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Rotary volunteers offer free home maintenance for seniors

By Diane Claytor



Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Home Team manager and volunteer repairs a ceiling fan for a local senior. Photos provided

wondering if some of his fellow Rotarians would be willing to join him in volunteering to perform these simple tasks for seniors.

In 2010, Englehart made a presentation to his local group, the Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club. "Seniors often need help and we can be that help for minor maintenance issues," he remembers saying. "We're not professional plumbers or electricians," Englehart emphasizes. "But we can replace a light bulb or smoke detector battery. We can fix a leak or tighten a joint. We can perform those small tasks that might cost more than \$100 just to have a professional show up." Lamorinda Sunrise Rotarians agreed.

Englehart connected with Episcopal Senior Communities (ESC; now named Covia, a Front Porch Partner), an organization that actively supports seniors by offering numerous services and resources. He met with Tracy Powell, ESC's vice president of community services, who helped come up with the name, HOME (Home Maintenance for the Elderly) Team. Powell remembers thinking this was "one of those programs that really shines . a great resource for helping seniors stay safe in their own home." ESC became the facilitator for the program, taking the calls for maintenance requests. This partnership lasted more than 11 years. Today, Lamorinda Village serves as the call center; Kathryn Ishizu, executive director, says her nonprofit organization is honored to be a part of this incredible service that allows seniors to age in their own home.

In addition to providing free maintenance services, Englehart notes another benefit for everyone: simply meeting with older residents. "ESC provided a red flag checklist, something we still use," he reports. "Everyone is trained to look for potential problems: hoarding, excessive dirt, food insecurities, falling hazards." All volunteers are taught to keep their eyes and ears open, Englehart explains. If they see possible problems, they are asked to advise their team manager, who can help provide additional resources to the senior.

There are no requirements, other than being an older adult, to call on the Rotary HOME Team. "I don't care what a senior's financial situation is," Englehart states, "if they can no longer safely climb a ladder to replace a light bulb, we're happy to do it for them." There are 65 members in Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, and all volunteer on the HOME Team. "If someone isn't handy with a screwdriver, he or she can certainly be a driver," Englehart notes.

Six Saturdays a year, Rotary HOME Team volunteers receive the maintenance request lists and go out in pairs to handle those minor repair issues: fix a leaking toilet, repair a sticky door, adjust cabinet drawer pulls, change smoke alarm batteries. "We're usually in and out in about 30 minutes," Englehart reports.

Seniors who have used the Rotary HOME Team services are beyond pleased. Betty LaPorte, an 87-year-old Lafayette resident, had a door that wouldn't close. Two Rotarians came out one Saturday morning, took a look, got their tools and within 30 minutes, the door was fixed. "They came when they said they would, did a great job and were absolutely charming," LaPorte says. "It's often so hard to find someone to do a small project like this." Angie Anastasion, who has had several odd jobs performed by the Rotary HOME Team, states that the volunteers were "cheerful, professional and very respectful of our property."

While Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary began the program 12 years ago, 33 other area Rotary clubs - mostly in

What started with a loving son helping his elderly father with small projects around the house grew into a popular, highly successful Rotary-sponsored free home maintenance service for seniors.

The Rotary HOME Team was the brainchild of Hays Englehart. Like many adult children, Englehart would regularly visit his widowed father. "I'd walk in the door, give him a big hug, chat a little and then he'd hand me a list of things around the house that needed attention," Englehart recalls. "He'd sit there with his cup of coffee or glass of wine and 'supervise' my work. We'd talk, laugh, spend quality father-son time together."

Englehart credits his dad for teaching him about tools and "fixing stuff so I could become a good handyman." After his father passed away, Englehart began thinking about other seniors who might not have a handy person nearby, "someone to change a light bulb or fix a leaky faucet," he says. As a longtime Rotarian, he began

Contra Costa County but as far south as San Diego - have adopted it. It was designed, Englehart explains, so any Rotary club in the world can make it their own.

"It's a win-win for everyone," Englehart proclaims. "It's one of the best feel-good things we've ever done and everyone who has participated absolutely agrees." Englehart, a recently retired financial planner, says he's more proud of this program than just about anything else he's done.

For more information or to request free basic home maintenance for seniors, please call 888-204-5573 or go to rotaryhometeam.com.



Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Home Team volunteer Mark Lewis repairs a senior's light switch. Photos provided

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