

Senior Companion Program

The Alternative To A Nursing Home

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A harsh reality of old age is that it can impair your ability to live independently just when you need that ability most.

Then what?

In Santa Cruz County there's an alternative to moving in with relatives or entering a residential care home for the support services you need.

It's called the Senior Companion Program.

Senior Companions are older men and women who have been trained by the Elvirita Lewis Foundation to provide personal support services and friendship to the most frail and home-bound seniors so that these seniors may remain as independent as possible.

A Senior Companion can keep from 15 to 20 persons out of residential care homes, according to Steve Brummel, executive director for the foundation.

"This is a substantial accomplishment," Brummel said, "for two reasons. First, the frail elderly are enabled to remain in their homes, their community. Second, it spares the elderly the cost of a rest home, a cost that is almost \$15,000 per year."

But funding cutbacks have created problems for the Senior Companion Program, hence the foundation is sponsoring a flea market Saturday to raise \$3,000, enough to keep a Senior Companion working in the field for a year.

In a twin effort, the foundation is also seeking funds from business and other organizations to raise another \$3,000 to keep a second Senior Companion in the field.

The flea market Saturday is at the Elder Resources Center, 5905 Soquel Drive, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Jim Holbert, a Senior Companion, has already collected several vans of donations from around town. He even brought one van of donations from Seaside.

Brummel said: "We're getting many good things people will want, including an air conditioner, several antique beds, the jawbone of an ass painted orange and with bells attached, oil paintings, hand-made pillows, cloisonne, silver, crystal, rugs . . ."

Other donations are wanted at the center. For large items, call the center and ask for pickup service. The telephone number is 462-2765.

What exactly does a Senior Companion do?

Explains Jim:

"There are six elderly people I shop for or take shopping. The oldest is 91, the youngest is 75. I have two crippled people I help. We take people to the doctor and other places they need to go or want to go. I used to take a paralyzed man in a wheelchair to go bowling. I have another paralyzed man with a wife that I shop for and if I didn't do that they wouldn't eat . . . or they would go into a residential home."

Said Brummel: "Jim is the link, the lifeline for older people in Santa Cruz and the San Lorenzo Valley."

Supervisor

Ms. Lois Hardy has been named supervisor of business services to the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. She previously worked as fiscal coordinator for the special education service region of Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

Meet Josephine Repass, who works at the center as an aide and as an assistant to the editor of the news clipping service.

"We have a series of buttons we sell to raise money," said Josephine. "The first one we sold was 'Our Elders Have Done It Longer.' My favorite is 'Enjoy Your Age.'"

Josephine has been coordinating all the home cooked items for the sale, and these will include little pizzas (sold hot), small cartons of baked beans, enchiladas, cakes, cookies, chicken casserole.

This is the fifth anniversary of Elvirita Lewis Foundation operations in the Monterey Bay Area, with the Santa Cruz office opening in 1976, Brummel said.

The foundation operates diverse programs in the tri-county area it serves, including Santa Cruz County.

In the service area it has 41 paid Senior Companions and Lead Companions, who each see an average of 15 frail elderly clients at home. Even with fringe benefits and administrative costs thrown in, the Companion cost per client is \$345.91 per year.

Many costs can be involved in keeping a frail elder at home rather than in a residential care home, Brummel said.

The foundation has broken these other costs down to some \$4,800 per year for rent or house payment, \$1,080 for skilled nursing visits, \$1,092 for Homemaker cleaning service, \$1,300 for Mobile Meals and other food, \$1,500 for miscellaneous services (yard, telephone, utilities and other costs), transportation and Senior Companion Service at \$346 per year.

The total costs come to some \$10,368 per year, compared with a minimum of \$14,400 for nursing home or convalescent center costs.

But even more important than the cash savings the Senior Companion Program effects is the independence it preserves for the elderly, Brummel thinks, the joy of living one's own life in one's own home and community even if one's body functions less well than it used to because of advancing years.

The flea market Saturday will enable the community to aid the Elvirita Lewis Foundation to continue the Senior Companion Program.

You're invited to attend.



Martha Dean, left, and Jim Holbert, right, of the senior companion program, and Josephine Repass, center, of the Elvirita Lewis Foundation.

