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Staci Matlock

Taos News editor editor@taosnews.com (mailto:editor@taosne

# **Taos Elders and Neighbors Together: support to live** independent lives



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## Courtesy TENT

Rose Gordon talks with Taos residents about her experiences with hospice in India.

By Cindy Brown

For The Taos News

Posted Friday, August 17, 2018 11:42 am

## FOR MORE

Open meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 5 at 2:30 Valverde Commons, 405

Valverde Commons Drive http://www.taoselders.org/ (http://www.taoselders.org/) (575) 224-6335 TaosElders@gmail.com (mailto:TaosElders@gmail.com)

Our society has not developed many successful models to help people stay in their homes as they age and become less able to live on their own, says Dr. Atul Gawande in his book "Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine, and What Matters in the End." In a society, where aging is treated like a disease and a problem, the focus is often on keeping people safe, rather than supporting them in continuing to live a meaningful life. As Gawa describes it, "to keep shaping the story of their life in the world."

A group of Taoseños read the book and were inspired to create a new organization to help people continue to live independent and meaningful lives. Called Taos Elders and Neighbors Together, or TENT, the founders say it "is a developing nonprofit community of elders and neighbors supporting one another. It is a virtual village with a volunteer-based support network that will connect members to various resources needed for them to live comfortable, dignified and vibrant lives in their own homes as they age.

### How it work

In this model, people can join the organization for a fee and then get services such as transportation, social activities, small home repairs, and in-home assistance provided by volunteers

After two years of research and planning, TENT is ready to launch its services this fall. Organizers will host a meeting Sept. 5 at 2:30 pm at Valverde Commons in Taos to allow potential volunteers, donors and members and to learn more about the organization and sign up. They expect that services will be available beginning in October.

"Social contact is so important," says Bette Myerson, secretary of the board of directors. "Elders get isolated if they are not connected and don't have social relationships. TENT offers social events and check-in phone calls, along with other services like transportation to doctors and to the grocery store, minor home repairs and caregiver relief." Other possible services include some computer support and assistance with meal preparation.

Debbie Branom, publicity coordinator adds, "They are simple-sounding services, but it is the sort of assistance that elderly folks really need. For example, they might not feel comfortable making minor repairs in their homes alone and would appreciate the help."

## Village to Village Network

TENT is based on a model established in 2010 called the Village to Village Network, which helps people get the assistance they need to stay in their homes. The first organization known as Beacon Hill Village opened more than 15 years ago, and now a network of 200 similar nonprofits operate and another 150 are in development. According to the website (vtvnetwork.org) the overall vision is "Through innovation, collaboration, advocacy and inclusion, the Village to Village Network expands opportunity, choice, support and care for all older people."

The Taos group has joined the Village to Village Network and have relied on their models and assistance as they establish TENT. "Village to Village and other peer organizations have answered so many of our questions," says Myerson. "The network is an invaluable tool to help



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#### Services and volunteers

TENT founders don't yet need the services being offered but envision a time when they might. They hope to establish a system that offers other options than assisted living or going to live with children.

Volunteers are already being recruited. Volunteer coordinator Marianne Furedi says that many of the volunteers in training express the idea they want to help others while they still car because at some point they also might need TENT's services. "It's a question of paying it forward," she says.

The availability of services will depend on the number of volunteers who sign up. The volunteers go through a background check and attend training.

The volunteers go through a background check and attend training. Initially services will be offered within 15-mile radius of Taos Plaza, including Taos, El Prado, Arroyo Seco and Arroyo Hondo, Ranchos de Taos, Talpa and Llano Quemado. A future expansion is hoped for into Ouesta and Peñasco.

"Volunteers are what will keep the organization going," says Myerson. "We want to keep them busy but not stretch them too far. Each volunteer can offer as many hours as they want and indicate their skills and abilities. We are tapping into all sorts of folks who are part of the community and want to support this effort."

Transportation is expected to be offered primarily locally, but if there are volunteers, occasional rides to Santa Fe and Albuquerque may be possible.

## Membership

TENT has incorporated as a nonprofit organization, so donations are tax deductible. They have begun to receive contributions and have held a series of public meetings with speakers. Topics have included aging in other cultures as well as staying vibrant and healthy. In addition, the group has a monthly newsletter.



They have a mailing dist sys 400 means to support or member might participate as either a donor, supporter, or member onp: 13/ANIZ PRIZEMENTAL AND PROVIDENTS.com) adine-th

Different levels of membership will be offered:

• a supporting neighbor membership - is \$150 per year. It is tax deductible and includes social activities but no support services and is a way to support overall organization.

• an individual membership is \$350 per year and includes social and support services • a household membership is \$450 per year and includes social and support services for all people living full time in their house.

There are no other charges beyond the membership fee.

"We recognize that not everyone needing the services will be able to afford them," says Myerson. "We are working on scholarships that could supplement what someone is able to pay." TENT has already received start-up funding from the Taos Community Foundation, Taos Milagro Rotary Club and the Unitarian Congregation of Taos.

## A supporting community

TENT is meeting with other organizations in the community, such as St. James Episcopal Church, Taos Jewish Center, Valverde Commons, Taos Retirement Village, Unitarian Congregation of Taos, Mountain Home Health Care and other medical providers. The organizations plan to provide referrals to each other and cooperate to make sure older people get the services they need.

The organizers want to make TENT as inclusive as possible. Membership is available to anyone needing services, regardless of their age. They will have bilingual volunteers and are translating their brochure into Spanish.



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TaosElders@gmail.com. Organizers invite everyone to bring their questions to the meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 5 at 2:30 pm at Valverde Commons, located at 405 Valverde Commons Drive.









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