

NO PLACE LIKE HOME: A holistic approach to aging

Written by MaryLynn Schiavi Correspondent

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Mike Parisi, 91, of Kingwood Township dances with the Hunterdon Tappers at the Sergeantsville Fire House in Delaware Township. / PHOTO BY KEITH A. MUCCILLI/ SPECIAL TO THE COURIER

Resources for Seniors by County

Hunterdon County• Hunterdon County Division of Senior, Disabilities and Veterans' Services, 4 Gauntt Place, Building 1, PO Box 2900, Flemington, 08822-2900. 908-788-1361/1362/1363. • Hunterdon County Senior Center, Route 31 County Complex, 4 Gauntt Place - Building 1, Flemington, 08822-2900. 908-788-1359; e-mail: seniorcenter@co.hunterdon.nj.us;

www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/aging/seniorcenter.htm. Middlesex County• Middlesex County Office of Aging and Disabled Services, 75 Bayard St., Middlesex.nj.us/aging/index.asp. Morris County• Morris County Division on Aging, Disabilities and Veterans, 340 W. Hanover Ave., PO Box 900, Morristown, 07963-0900. 973-285-6848; www.morrishumanservices.org/adv/index.asp. • Senior Resource Center (serving seniors and their families in Chester and surrounding areas including: Randolph, Mount Olive, Mendham, and Long Valley), 50 Route 24, Chester. 908-879-2202; www.seniorresourcecenter.org. • Synergy HomeCare - Northwest (serving Morris, Sussex and northern Somerset and Hunterdon counties), 115 U.S. Route 46, Mountain Lakes, NJ 07046. 973-394-5638; www.synergyhomecare.com/agencies/nj/mountain-lakes/nj08/. Somerset County• Somerset County Office on Aging and Disability Services, 27 Warren St., 1st Floor, PO Box 3000, Somerville, 08876. 908-704-6346; <http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/hservices/aging/index.html>. • Fellowship Village Helping Hands Home Care and Senior Living Program, Fellowship Village Road, Liberty Corner section of Bernards. 877-343-6059; <http://fellowshipseniorliving.org/home-health-basking-ridge-new-jersey>. • HomeSharing (serving Somerset, Hunterdon, Union, Morris and Middlesex counties), The PeopleCare Center, 120 Finderne Ave., Bridgewater, 08807. 908-526-4663; www.homesharing.org. • Evergreen Home Companions, (serving Somerset, Hunterdon, Morris and Union counties), based in Branchburg. 908-725-8528; www.Evergreenhomecompanions.com. Sussex County• Sussex County Division of Senior Services, Sussex County Administration Building, 1 Spring St., 2nd Floor, Newton, 07860. 973-579-0555; www.sussex.nj.us/Cit-e-Access/webpage.cfm?TID=7&TPID=933. Union County• Union County Division on Aging, Administration Building, Elizabeth, 07207. 908-527-4870 or toll-free 888-280-8226; <http://ucnj.org/government/Human-Services/Division-Of-The-Aging>

Editor's note: This is the third in a three-part series exploring what home means to people as they age and the quality-of-life issues that arise as our society prepares for an unprecedented population shift. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, by 2030, close to 72 million people will be age 65 and older which equates to 19 percent of the total population. Where will this segment of the population call home? What are the challenges and opportunities before us as the largest and most rebellious generation enters the final phase of their lives?

Mick Jagger is now 70, Steven Tyler, 66, and David Bowie recently celebrated his 65th birthday.

The faces of the senior population are changing as members of the Baby Boomer generation enter their senior years. But while the aging population may look slightly different from previous generations, one thing remains the same — lifestyle and housing options for this new breed of seniors can be as individual as the seniors themselves.

According to those working to meet the needs this growing population, the solutions must be multifaceted and embraced by everyone in the community.

While at least 10 percent of seniors look forward to downsizing and living in an over-50, retirement or senior community, most would prefer to interact with people of all ages and backgrounds, according to Jacque Rubel, founder of Aging in Place Partnership, based in South Brunswick.

Rubel said AIPP's mission is to serve as a resource to the community. Working with a range of businesses and organizations, AIPP identifies needs and brainstorms and coordinates solutions that are knit into the fabric of the community and involve inter-generational programs.

One such initiative is In a Kaleidoscope, an in-school art program taught by artists and volunteers from the New Brunswick Township Senior Center.

Rubel agrees with Emily Greenfield, an associate professor of sociology at Rutgers University, that serving the needs of the burgeoning older population, is not just about offering discrete services, but developing a holistic and integrated community approach.

"The trend is definitely toward aging in place or what we now like to call aging in community," Greenfield said.

"Aging in community" means looking at the many dimensions of life in the community, she said, and determining how they impact someone who is older and vice versa.

"The goal is about avoiding unwanted relocation and helping seniors to remain in their own communities and keep their relationships in place," Greenfield said.

While state and county programs are accomplishing a great deal, Greenfield said complementary local programs are critical to fully serving the growing senior population.

An essential step toward meeting the needs of the older population is establishing a relationship to ensure that they know where to go for help and resources in the future.

Reaching out to seniors

Programs like the Senior Resource Center, serving Chester, Randolph, Mount Olive and surrounding areas, establish relationships with seniors and their families by offering not only exercise, nutrition and continuous learning programs, but also guidance and information about Medicare, Medicaid, and other social service programs.

"When a caregiver is suddenly thrust into the situation of having to make life-changing decision, he or she

can avoid the enormous stress and countless hours involved when they can call upon a local resource who can provide detailed information at the other end of the phone,” said Kathy Kremins, a board member for the nonprofit organization.

The Hunterdon County Senior Center is considered to be a preeminent program in the area, according to Michael Parisi, 91, who attends tap dancing, Zumba, and social dance classes on a weekly basis.

“There are so many different activities to choose from at the center, there is something for everyone and it’s important to be involved and active,” Parisi said.

The center’s range of classes and activities include yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, dance, art and music, recreational card games, philosophical and intellectual discussions, movies and gardening.

The greatest challenge to seniors utilizing the center may be limitations related to transportation.

“The senior center is located in Flemington, but seniors in the outlying areas of the county may have difficulty either driving or getting a ride to the center,” said Laine Nauman, division head, Hunterdon County Seniors, Disabilities and Veterans Services Division.

She said Hunterdon has limited bus services because it is a large, rural area, but as the population ages and the need increases, increased public transportation is needed.

AIPP is finding solutions to its transportation needs in South Brunswick with the establishment of a new curb-to-curb service this spring.

The new service has been made possible through a donation from AIPP board member Len Schickler, vice president of Brunswick Mobility Professionals.

The new program, yet to be named, first will feature one mobility van, with future vans to follow.

Golden Girls style

Rubel said what is most important as we consider how we will live as we grow older is being proactive instead of reactive and thinking through all the options.

“While some feel that having a roommate or two could never work for them, sometimes it can make all the difference,” she said.

Rubel said sharing household expenses including ever-escalating utility costs can make it possible to continue to live in one’s own home.

HomeSharing Inc. based in Bridgewater is an option that serves five counties: Somerset, Morris, Hunterdon, Union and Middlesex.

Now in its 30th year, Home Sharing, pairs those who are seeking to rent a room in their home with those who can’t afford the cost of their own home or apartment or would just prefer having a roommate for companionship.

“Our organization provides a source of affordable and quality housing for people of all ages,” said

executive director Lisa Blum.

She said approximately one third of their clients are seniors, another third are disabled, and the remaining clients have lost their jobs and need help paying the mortgage and don't qualify for assistance from government or other private agencies.

"For seniors it is a wonderful service because the extra income and companionship makes it possible for them to remain in their homes," Blum said.

While the amount of rent depends on what the provider is seeking, Blum said the average room rental is between \$550 and \$600.

All options

Another option for seniors considering staying at home is turning to a business like Evergreen Home Companions, a nonmedical, at-home, eldercare service, based in Branchburg.

Evergreen provides a range of supportive services, including medication reminders, lunch preparation, escorts to doctor and dentist appointments as well as for shopping and events, mail organization, assistance with apparel selection, grooming, light housekeeping, and as conversation and companionship.

The goal, according to a company representative, is for the nonmedical, eldercare provider to assist seniors to remain healthy and safe in an environment they comfortable living in. The company services Somerset, Morris, Hunterdon and Union counties.

Rubel said she believes the most important thing for everyone to keep in mind is to start planning early, be creative and know that there is not just one way that works for everyone.

As Dorothy realized on her journey through Oz, one's own backyard may very well hold all the treasures needed for a happy life, and there truly is no place like home.

On the other hand, venturing beyond the rainbow to try something new could be the answer for those who find home wherever they may be.