

The Making of a Village: The Greater Newburyport Village Comes to Life

By Tom Lochhaas, Village member and volunteer

Photos by Barbara Dowd



Paul Harrington, President of the Greater Newburyport Village

When Newburyport resident Paul Harrington began helping organize a local nonprofit Village some three years ago, he never guessed he'd later become one of the first Village members to need its services. While he was walking the family dog, a slip on the ice caused an injury that resulted in many months of rehab. His wife, Betty, had to take care of their home, dog, and everything else while caring for Paul. Fortunately, Greater Newburyport Village volunteers stepped in to help, even taking the dog for daily walks.

The Village recently celebrated its 6-month anniversary with more than 50 members and an enthusiastic team of volunteers. Its mission, "to promote living well and independently for a lifetime through community engagement and a network of neighborly support," means the Village focuses on helping people live happily in their own homes and community as they age. Most members are over age 55 and active but are aware that in years ahead, they may need help with household chores, getting a ride to a doctor's appointment, or learning to use a new smartphone. The Village provides many such services as well as referrals to recommended home professionals such as electricians and plumbers.

Volunteer services form the basis of the national "Village movement," now with several hundred active or developing Villages across the country—with Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood being the first. While Paul and the other Greater Newburyport Village founders looked to the national movement as they started organizing, the local Village was developed to address the specific needs and wants of Newburyport, Amesbury, Newbury, Salisbury, West Newbury, and Rowley residents.

In addition to helpful services, the Village's social, cultural, and educational opportunities include the popular Lunch & Learn series of noontime gatherings with speakers on a wide variety of topics, recreational outings, group dinners, and events such as a recent harbor boat tour. "We are a member-driven organization," Paul explains, "and that means that as we grow and members want to form new groups for activities or other special events, the Village will provide even more opportunities." In this way, the Village has also become important to members new to the area who want to expand their social network and explore interests together with other Village members.

As a nonprofit, all services and activities of the Village are handled by volunteers. A team of more than a dozen local residents started the Village and dozens more have discovered the personal fulfillment that comes from lending a helping hand. Recent retiree and Village volunteer Mike Prendergast puts it this way: "It feels good to make new friends while giving a hand to those who need it,

and you never know when you may suddenly need some neighborly support yourself—like someone to water your vegetable garden when you're away." Or even walk your dog.

The Greater Newburyport Village is accepting new members. To learn more, visit the website GreaterNewburyportVillage.org, or send an email to info@greater-newburyportvillage.org, or call 978-206-1821.



Village members and volunteers at a social event



Village volunteers helping a member with her garden