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New Representative to Agency on Aging

By Sophie Braccini



Keith Katzman in his Moraga home. Photo Sophie Braccini

There are a few people in Moraga who can be regarded as experts on senior issues. One of them is George Fisher, co-founder of the Moraga Movers. So when he talks about seniors, the Town Council listens.

"Moraga had not had representation on the Contra Costa County Area Agency on Aging for quite some time," said Fisher. "My wife Julie and I went to the meetings and thought it was important that Moraga be represented, so I asked the council to name someone." The council asked George or Julie to be that representative, "but we thought that someone younger would be more advisable," responded George. "There is a lot of work to be done and you want someone with energy." Then Fisher met someone he immediately considered to be the ideal candidate, in the person of Keith Katzman, a man barely in his 50s but with a strong desire to be an advocate for Moraga seniors.

"It may all come from my grandfather, whom I was very close to," said Katzman. "He lived close by, and I was lucky to have him in my life way into my adulthood. We had a very strong relationship. So I have always paid attention to the needs of seniors in their everyday lives - their need to be safe in their homes, to have quality care, transportation available when they can't drive anymore, a welcoming community that offers accessible services." When Fisher mentioned the county position that needed to be filled, Katzman immediately applied.

According to its website, CCCAAA's mission is to provide leadership in addressing issues that relate to older Californians, to develop community-based systems of care that provide services which support independence within California's interdependent society, and which protects the quality of life of older adults and persons with functional impairments, and to promote citizen involvement in the

planning and delivery of service.

The care part of the services consists of an Adult Day Care or social weekday program; ombudsman services; a family caregiver provider program, which addresses the specific needs of family members who provide care to an elderly relative; home visiting services to frail seniors by volunteers; and an in-home services registry. CCCAAA also supports different non-profits that service seniors, such as Senior Helpline Services that provides free transportation to seniors who can't drive, but can walk with a cane or walker, Meals on Wheels and Senior Outreach Services. CCCAAA also manages the Senior Nutrition Program serving an average of 16,000 meals a month at 21 different cafe sites throughout Contra Costa County. CCCAAA offers health insurance counseling and advocacy. Finally, CCCAAA disseminates to its members information about changes at the federal level that affect seniors and listens to the concerns the representatives bring forth.

Katzman was sworn in as Moraga's CCCAAA representative in July, but he didn't wait until then to begin work. "I joined the Moraga Movers and started talking to those I am now representing," said Katzman, who had to get a special exemption to join the organization because he is not yet age 55. He added that since he was raised in Moraga, he recognized many parents of his former classmates at the first Moraga Movers dinner he attended. Fisher noted that Katzman is also in the process of getting his Class B drivers license to help with the transportation of seniors when they go on excursions together. In addition, Katzman attends meetings of the non-profit Village to Village that's forming.

"One of the first things I want to do is organize a communication system to reach all of Moraga's senior residents," said Katzman. His first concern is safety. As a Community Emergency Response Team graduate, he is very aware of the importance of local communication in times of grave disaster; he even recently passed the Ham Radio exam to be even more connected. "Maybe it could take the form of a phone tree with, at the top of the tree, those who are most comfortable with email and texting," he said.

Katzman will also follow the question of senior transportation in Moraga. He is aware of the challenges that the Spirit Van is facing and will be studying all the different systems available in the county. A real estate agent by trade, Katzman says he wants to give back to his town; the method he has chosen is no small task.

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