

## Villages Clark County to launch in 2018

### Organization leads effort to help seniors with tasks at home

By **Marissa Harshman** (</author/mharshman>),

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#### You can help

- For more information on Villages Clark County or to get involved in the planning efforts, visit the website, [www.villagesclarkcounty.org](http://www.villagesclarkcounty.org) (<http://www.villagesclarkcounty.org>), or call Helen Elder at 360-210-5821.

Nearly 90 percent of people 65 and older want to stay in their current home and communities as they age, according to the American Association of Retired Persons.



But what are they to do as they get older and are unable to perform some of the tasks required of those who live on their own — lawn work, changing light bulbs, grocery shopping — and don't have adult children nearby to help?

A group of Clark County residents believe they have the answer: create a village.

Villages are a concept started in 2002 by a group of neighbors living in Boston's Beacon Hill. The idea is to create a community around seniors who wish to age in place. Villages are networks in this approach, not physical places.

The villages are led by nonprofit organizations that link screened and trained volunteers with seniors who need help. The villages also serve as a social network, connecting seniors with other seniors and providing opportunities to get involved in the community.

"We bring volunteers into seniors' homes to help do things adult children would do, but the adult children live in New Jersey," said Helen Elder, a volunteer on the planning committee working to launch the local village.

Nationwide, there are more than 200 open villages and more than 150 villages in planning stages, according to Village to Village Network, the national organization tracking the movement.

Villages Clark County has been in the works for a couple of years and will go live in 2018. The local nonprofit is part of the regional Villages Northwest group that has nine villages up and running, including two in Portland, one in Hillsboro, Ore., and one in Beaverton, Ore.

In Clark County, about 14 percent of residents are 65 and older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The county estimates that 25 percent of the local population will be 60 or older by 2030.

The high cost of assisted living centers will make it tough for many seniors to afford to leave their homes, Elder said. That's the motivation for a group of enthusiastic volunteers working to fundraise start-up costs and spread the word about Villages Clark County, she said.

"We have to do something," Elder said.

Here's how villages work.

Seniors who wish to be a part of the village will purchase a membership. The cost of that membership is determined by the number of members and the cost of operating the organization, which will have office space and possible one employee. In Portland, the two villages have monthly costs of about \$50, Elder said.

The nonprofit will recruit, background check and train volunteers to go into members' homes and perform a variety of tasks, from yard work and house cleaning to food prep and computer help. The volunteers may also provide transportation to appointments or do grocery shopping for members.

Volunteers will not provide health care services or medication management, nor will they perform personal hygiene tasks, Elder said. But the volunteers will be trained to recognize if a member is having problems or has needs beyond the scope of the program and can help connect the senior to the appropriate resources, she said.

In addition to the volunteers, the organization will manage a list of vetted businesses to refer for tasks that cannot be performed by volunteers. In exchange for the referral, the business will offer a discounted rate for the members, Elder said.

Villages Clark County also hopes to serve as a social group, connecting seniors with each other and opportunities in the community, Elder said.

The organization will manage a calendar of free things to do around the community and will help to facilitate group outings. The goal, Elder said, is to get seniors engaged in their community — for their own benefit and that of the community.

"We have cultural ideas about aging, and us boomers are going to bust them open," Elder said.



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