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Standing Room Only at Senior Symposium

By Cathy Tyson



John and Sue Otto are signed in by Lafayette Senior Commissioner Sandra Smith. Photo courtesy of Mei Sun Li

The panel discussion featured a range of senior specialists that illuminated a host of concrete options for seniors who wish to remain in their homes. Experts included representatives from: John Muir Senior Services, Rossmoor Counseling Services, Senior Helpline Services, physical therapy and the Center for Technology and Aging.

"Be aware and plan ahead for your needs," advised Joanna Marie, Eldercare Consultant and volunteer with Elder Financial Protection Network at the second component of the Symposium. She explained specifically how to plan for your needs - legally, socially, and recommended ways to protect yourself from elder financial abuse.

Mary Bruns, of the Lafayette Senior Center, addressed transportation issues. She encouraged seniors to use the Spirit Van, "We all get to the point where we can't drive a car - our goal is to get you to use the van before you truly need it, so you become comfortable." Lamorinda residents can use the van for doctor appointments, trips to the grocery store or bank, there's even a free daily trip out to the Walnut Creek Senior Center for lunch.

"We're like the Link Program, only better - door through door service," noted Bruns, explaining that helpful drivers will escort passengers to and from the front door. Seniors looking for a ride just need to call by 1:00 p.m., one business day before they need a lift; \$3 for a one way ride.

Senior Helpline Services offers the deal of the century, a ride completely free to seniors. "Let the resources of the community help you out," said Janet Johnson, Executive Director. She explained that their volunteer drivers use their own cars and own gas to get seniors where they need to go. The program gave 3,200 rides last year. All drivers are fingerprinted and have passed a background check, and they don't accept tips.

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Offering valuable information to seniors so they can stay in their homes longer, a stellar collection of experts offered constructive advice on everything from in-home services to elder law to transportation at the recent Senior Symposium held at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

"The quality of an older person's life is clearly impacted by the rising costs and the skimpiness of services that would enable citizens to remain in their own familiar and comfortable homes longer. And with even more nightmare budget cuts by the State, it is ever more important to plan early," said Mei Sun Li, Manager of Lafayette Senior Services. "In the coming months, Lafayette Senior Services will continue to present workshops which will address many of these concerns. Look for more information in the Lafayette Recreation Guide or www.lafayetterec.org (click on Senior Workshops). Programs are open to anyone of any age and residency."

An estimated 150 mature attendees, some caregivers and loved ones attentively listening and taking notes, packed the Lafayette Library and Learning Center's Community Hall. The event was presented in three sections, first a panel discussion on in-home services, followed by a section on elder law issues, and finally transportation options.