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The New Old Age in Lamorinda: Aging In Place Safely and Independently

By *Sophie Braccini*

Ruth McCahan Photo Craig Isaacs

Ruth McCahan opened her presentation at the "Aging Successfully in Our Community" symposium on October 13 with a question, "How many of you have lived here in Lafayette, Moraga, or Orinda for over 20 years?" To the large show of hands she added, "You must like it here and you'd probably like to stay. But how many of us as we reach our 60s, 70s and 80s begin to consider some sort of senior housing as the next logical step - in spite of our desire to stay put?" The answer, says McCahan, is a Village community, and it is one of the new ways seniors all over the country are living their retirement years in a friendlier, more autonomous and less expensive way.

McCahan immediately saw the potential of the Village concept when she first read about Village to Village four years ago. "The mission of a Village is to provide its members both the practical means and the confidence to remain in their own homes as they age," says McCahan. The concept was created in 2001 by two retired women from Boston who wanted to find a way to help people stay in their homes and communities for the rest of their lives.

There are now about 90 Village communities all over

the United States. "Many among us want to enjoy an active healthy life without moving away from our neighborhoods," says McCahan. "We are older, but we are also healthier than previous generations and poised to set new records for longevity. We cherish living near old friends and among younger families. We fully appreciate the pleasures of our neighborhoods, our downtowns, familiar streets, parks, favorite merchants, libraries, and churches, as well as all the professional and community-based connections on which we have come to rely."

The Lafayette resident has been involved with senior services in her city for years. She rallied a group of Lamorindans interested in the idea of harnessing seniors' creativity and power to support each other. George and Julie Fisher, active members of the Moraga Movers, are working on the project. "There are about 57,500 people living in Lamorinda, 10,532 of them are 65 and older," says George Fisher. "That's 18 percent of the population and that number is growing. Many of us want to stay in our homes, but as we age, we have more needs and we want safe and reasonably priced solutions to stay independent."

"It's almost like an insurance program for people who want to age in place, stay where they are comfortable," adds Julie, who says the concept also appeals to the sandwich generation because it offers adult children who don't live near their aging parents some peace of mind.

The Lamorinda Village task force is seeking community input, in the form of a survey, to determine the level of interest in a Village and the types of services residents might seek. The survey lists different needs in six categories of service: health and wellness assistance; continuing education; daily living/home services; organized physical activities; organized social activities; and personal and financial services, and asks respondents to prioritize them. The survey also asks how much potential members would be willing to pay for the service. In the 90 existing villages, the annual cost varies between \$750 and \$1,200.

"Those interested in participating in the survey, whether in their 60s, 70s, 80s or older, or those who have parents in that age group, can send an email to lamorindavillage@gmail.com and they will automatically be sent the link to the on-line survey," says McCahan. To receive a survey by mail, send a note to P.O. Box 57, Lafayette, CA 94549. For more information about the concept itself, visit www.vtvnetwork.org.

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