



**MILL CITY COMMONS**  
YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD FOR A LIFETIME

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### **Connection Not Infection**

**Mill City Commons provides social stimulus package for members during COVID-19**

Minneapolis, MN - A unique membership-based community of downtown riverfront neighbors age 55+ refuse to let COVID-19 isolation stop their passion for engaging, sharing, growing, and learning.

Prior to COVID-19, Mill City Commons (MCC) offered a robust monthly calendar of in-person social, cultural, recreational, and educational programs for over 200 members. Normal programming included lectures, tours, demonstrations, volunteer opportunities, social hours, and physical activities. When COVID-19 hit along with social distancing and stay-at-home orders, MCC immediately pivoted to offering virtual programming via Zoom.

“It has been widely reported that adults over the age of 60 are most vulnerable to severe health issues due to COVID-19 causing them to be vigilant about self-isolation and physical distancing,” said Vice-Chair of MCC’s board and retired Mayo Clinic Dr. Michael Brennan. “These kinds of restrictions, while important, can be devastating and create severe loneliness and mental health issues--we knew MCC had to find ways to address these concerns for our members,” he added.

Within days of Governor Walz issuing the stay at home order, Mill City Commons converted its first program--a lively current events discussion--to an online format. Since then, weekly online program attendance has exceeded previous in-person attendance numbers. To date, a large portion of the membership has attended an online program or event.

“We have not offered online programming before,” said Elise Linehan, MCC’s Executive Director. “We weren’t sure how our members would respond given the new format and the need to learn a new technology quickly-but we knew MCC had to try and have been thrilled with the results.”

MCC member Pat Hoven described it best, “Because socializing with family and friends is very important to me the “Stay home” rules were difficult although I followed them.

Being a member of MCC has brought so many wonderful programs, educational and social, and developed ways to connect with friends and neighbors. The use of Zoom during this troubled time has far surpassed my expectations of feeling connected. It is almost like being there!"

"We have such a strong and vibrant membership at Mill City Commons," said MCC Board Member Sonia Cairns. "I've been involved in helping to create engaging in-person programs over the past years. We wondered if we could recreate the intellectually stimulating and engaging in-person meetings we had held in the past. Would we be able to sustain the robust conversation among the guest speakers and members? Recent Zoom meetings have been among the most robust we've ever hosted. Speakers, highly skilled staff and members have quickly adapted to Zoom programs. Now we are getting even more creative as members recommend Zoom programs they would like to host themselves – on storytelling, cooking with grandchildren, and various exercise activities."

In addition to quickly converting programs to an online format, MCC conducted a survey to assess member needs for connection during COVID-19. The result was the creation of "Pandemic Pals"-a buddy call system between members. MCC member Linnea Olesen commented, "I LOVED when fellow MCC members called me out of the blue! I can live on those calls for another month. Friendly communication is so wonderful... I'm lucky." MCC members have reported that online programming and increased buddy calls have significantly reduced feelings of depression and isolation due to COVID-19.

"Our continued success as a membership-driven organization is due to the value our members have come to know and expect from our timely and diverse programming and robust personal connections," said Linehan. "And, although COVID-19 has tested individual resolves, it has presented a unique opportunity for our community members to participate more frequently and get to know new friends. These kinds of connections build and maintain resiliency and well-being, and for that, we are grateful," she added.

Interested individuals who want to give Mill City Commons a try can purchase a 3 - Month Trail Membership for \$100 for the months of June – August.

#### About

Join us at Mill City Commons and enjoy the feeling of a "village" within the city, a community bringing together neighbors 55+ residing along or near the downtown riverfront. MCC engages its members and builds community to maintain healthy and vibrant lives in our neighborhood. MCC offers valuable connections to active, welcoming friends and a rich calendar of events that make it easy to engage and have fun as we learn, grow and share together. Members also have access to trusted resources and friendly staff to help redefine and navigate the aging journey.

Website - [www.millcitycommons.org](http://www.millcitycommons.org)

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