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IN THE REGION | WESTCHESTER

An Old-Age Home All Your Own



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

FORGET FLORIDA Alberta Blasewitz at home in Yonkers, receives a visit from a neighbor, Catherine Reid.

By ELSA BRENNER
Published: April 28, 2010

ONE evening four winters ago Robert Immerman came home to discover the steep steps leading up to his house in Larchmont glazed with ice. Unable to make the ascent to the front door because of balance problems he had suffered since undergoing brain surgery, he panicked.

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Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Thomas and Emily Saunders plan to retrofit their house in Rye as their needs dictate.

“That was it,” said his wife, Minna. “That’s when we knew we had to move.” The couple — he is 70 and has since retired from his architecture practice; she is 66 and teaching part-time — had lived in the three-bedroom Tudor-style house for more than 30 years. Their two daughters had grown up there. They faced a tough question, one that most people eventually wrestle with: where to live in their old age.

They ruled out moving to a retirement community or an assisted-living facility outside of Larchmont. “We love our community, and most of our friends are here,” Mrs. Immerman said.

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So the Immermans aren't leaving town. The route they chose —to “age in place” — is becoming increasingly popular in [Westchester](#) and elsewhere.

Amy Paul, the executive director of the Center for Aging in Place Support in White Plains, said people had begun to “rethink the process of aging and to push back on stereotyping of the old.”

The organization, a nonprofit established two years ago, offers grants and technical advice to aging-in-place startups in Westchester County.

“Nowadays when people get older,” Ms. Paul said, “they don't want to have to go away out of sight.”

She also ascribed the trend to the troubled real estate market of the past three years, which has made it more difficult to sell a house and still realize a sizable profit.

As of the 2008, 186,889 people over 60 lived in the county, out of an overall population of 953,943, according to the county planning department. By 2030, Westchester's population is expected to be 982,666, with about 243,518 residents over 60. [AARP](#) polls indicate that almost 9 in 10 Americans over 60 share the Immermans' desire to live out their lives in familiar surroundings as opposed to an institutional setting — however luxurious some care communities may be.

In Larchmont, it turned out that the Immermans' search for a housing solution coincided with the creation of At Home on the Sound, a nonprofit support network designed to facilitate aging in place.

They moved within town to a three-bedroom co-op in an elevator building, and will rely on the organization to assist them in their lives there. At Home on the Sound, which officially opens this month, will offer its clients referrals to social service and health care providers, tradespeople, drivers and housekeepers, among other services..

“As seniors,” Mrs. Immerman said, “we don't want to have to go someplace else and start over. We want to stay where we are and remain a vital part of our communities.”

Most efforts like At Home on the Sound refer to themselves as villages — a takeoff on the notion that it requires a village to raise a child and likewise to support older residents. Groups are often modeled after Beacon Hill Village in Boston, a pioneer in the community-based approach. About a decade old, it now has 400 members.

In Westchester, the number of older residents electing not to leave their current homes has inspired the Home Services Shop, a handyman service in Pleasantville, to add a new business division to retrofit their houses, said Kurt McKinney, the company's vice president.

Over the past two years, Mr. McKinney said, demand has increased for the installation of bathroom grab bars and chair lifts for stairs, and for the widening of doorways to accommodate wheelchairs.

In Yonkers, Alberta Blasewitz, 80, belongs to a three-year-old aging-in-place group called DeHaven on the Hudson, named after a neighborhood street. The organization serves 130 members living in condominiums and co-ops on the city's west side.

For Ms. Blasewitz, a retired secretary, membership has been critical: recently home from a three-week hospital stay, she has been able to count on friends and volunteers to drive her to the doctor, run errands, prepare food and regularly check in on her progress.

In Rye, Thomas Saunders, 65, and his wife, Emily, 66, have considered a number of options, including moving to the [Carolinas](#) or Georgia, where housing costs are lower and [golf](#) courses more plentiful. They have instead decided to remain in the three-bedroom two-bath Tudor that has been their home for 26 years.

Mr. Saunders, a retired engineer who suffered a stroke 12 years ago, said that in the final analysis it mattered more to him to remain close to his doctors in [Manhattan](#) and to the

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couple's daughter and three grandchildren in [Connecticut](#).

Instead of moving, he said, they will retrofit the house as their needs dictate. Mr. Saunders is a founding member of a nascent group called Sprye, an acronym for Staying Put in Rye and the Environs.

The local aging-in-place associations rely primarily on volunteers, although some — like the three-year-old Gramatan Village in Bronxville — have at least one paid staff member who coordinates services and vets service providers' credentials.

Gramatan Village, which has with 400 members, charges \$360 a year for individuals and \$480 for a family. At Home on the Sound will charge a similar amount.

DeHaven on the Hudson's members pay just \$25 a year, in large part because many of them rely on [Social Security](#) and small pensions, and few, if any, have significant investments, said Barbara Weinbaum, the group's president.

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