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Aging in Place

By Editor

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Kris Barnes, Max and Norma Hedgecoth, Gloria Miller, Jay Sherline, Sabina Meyer, Ellen Sherline and Madeline Scales-Taylor. (Not pictured: Joanne Hickox and Cindy Vallely)

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If Kris Barnes of Granada has her way, the well-used statement 'It takes a village' will apply to seniors and not just to the concept of raising children.

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Barnes and nine friends who hail from San Marco, San Jose, Lakewood, and the Southbank are in the process of researching whether it makes sense to establish a Village to Village network in the San Marco community. By establishing Village to Village, a new concept in senior living, it is their hope to provide the community with a membership-based, neighbor-to-neighbor nexus, to help themselves as well as other nearby older residents stay active in their homes and their communities longer and not have to consider moving to a retirement community.

"My interest in forming a Village to Village is that I want to be able to stay in my home as long as possible, barring some medical thing that pulls me out," Barnes said. "And I want it to be as easy for my children as possible. I've helped a lot of elderly relatives in my family – they had no children – because I was the only one who could help. It's hard to help everybody out and take care of your children and your life. It can be real complicated. The more resources we have as we age, the better we'll be."

During a seminar about the Village concept sponsored by the Community Advisory Council (CAC) of the AgeWell Institute of Baptist Health Feb.3, Barnes met several like-minded seniors, including Joanne Hickox of Seniors on a Mission, Sabina Meyer of San Jose, Gloria Miller of Lakewood, Ellen and Jay Sherline and Max and Norma Hedgecoth of San Marco, Cindy Vallely, executive director of the City's Council on Elder Affairs, and Madeline Scales-Taylor of the Southbank.

More than 50 nonprofit representatives and other stakeholders of organizations that cater to Jacksonville's senior community came to hear Natalie Galucia, executive director of the Village to Village Network, and Gloria Niec, executive director of Celebrations Thriving in Place Village in Orlando, give insights about what it takes to get a Village network up and running.

The Village concept was born on Boston's Beacon Hill in 2001, when a group of residents founded a nonprofit called Beacon Hill Village so they could inexpensively access necessary services from their homes and not be forced into assisted living communities. Today there are currently 200 open Villages in the United States and more than 150 in development in 45 states and the District of Columbia, said Dr. Kenneth A. Tannenbaum, chair of CAC.

Developing Villages within major cities is going to be important in the future, because with the Baby Boom generation aging out, soon there will be more adults 65 and older than can be accommodated by existing retirement communities, Galucia said.

Villages are an inexpensive, easy way for communities to address the challenges connected with aging, she said. Villages focus on the whole person and allow seniors to break down a sense of isolation and more easily find ways to socialize and have a sense of connectedness while living in their own homes.

For a Village to work, residents need to have a strong desire to care for themselves. Villages usually begin within small, geographically-based neighborhoods and are comprised of members who have the goal of consolidating and coordinating essential services within the Village network, such as transportation, hands-on assistance within the home if needed, yardwork, bookkeeping and/or social activities, Galucia said. Villages often provide lists of approved home-maintenance contractors, some of which may provide discounts to members. By relying on a mixture of paid and volunteer help, members receive the same kind of assistance they would have living in a retirement community but without uprooting themselves from their homes.

The key to the Village concept is volunteerism, Galucia explained. Most programs and services are provided through well-vetted, volunteer-based, neighbor-to-neighbor, pay-it-forward mutual support, although some Villages have paid employees, she said.

Villages are funded through membership dues, which typically range around \$450 annually per individual, \$650 per household and \$90 for low-income members, as well as grants and donations. Dues can be broken down into monthly payments, Galucia said, noting the average Village raises approximately 40 to 60 percent of its funding through donations and grants. How a Village is organized and what services it provides are flexible and tailored to the membership's needs, she said.

Galucia's national organization, the Village to Village Network, provides online resources, education, and expertise to assist community members in establishing and managing their Villages.

Barnes' group met at her home Feb. 17 to discuss how to get started. They decided to obtain a membership in the national Village to Village network for six months at a cost of \$100, which Janet Owens, CEO of the Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC), agreed to cover. Once they have joined the national organization, 11 members of their planning committee will have access to its website and support, Barnes said.

The group also agreed to canvas residents in San Marco and its surrounding neighborhoods to determine interest in the program. Jay Sherline mentioned that Jacksonville, large as it is, is a natural for the Village concept in that it is already divided into neighborhoods. Barnes said some housing communities, such as her mother's condo building, Six Thousand on the River, can be



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considered a sort of “village” in that neighbors and friends often help each other.

“We’re not trying to be caregivers,” said Ellen Sherline. “We are not medical, and this will not be Meals on Wheels. This will centralize and organize services so one person will not be called every time.” Her husband agreed, saying, “This is the definition of being a good neighbor. If we get neighbors to know each other and have people vetted so they can drive you, bring a meal once in a while, or help change a lightbulb, it will be great. If you get a ride for \$15 or \$20 it is cheaper than having a car and less expensive than doing things alone or going into assisted living if you don’t have to.”

Although the Baptist Health AgeWell Institute introduced the program by hosting Galucia and Niec with the hopes of spawning more than one grassroots effort within Jacksonville’s neighborhoods, it has no plans of being anything more than a catalyst in setting up individual Villages, said Tannebaum. “We can’t do it. The only way to do it is to get it started by the people who live there who want to do it,” he said.

In speaking with Toni Bonfilli, Baptist AgeWell’s coordinator of community engagement, Jay Sherline said the institute has since received several email inquiries, but so far no group has moved ahead like the group in San Marco.

Sherline said he has asked AgeWell if it could supply a geographic overlay of San Marco to help the group define its boundaries as well as a demographic breakdown of the San Marco neighborhood by age to help define the group’s needs.

Baptist is also willing to supply meeting space, technological support, and food and drink to assist neighborhood groups as they organize their Villages, said Audrey Moran, senior vice president, Baptist Health Social Responsibility & Community Advocacy at the close of the meeting.

Anyone interested in becoming a part of the San Marco area Village should contact the planning group at V2VSanMarco@gmail.com.

By Marcia Hodgson
Resident Community News

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