

# Helping seniors thrive at home

By LENA ELLWANGER

Some things really do take a village. Other times it's just nice to know the village is there.

Feeling connected is one of the most important benefits of Queen Anne's at Home, a nonprofit membership organization that recently marked the end of its inaugural year.

The overall purpose of the organization is three-fold, says Margan Glover, board president. "What makes the difference between aging in place and thriving at home ... boils down to three things: a sense of purpose, a sense of connection and a sense of empowerment, so everything we do focuses on those three things."

The organization was started as a county initiative: "They were looking at the demographic forecasts, and Queen Anne's County is one of the few counties in Maryland that is forecast to be an aging county. They were looking at that and the pressure that was going to be put on the various county services and realizing there were going to be pretty big gaps."

After doing some research, "They come upon the Village movement model. ... Everything is done by members, for each other."

Membership is open to any senior in Queen Anne's County, age 50 and up. The yearly fee for membership is \$50 per individual or \$75 per household.

When a person or couple first joins, they fill out a form detailing their needs, their interests and services they would be willing and able to provide.

QA@Home is currently at around 50 members, but Margan says, "We would love to have hundreds. Eventually, we would love to be the community that seniors in our county turn to."

She says she would like to see membership at least double in the next year.

"There is kind of a critical mass to this that we are building toward. Since it's members looking out for each other, you need to have enough people so that, let's say you need a ride to the doctor, you need to have enough people who

have volunteered to give rides so that you're pretty sure you're going to get your request taken care of."

Plus, higher numbers mean greater results for everyone. "The more people you have, not only is it more people taking care of each other, but you've got more ideas coming in, you've got more skills coming in."

Some seniors may hesitate to join because they feel they have nothing to offer. That is never the case, Margan says. "In addition to talking about what you need, let's talk about what you can do. Do you like to write, do you like to talk to people, do you like to play card games, do you like to cook? There's tons of things you can do to help other members."

The Senior Navigation Plan is another primary benefit of QA@Home. Organized digitally or in a binder, SNAP chapters include such topics as emergency planning, medical directives, end-of-life options, wellness and fitness plans, and scam prevention, among others.

"As far as we know, there's no other entity in Queen Anne's County that offers anything like that. ... For a lot of people, that is very appealing because it's something that everybody knows — of any age — we need to be better organized than we are, especially when we're talking about big things like our legal matters, our financial matters, our health matters."

SNAP, and the organization as a whole, helps seniors come up with plan B. "A large number of people who are aging in place have this underlying current of anxiety about the future, and so a big part of what Queen Anne's at Home is all about is helping people diminish that anxiety by thinking through, 'What are you going to need to make this work?'"

Margan says the monthly SNAP programs are bringing in members who may have thought they had everything prepared, but are now realizing there are additional topics they hadn't considered and changes they need to keep up with.

There is a socialization aspect to the SNAP sessions, as well, particularly so folks can get to know each other. After all, you want to know who is coming to your house when a service is needed, Margan says.



PHILIP STAPLETON

She believes all of the social opportunities offered by QA@Home can help seniors thrive.

"We have coffees and meet-ups and happy hours and share-a-skills," which are offered at a variety of locations and at different times so everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Margan says prospective members are welcome. "If someone is thinking about joining, we always encourage them to come to at least one event first. Come to a coffee or come to a SNAP, that way you get to see what we're up to, you get to meet other members, you get a sense of whether this is a group you would be comfortable with."

To learn more about any aspect of the organization, visit [qaathome.helpfulvillage.com](http://qaathome.helpfulvillage.com) or call 410-635-4045.

And not to worry, tech savvy is not necessary, as all service requests can be called in and all volunteers available to respond can be reached by phone.

"We make sure everybody stays in the loop."