

City Living

‘Canopy of Neighbors Continues To Grow’

Canopy of Neighbors assists seniors to “age in place” independently by easing connections to services, providing transportation and facilitating social interaction with other elders in the 14222 and 14209 zip codes.

Canopy is a local manifestation of the “village concept that originated in Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood in 2001. Like most great ideas, this concept is simple. An organization of this type typically employs only two or three individuals and relies heavily on volunteer support to help sustain independence for seniors in their homes and apartments.

The Village to Village Network, a national conduit for information sharing, reports that 89 such “villages” exist in the United States right now with 123 more in development stages. These are all united by the common goal of maintaining independence and promoting “aging in place.”

Peggy Simpson of the Dupont Circle Village points out, “Most of us are learning as we go. So, from my view, all information about other villages and their strategic policy decisions and operating results are very, very valuable.”

Canopy of neighbors was the subject of an article I wrote in 2011 as they were opening their doors; the time seemed right to revisit and tell their story as it is unfolding.

There are 96 members currently residing in their houses, apartments and condominiums.* There are walking clubs and book discussion groups. Transportation to medical, shopping and other necessities is provided as needed with some people availing themselves of this at least a few times per week.

The community room at nearby Baptist Manor is used for regular yoga classes and group informational meetings. Interested individuals attend preview night as a group at the Irish Classical Theater on a regular basis as well as a monthly lunch discussion group at a neighborhood restaurant.

An individual membership to join Canopy is \$400 annually for a single person and \$600 for two people residing in the same household. Membership is also limited to people aged 62 or older.

The Canopy staff also serves as a central base for coordinating minor home repairs and transportation to medical appointments and social services. If a volunteer is not available, then connections to paid pre-screened contractors are facilitated. This is an amazing development in senior housing that operates at minimal cost, extends independent living, reduces isolation and saves tremendous cost to the entire senior care delivery system. Canopy directors spend a tremendous amount of time and passionate energy recruiting, coordinating and training volunteers and in their own words: they teach people of all ages “to be stewards of a community that is a good place to live.”

Canopy of Neighbors recently completed the “Mosaic project,” a compilation of personal stories, that utilized both art and narrative to tell the personal histories of many of Canopy’s members. This work, engineered by Sharon Cramer, professor emeritus from the university of buffalo, tells much of the story of the Buffalo area over the last century from an eyewitness standpoint in addition to identifying and sharing common threads of the group’s history.

Canopy has received temporary funding from several local entities and as with most organizations serving the public, they have unmet needs for both financial and volunteer resources.

You can find out more about this program and the “village” concept at www.canopyofneighbors.org.

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*As of February 2014, that number has have grown to 130 members.