

Aging in Place keeps you at home

By Cheryl M. Keyser
For Public Opinion

On April 7, the Support Network at Penn National (SNaP for short) will hold a kickoff event to sign up community members for its service program.

SNaP, a separate entity from the homeowners association — although organized by residents — is modeled on groups in other cities which provide a service structure to help older adults remain in their own homes as they age.

No matter how attractive an assisted living facility or comfortable a nursing home, it's still not home. Most people as they age would prefer to remain in their own home, near friends and familiar surroundings.

Over the past few years, close to 100 self-help groups have been formed to help people age in place by providing referrals or direct services for an annual fee.

Penn National is now home to a new one.

"We have many people who have lived here for 30 years," said Patrice Nitterhouse, vice president of White Rock, the owner and developer of Penn National Golf Course Community.

SNaP is a home-grown organization developed over a two-year period in intensive twice-a-week meetings. It is an entirely volunteer effort, a key characteristic of life at Penn National, which hosts a number of volunteer and Affinity groups.

The driving force behind SNaP is Al Poppen, who has lived at Penn National for about five years. He first heard about aging-in-place communities through articles in the New York Times and other newspapers, and presented the idea to the Penn National Homeowners Association, asking if they might be interested in putting together a group of residents to develop a proposal.

Aging in place is seen as an important living option for older adults, delaying the need for institutionalization.

To encourage and promote the idea, the National Aging in Place Council (NAIPC) has been formed to develop links among providers of health care services, businesses, public agencies and homeowners. It also advocates for policies, regulation and business practices that will promote this alternative.

"By 2015 the U.S. will have more than 46 million households with people from 51 to 70 years of age, compared with 25 million for the previous generation. The demand for creative and high quality services is clear," said Peter Bell, NAIPC Executive Director.

The Fifth Annual Aging in Place week will be held from Oct. 13 to 19. For more information, check its Web site at <http://www.naipc.org>.



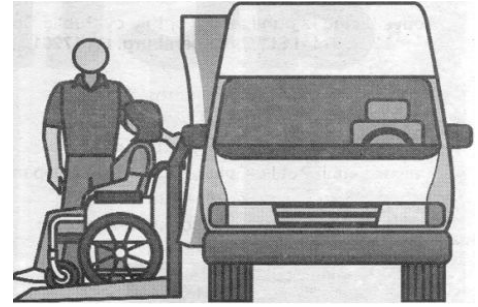
After a month's consideration, the association gave him the go-ahead, adding that if this came to fruition, it should be organized as a separate corporation.

Poppen then wrote an article for the Penn National newsletter, asking for people with backgrounds in such areas as health care, marketing and business to join him. "Within two weeks we had 12 to 13 highly qualified people," he said.

The group proceeded in a very methodical manner, holding some 8 to 9 focus groups to develop a questionnaire for a needs assessment. They didn't limit their research only to current residents of Penn National. They also contacted people who had moved on to Quincy or Menno Haven to get their input.

The eight-page questionnaire was distributed to every one of the more than 1,000 homes in Penn National and received a high 50 percent response, with a tally of 80 percent in the "for" column.

Originally, the group was going to base its program design on one developed in the Beacon Hill section of Boston. "But we realized that we are a different community and we have to develop a plan based on our own needs," said Poppen. They also sought



guidance from local assisted living and health service organizations. "There are a lot of good resources here and we wanted to utilize them," he added.

Several committees have been developed by people with expertise in a field; for example, the information services committee is headed by a retired librarian, and the health support service committee by a retired surgeon and his wife, a nurse educator. Other committees include home maintenance, lifelong learning and the toughest one, transportation.

"If you can't drive at Penn National, you are up a creek," said Poppen. "We need transportation for things people want to do, not necessarily need to do."

"Being able to draw on this wealth of talent exemplifies the strength of the Penn National community," Nitterhouse said. "The brilliant thing about what our residents have done is respond to a social need by being self-sufficient and finding a way to get it done. I'm happy to support what they are doing."

The group also impressed Rep. Todd Rock, who obtained \$10,000 in seed money from the state to help them get started. "I could see that the organization was well-planned and the money would be well used. I couldn't think of a better way to use taxpayer dollars."

SNaP fees are considerably lower than those of many other groups. Charter members [those joining by April 15] will pay \$450 per household a year, and those who sign up later will pay \$500. An executive director, Donna Crissman, has already been hired, and on May 1, SNaP will be officially launched.

"The fee may seem a lot, but if we delay the admission to a nursing home by one week, it will pay for the annual fee," said Dick Kiel, SNaP vice president. "The true benefit of SNaP, however, cannot be measured in dollars. It offers peace of mind and a sense of independence."

For more information, call the SNaP office at 352-2612 or check the Web site at <http://www.snappn.org>.