

EAST-ENDER by Tom Gilbert: 3 from Franklin County picked for national symposium

Public Opinion Online

It is always uplifting to see those among us receive recognition for abilities and accomplishments.

So it was when NCB Capital Impact decided to conduct a national symposium, with AARP sponsorship, at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., to support the Village to Village Network. The symposium was called "Creating and Running Your Own Village," and they tapped three of our local residents, Donna Crissman, Dick Kiel and Don Weber, to participate.

The purpose of the Village to Village Network is to help communities establish and maintain organizations aimed at enabling people to age in place, as opposed to moving to assisted or nursing facilities. The network is sponsored through a joint partnership between NCB Capital Impact and the Beacon Hill Village.

NCB Capital Impact is a national nonprofit organization that creates access to capital and expert technical assistance for communities that would like to set up support groups. It combines both financial and developmental services to spark the development of local organizations.

Beacon Hill Village is a membership organization in Boston. It was created in 2001 by a group of long-time Beacon Hill residents as an alternative to moving to retirement or assisted-living facilities.

There are 48 such operating support groups across the nation and many others in various stages of development. Many of the approximately 180 attendees were not actually members of a group but were looking for help and guidance with regard to putting a group together.

"I feel being invited to participate on the national level validates the credibility of our organization," Kiel said.

Crissman, Kiel and Weber were invited to participate because of their involvement with the Support Network at Penn National (SNaP). It is not only a very professional operation but also a highly successful one with one of the lowest membership fees among such organizations.

What's more, it is one of the few such organizations to operate in a rural setting and other rural groups have shown an interest in establishing aging-in-place groups.

"Being rural, we don't have as many resources available to us as do some of the urban groups," Weber said. "Our main resource is us and I feel we've done very well."

Crissman, who is the executive director of SNaP, gave a presentation and served as a panelist in a session dealing with putting a plan into action.

"It was nice to be able to share with others our experiences," Crissman said. "And I'm sure we'll get a lot of phone calls from people wanting to know how we dealt with this or that problem."

Kiel, who is a past president of SNaP, gave a presentation and served as a panelist for a session dealing with developing a plan to create an organization.

Weber, present president of SNaP, led a small group discussion on the proper balance between volunteers and paid staff.

A tip of the hat to all three.

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