

It's a SNaP at Penn National

By **CHERYL M. KEYSER**
For Public Opinion

SNaP, the three-year-old Support Network at Penn National, is undertaking a major membership drive in January 2011.

"We are a very practical, functioning organization, providing services to members which they have indicated they are very satisfied with," said Dick Kiel, past president and charter member.

The organization helps residents of the community remain in their homes as they become older, providing services through volunteers and selected providers for everything from home maintenance, transportation, caregiver relief and education to social support, day trips, and social events.

So far this year, SNaP has handled 212 requests for service, including 121 for home maintenance, 25 for transportation, and the rest for information, according to Executive Director Donna Crissman.

"We estimate that we have saved our members over \$1,000 in maintenance costs alone," she added.

SNaP is one of the new faces of what is known as "aging in place." Many people prefer to remain in their own home as they grow older, no matter how attractive an assisted living facility or a specially designed senior community. In their own environment, they know their neighbors and friends, the stores they shop at, the churches they attend and their children—who may well be helping in their later years even from a distance—also know these people and places.

One of the first steps taken to provide services for people who live in a community with many older individuals is a model originally established in the Beacon Hill Village of Boston. It has been replicated across the country in more than 75 communities.

It was the inspiration for SNaP, which began with former Penn National resident Al Poppen. He saw an article in The New York Times about the Boston group and proposed that Penn National start a similar organization. And so began a two-year process of getting the approval of the homeowners association, putting together a group of organizers, surveying community needs, and

establishing it as a tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) entity.

Just as other groups have done, SNaP has modified the Boston structure to serve its own needs.

"Today, we are the only rural aging-in-place community in Pennsylvania and one of the very few in the United States," said Kiel.

"We have been recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and received a grant to support our work. The department is so pleased with our model that they plan to use it with other state groups," said current SNaP president, Don Weber.

Anecdotes abound of the work done by SNaP's some 77 volunteers who donate their time and talents. "Requests for service range from painting interior and exterior surfaces, to window, cleaning, lawn care, leaky roofs, driveway sealing, deck washing, installing bathtub bars, and appliance repair," noted Crissman. There are even some who untangle computer problems.

"One couple bought a new washer and dryer and a SNaP volunteer built a platform for the machines so the wife did not have to bend," explained Crissman.

Another couple, both with chronic illnesses, have reached out to SNaP for transportation assistance. "They attended our potluck dinner and the wife stood up and gave touching testimony on how they would not be able to get along without our members," added Weber.

While volunteers provide many necessary services, SNaP members have also vetted local businesses to establish a network of preferred providers within an area encompassing Chambersburg, Waynesboro, Greencastle and Shippensburg. "At least two members of Penn National have used the services of a business and determined that they are competent and timely" said Kiel. "We trust them and are not reluctant to



Pecan duty: Don Weber and Donna Crissman bag pecans for customers at SNaP headquarters.

recommend them to members." In addition, [many of] these businesses provide a discount to SNaP members.

But SNaP is not just about providing services, it also holds fun events for members—a wine and cheese get-together, a holiday bazaar, a pancake breakfast, a Susquehanna River cruise, and even snow tubing, among others.

In October, a presentation on SNaP was held for Chambersburg's Institute for Retired Persons (IRP). And the organization has also come to national attention at an AARP-sponsored seminar in Washington, D.C. on "Creating and Running Your Own Village." Both Crissman and Kiel were presenters at the event. "Now we get calls from across the country inquiring about our organization," said Kiel.

There is a bit of missionary zeal among SNaP members. "We feel so good about our group that we want everyone to join," said Kiel. "It is important to know that if something happens to you there is someone there to take care of you."

As the SNaP motto says, the organization is about "Neighbors helping neighbors live actively, safely and comfortably at home."

To learn more

For more information call SNaP at 352-2612 or visit <http://www.snapn.org>
Annual dues for a family are \$250; for one person, \$200.

A subsidized membership of \$150 is based on income.