

# Home but not alone

In virtual Village, seniors find support while aging in place

BY CHRIS KENRICK

EVEN AS THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN KEPT MOST PEOPLE APART DURING 2020, one group of local seniors found ways to stay connected through a grassroots support network launched a decade earlier to help those aging at home combat isolation.

Called Avenidas Village because of its affiliation with the local senior services agency Avenidas, the organization operates much like a mutual aid society for seniors growing old in their own homes.

About 300 Palo Alto-area seniors belong to the local network.

“Avenidas Village has become my community,” said Menlo Park resident Alice Kozar, a retired physician who joined several years ago after her husband developed health problems, including dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. “I am now home but not alone. Even though my son suffered a surprise stroke and died at 45, and my husband is in assisted living ... I don’t feel isolated.”

In exchange for annual membership dues, the network helps members coordinate daily living, social and recreational activities: home maintenance, health, transportation, social engagement, caregiving, end-of-life concerns and other challenges that often confront seniors who live in their own homes.

Membership dues support two-and-a-half staff positions and a host of ongoing resources and activities, including lists of vetted service providers, social events, walking groups, excursions, lectures and discussions.



Deborah Clark and Janet Constantinou chat while walking with other Avenidas Village members on their weekly promenade in Palo Alto.

Photo by Magali Gauthier.

Village members can arrange to receive check-in phone calls on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, and an email list provides quick feedback when a member poses a question to the group.

Most of the current Village members range in age from their early 70s to late 90s, said Dawn Greenblat, member services manager. The oldest is 108 and still living in her own home. Most members are retired, though some are still working.

Annually, the dues are \$1,040 for an individual and \$1,490 for a couple, with reduced rates for seniors who have incomes below \$60,000 a year.

When the pandemic struck, Village activities switched to Zoom, with tutorials for those who needed help accessing the platform. Village members received calls to make sure they were okay, and the staff began making grocery runs for members who needed help.

And now that the country is emerging from the pandemic, the organization plans to permanently shift some of its services to a hybrid model.

Founded in 2007, Avenidas Village is part of a national movement of about 300 similar “Villages” modeled after Boston’s Beacon Hill Village, which pioneered the concept in 1999 after a group of neighbors formed an association. Avenidas Village was the first program in California, where there are now about 60, including about 15 in the Bay Area. **LW**

To learn more about Avenidas Village, go to [avenidasvillage.org](http://avenidasvillage.org).

For information about other California Villages go to [villagemovementcalifornia.org](http://villagemovementcalifornia.org). The national Village network can be accessed at [vtvnetwork.org](http://vtvnetwork.org).

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