

# The Village to Village Network

By Ann Albert, Executive Director, Supporting Active Independent Lives (SAIL)

Over the past 10 years, we've all witnessed a changing landscape of services and living options for older adults. The increase in our nation's aging population has been well recorded as our 78 million baby boomers began retiring in 2012. Communities across the country are seeking innovative and cost-effective ways to augment existing services and health care networks that will help older adults stay healthy and active while living in their own homes. Remaining at home in most cases can prove to be most economical for many and, according to studies by AARP, it is the preference of over 90% of those ages 65 plus.

Thanks to the creative thinking and grassroots efforts of business folks, government agencies, boomers and their parents, we now have access to a plethora of home-delivered services, organizations offering volunteer support, educational and social opportunities, including unique and carefully planned living options such as co-housing developments, congregate senior apartments, age-friendly condominium communities, cooperatives, house sharing, and full-scale continuing care retirement communities (CCRC's).

Another model for supporting healthy and active aging has emerged during these past ten years—the Village model. The movement has expanded across the country since it began in 2001 with our nation's first "Village," Beacon Hill Village in Boston. Now there are 160 Village organizations nationwide with over 25,000 members. Another 150 Villages are in development. Most are founded and governed by members and others affiliated with a local non-profit aging services organization. Each one is membership-based and service-focused (whereby members give and receive). Sliding membership fees are available for members with low incomes. The idea is to leverage existing assets available in the community while members support one another in living safely and fully at home.

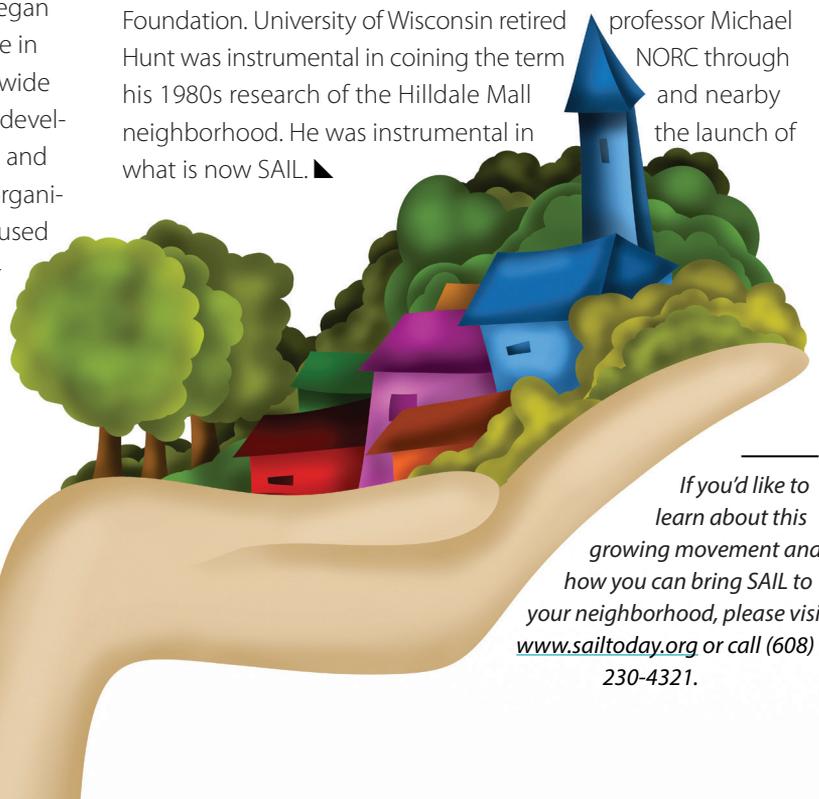
Villages recognize the need for members to purchase services to maintain their homes and well being. They provide members with access to vetted, and often discounted, service providers. Member and community volunteers play an active role in providing expert advice, transportation, social visits, light

home chores, educational programs, and more. Referrals are often made to local aging services agencies.

*SAIL is actually the second oldest Village in the nation and is a charter member of the national Village to Village Network.*

Villages protect the independence of older adults by offering a concierge-like service model whereby members pick and choose services and resources that meet their individual and unique requirements. Members drive the organization and help create or arrange for the various benefits offered. These benefits are designed to prevent social isolation, reduce risks for falls, prevent scams and risks related to dishonest or incompetent service providers, and assure knowledge and access to health services and wellness programs.

Madison has its own Village, SAIL—Supporting Active Independent Lives. SAIL, founded and governed by Oakwood Village and Attic Angel Association as of 2005, began as a 17-month Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) and was funded by the Administration on Aging and the Madison Community Foundation. University of Wisconsin retired professor Michael Hunt was instrumental in coining the term NORC through his 1980s research of the Hilldale Mall and nearby neighborhood. He was instrumental in the launch of what is now SAIL. ▲



*If you'd like to learn about this growing movement and how you can bring SAIL to your neighborhood, please visit [www.sailtoday.org](http://www.sailtoday.org) or call (608) 230-4321.*