



Ashby Village volunteers at work. Photo by Pat Carvalho.

Spotlight on Ashby Village A World of Seniors Engaged in Their Community

BY LISA CARLSON

Aging well and with grace doesn't require a gym membership or expensive beauty products.

Rather, a sense of purpose is the key to getting the most out of your life.

Brooke Nelson, Readers' Digest

Ashby Village is a “virtual” senior community, one without walls. Members, aged fifty and above, support one another in remaining active and independent while living at home. More importantly, Ashby Village helps harness the power of aging in the community through continuous learning, social connection, and maintaining a sense of purpose. With one in five residents of Berkeley expected to be over the age of sixty-five by 2020, those who are healthy often hope to age in place. Those who need medical support express the desire to continue to live at home, too.

Ashby Village, a nonprofit, was founded in 2010 as part of the national village movement to help people age in place. The organization connects members with resources and one another. There are 400 current members and about 275 volunteers residing in Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Emeryville, Kensington and parts of Oakland. About 120 members are Berkeley Hills residents, and they are part of one of the seven Ashby Village Neighborhood groups – a very popular source of social activities for members where they can get together close to home.

The first village, Beacon Hill, in Boston, launched in 1993. The initial concept was of a community of people who pool resources by paying membership dues and volunteering their skills and time to help one another. There are currently 200 villages in the U.S., and 150 are being organized across the country; most of them are in California.

Berkeley's Ashby Village maintains offices and conference rooms in rented space at the beautiful, historic Thousand Oaks Baptist Church off Solano Avenue. Entertainment and exercise classes take place in the Julia Morgan Hall in that building.

“We greatly contribute to social well-being in older age, reduce isolation, decrease health risks and therefore prevent or postpone the need for expensive institutional care. We support the psychological, functional, and emotional well-being of our members through social, educational and cultural events,” said Executive Director Andy Gaines.

“Volunteerism is a cornerstone of the Village model, drawing upon the untapped capacity of people in our communities to support each other.

Our Village has a ‘volunteer-first’ policy, finding a qualified volunteer to fulfill a request before referring members to a commercial vendor. Ashby Village volunteers include members, their children, college students, empty nesters, retirees, and many others from the community,” according to the organization’s website.

Volunteer training is taken seriously and takes place on a Saturday every three to four months. Volunteers are carefully screened prior to engaging with seniors.

“We have a good retention rate. We have appreciation events, send birthday and holiday cards...we’re like a big family,” said Community Engagement Manager Manuela Pegoraro.

Offering Practical Services

Ashby Village’s three pillars are: services, programs and community. It offers a wide variety of services while connecting members with each other and with younger volunteers. Services include:

- Transportation to grocery shopping and medical appointments
- Assistance with medical appointments by MedPals
- Computer and electronic help
- Light gardening
- Small repairs
- Companionship, including reading aloud
- Home organizing
- Food preparation
- Pet care

It’s a fact of life that as we age we navigate changes, challenges and transformations, and individuals will experience these at their own biological and emotional pace. Ashby Village offers support services to help with emotional processing of loss, illness and isolation, as well as with practical matters like decluttering. Volunteers work in teams, including the Social

