

A volunteer program at SaddleBrooke has neighbors helping neighbors

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Volunteers are trained in advance of their service.

By Theresa Poalucci

Living in a retirement community like SaddleBrooke, does not guarantee that a resident will thrive. It is true that housing developments for retirees offer plenty of opportunity for social engagement, but as residents get older they often find themselves living alone in their homes – no longer able to make use of the golf course, swimming pools, dinners at the clubhouse, craft classes or club participation.

It was two SaddleBrooke gentlemen sharing a couple of beers, and discussing the needs that some SaddleBrooke residents were starting to face – illness, surgery, disability, inability to drive, and dealing with the death of a spouse - that got them started on the idea of neighbors helping neighbors.

The two started researching other senior communities, for surely they thought, other communities must share these same issues. And how right they were, for they discovered there is a “National Village Network” of neighbors helping neighbors, a bona fide organization that has been successfully operating in several communities, providing help to those in need. Shortly thereafter, The Senior Village of SaddleBrooke was incorporated and is now part of the national chapter.

Called Senior Village at SaddleBrooke (SVS), this all volunteer organization asks those that are facing physical limitations, unable to drive, partake in activities, or socialize, to register with them. Then when the individual needs help, the volunteers at SVS have the information they need to provide assistance.

“Isolation, loneliness and depression can set in as old friends move on, families are afar, widowhood is a reality, and

socialization becomes nonexistent,” said Sandy Morse, a volunteer with SVS, who helps with publicity and creating a newsletter for the group. “Many of the people who moved into SaddleBrooke 30 years ago are now in their 90s and have become isolated.”

Started about a year ago, the group has 185 volunteers to assist and more than 300 members who need help from time to time. Members pay a fee of \$48, if they are single, or \$60 for a couple. This helps defray the cost of insurance, volunteer training, background checks, and administrative costs.

New members go through an intake process so SVS knows who their next of kin is in case of an emergency, if they need reminders about appointments or medication, what level of socialization do they currently have, and even check to make sure their home is safe from fall hazards.

“The majority of what we do is drive people to doctor’s appointments,” explained Morse. “We try to match them with a volunteer that is heading in the same direction and can accommodate dropping them off and picking them up.”

Morse reported that since last February the group has logged some 5,000 plus miles.

Other requests for help run the gamut for needing help around the house, like turning a mattress or hanging a picture to replacing light bulbs or moving something that is too heavy for the home owner. Volunteers who help with small projects inside and outside the home are called the Helping Hands team.

SVS can also install the Golder Ranch Fire District’s lock box on a SaddleBrooke resident’s home exterior if they have already purchased the box. The device enables the fire department paramedics to enter the home via a secured key within the box, which prevents them breaking down the door if the person inside has called 911 and can’t get to the door to let help in.

Although driving and assistance around the home are vital parts of the Village program, Morse feels that the social aspect is just as important.

“Senior Village knows that by staying active, establishing supportive friendships and having social interaction, the quality of life is enhanced and longevity can actually be increased, for our members” she said. “We are here for those who want and need more social interaction in their lives, and for those members who are homebound, lonely or out of touch with friends. Our Friendly Contact volunteers are sometimes their only link to the community.”

Jim Becker, a volunteer for Senior Village urges people not to hesitate to enroll as members. “People have a sense that they don’t want to bother their neighbors. I just want people to know that this is what we want to do. We’re here because we want to help somebody, and it’s their turn to be helped.”

“The best job is the one you don’t get paid for.” He added, “I was so glad when the Village got started because this is what I’ve been looking for.”

Morse would agree with Becker, adding “This is turning into a really big thing and people are so eager to volunteer.”

Live in SaddleBrooke and want to know more? Go to seniorvillageatsaddlebrooke.org. To sign up as a volunteer, to make a donation, or to become a Friend of the Village log on to svatsb.org. For membership, call 520-314-1042.

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