

Seniors Life in LAMORINDA

What Does it Take to Age in Place?

Community support helps it happen

By Cathy Tyson



Ballroom dancing at the Lafayette Community Center

“There are two types of people, seniors and seniors in the making” said Sandra Smith, a healthy, active 70-year-old living with her 75-year-old husband in Lafayette. She and the other members of the Lafayette Senior Services Commission work hard to “enhance the well-being of older adults by identifying their concerns and needs, providing information about resources and promoting community programs and services that enable them to live meaningful lives,” according to their mission statement.

Lucky for the continually growing proportion of older residents in Lamorinda there are a number of community-based organizations that support the independence of our seniors, see adjacent box for contact information.

What factors influence the necessity of moving out of current housing? Dr. Kathryn Williams, an Orinda resident and a senior herself, is on the advisory council of Contra Costa County’s Area Agency on Aging. She said that a couple of the main reasons older adults aren’t able to stay in their homes are due to health concerns and memory issues. Especially if they live alone, once elders have a stroke or break a hip, it’s very difficult to remain at home, especially for those living alone.

Because of reduced mobility and normal changes associated with aging like hearing impairment, failing vision, arthritis – sometimes it’s the house that creates the difficulties. To avoid that and create an environment that is safe and accessible there are a number of options for seniors.

With funding mandated through the Older Americans Act there are numerous programs provided through the County’s Area Agency on Aging to keep seniors home longer. “This is the one place you can find complete access for older adults,” said Micki Sherman, Program Manager for the Agency on Aging. By calling their phone number staffed with trained social workers, seniors can get help with a number of services including help for low cost and free adaptive devices, weatherization, even air conditioning (800) 510-2020.

Another great resource is Independent Living Resource; their motto is, “because everyone de-

serves to be in control of their life!” They provide free services to Contra Costa County residents who may need improved access in their home as well as assistive technology help for those that have difficulty hearing or poor vision. For more information call (925) 363-7293 or <http://ilrcoco-sol.org/default.aspx>

Social support:

There are a variety of organizations in Lamorinda that support and enhance aging in place. Almost all of the many churches in the area have some kind of senior focused programs; contact them directly for more information. One example is Contact Care, a free service from the Our Savior’s Lutheran Church that offers complimentary phone calls on a daily and weekly basis to “check in” with seniors. Call Elaine Welch at Senior Helpline Services Reassurance Phone Friend Program at (925) 284-8328.

Temple Isaiah hosts a monthly Senior Lunch Group, usually on the first Wednesday of the month, contact Mary Anne Winig the Adult Program Coordinator at (925) 283-8575.

Moraga Movers hosts activities for adults over 55. They have a bowling club, monthly book reviews, twice-weekly Bridge, trips and a monthly dinner at St. Mary’s College. Contact them at (925) 376-6622 at the Hacienda de las Flores.

The Orinda Senior Bridge Club meets on Thursdays at 12:15 in the Orinda Community Center. There’s a \$3 drop-in fee. (925) 254-2445.



Aegis of Moraga resident Tom Noyes taking a 3 mile walk with his “dog” Charley says hello to Charlotte and Al Peters of Orinda and their dog CoCo
Photo Andy Scheck

The Spirit Van provides door to door service for elders wishing to enjoy a very low cost nutritious lunch at the Walnut Creek Senior Café. A hot meal along with socializing is on the menu Monday through Friday. One day advance registration is required; call (925) 280-7310.

Paid help:

Sometimes staying home requires help from paid staff, there are many firms in the area that provide this type of service. Sandra Lemmons of Companion Care in Lafayette said, “we have clients in their eighties and nineties, one fellow in his nineties is very active – swims every day, but he has an aide come in because of memory and balance issues.” For clients who need some assistance, like help cooking, light house keeping, running errands, or even a driver to take them to bridge club, a companion to go to the movies with, paying by the hour is an option that might help keep them in their homes longer. With an hourly rate of \$28.50 per hour with a three hour minimum, this kind of assistance can also give family caregivers a break.

The secret of aging in place for Sandra Smith is, “doing a lot of volunteering. It keeps you young. There was a university study done that showed people who volunteer live longer. It gives them a sense of purpose and a feeling of being needed.” She encourages other seniors to volunteer because you get so much out of it. Considering the many programs in the community, it looks like many already are, but they can always use more help.



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