhood Falmouth. A Falmouth resident Paul Ferris Smith caught that spark, and with a lot of help from many people, initiated the development of Neighborhood Falmouth.

Meanwhile, several Villages were being developed throughout the U. S. For example, Capitol Hill Village in DC, Avenidas in Palo Alto CA, and Washington Park Cares in Denver CO all went into business in 2007-2008. Vineyard Village on Martha's Vineyard began operations in 2008. Nauset Neighbors started in 2011, serving the towns of Harwich, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham and Wellfleet. Membership in these Village organizations usually includes basic transportation for shopping and excursions, and regular social events, but additional trips and other services can be offered on a fee-for-service basis, with membership discounts. They publish newsletters, host parties, and help people get to know each other better and form "affinity groups" with shared interests. They all help people stay in their homes as they age, by making where they live into aging-friendly communities, overlaying existing services and community.

The Neighborhood Falmouth board looked carefully at three existing New England villages: Beacon Hill, Cambridge at Home MA, and, Staying Put in New Canaan, CT. After establishing an organizational structure, enrolling a number of founding members, and sufficient fund-raising activity to ensure stability, Neighborhood Falmouth followed the Village pattern, and was launched in 2009. The focus is on building support structures that can help us stay in our homes, connecting to neighbors rather than isolating ourselves as we age.

While all this activity was going on, a regional coordination network for the Villages was created in 2009. This Village-To-Village (VTV) Network links individual Villages, providing sharing of information, conferences and seminars. VTV also provides information on set-up and running of a Village, including organizational document samples, tips on fund-raising, and access to website development help.

According to the Village to Village Network, in 2012 there are 90 open

Villages throughout the United States and another 125 in development. These Villages exist in 38 states and DC. There are also member Villages in Canada, Australia and the Netherlands.

Regarding the future of the Village Movement, and the impact it has on local economies as a result of keeping people in the community, as opposed to their moving to retirement communities or other institutional settings -- Judy Willette, National Director of the Village to Village Network addressed TEDx Boston, a conference that brought together grassroots change agents and blue-sky inventors. (Note: TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design). Ms. Willette's topic was "It Takes Villages -- The rock'n'roll generation changes the tune of aging." Her presentation was summarized: "Were they going to wait for the government to create a better way for them to age? Absolutely not. Ask anyone from the generation that brought us Woodstock, and 93% of them will answer that they want to live in their own homes for the rest of their lives. So, it makes sense that these baby boomers who also generated the civil rights, environmental, and women's movements, have now created "Villages" - non-profits run by and for people 50+." She discussed "how this common sense 'neighbors helping neighbors' approach is revolutionizing aging, and how the Village movement could reduce Medicare costs, help elders get the most out of life, and offer concrete ways to stay in our homes and communities as we age."

As part of the Village Movement, Neighborhood Falmouth is leading the residents of Falmouth into the future!

Neighborhood Falmouth is a nonprofit, membership organization, operating since 2009 to help Falmouth seniors live safely and comfortably in their own homes. For more information on joining, volunteering, and donating, call 508-564-7543; or visit www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org.