

Opinion

Our View: SouthCoast is gearing up for senior citizen boom

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"I grow old ... I grow old ...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

— T. S. Eliot

We don't like to think of ourselves as walking around with rolled up trousers or a shawl over our shoulders.

But the truth in life is that if we live long enough, we all get there.

And where we get to is a time in life when we need help.

It may not be 60, or even 70. But by our mid-eighties, the truth is that most of us will need some assistance. At least now and then.

You only have to read The Standard-Times obituaries to know that many people nowadays don't pass away until their nineties.

If 60 is the new 50, then 90 is the new 80 and increasingly, like J. Alfred Prufrock, people who have led vibrant, active lives can begin to be isolated as they grow older.

Dartmouth is a local community that is leading the way when it comes to planning for a future when a larger and larger share of the town's population will be senior citizens.

Some 14,000 Dartmouth residents are between the ages of 50 and 85, 8,900 of them senior citizens. That's a whopping 43 percent of the Dartmouth population. The Baby Boomers have grown old.

Last week the town's Age-Friendly Steering Committee announced it is conducting an in-depth survey of needs in the town. From transportation to housing to social participation to community and health services, the survey aims to find out what town residents need.

One group that has already organized to address the need is the nonprofit Coastal Neighbors Network. The community-based group launched last September and already has 52 members. It is one of a growing number of “virtual villages” that offers older adults options for staying at home.

CNN — don’t get it confused with the cable TV network — organizes volunteers to provide transportation, social opportunities, health connections and home maintenance.

The volunteers undergo background checks and are insured for the services they provide to members who pay between \$350 and \$900 a year depending on the services an individual or household needs.

The Dartmouth Council on Aging, like similar groups in municipalities across the SouthCoast and nation, have long been providing senior services, many of them in a communal setting.

Groups like CNN are cropping up to provide additional services to seniors who want to remain at home but need some help, often for simple things like getting up a ladder to change a light bulb, or putting a heavy air conditioner in a window. They also organize social activities like going to the theater, the movies, out to dinner. They can provide a friend to drive a senior to the doctor’s or the grocery store, maybe to talk about the issues that are on their mind.

The world is changing and new ways of delivering services are growing up as technology changes and the way we live our lives changes.

Senior citizens who live in sprawling suburbs like Dartmouth are going to be an increasingly large portion of the population. Those citizens will be productive members of society but they will also need some additional services.

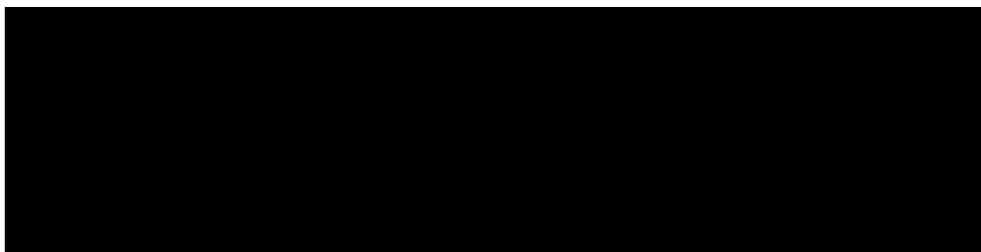
Cities and towns, for-profits and non-profits, are figuring out ways to help.



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