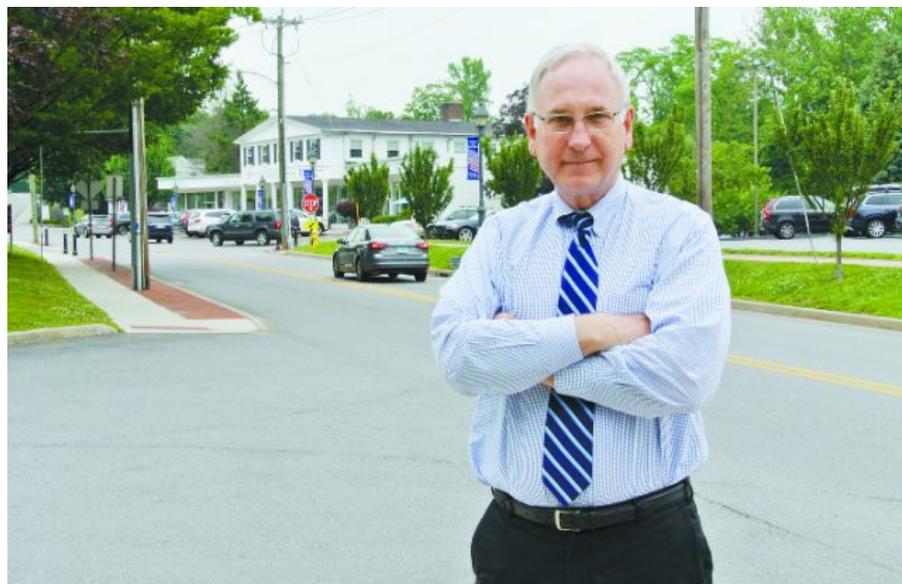


## Leading seniors to a broader future

By [Jeannette Ross](#) on July 11, 2017 in [Lead News](#), [News](#), [People](#) · 0 Comments



*Stay at Home in Wilton President Peter Dodds in Wilton Center. Part of the mission of the organization is to help seniors socialize and get out and about in town. — Jeannette Ross photo*

### About author



[Jeannette Ross](#)

Peter Dodds is a retired physician and perhaps that is why he takes a head-to-toe approach to his position as president of Stay at Home in Wilton. The retired urologist — he was chair of the Department of Surgery at Norwalk Hospital — stepped into the position last year.

After retiring two-and-a-half years ago, he began looking for a community activity in which he could become involved, so he volunteered with Stay at Home and joined the board.

“In my profession I dealt with a lot of seniors,” he said in a recent interview. “I became interested in their lives and how fascinating some of them were.”

He became interested in issues affecting seniors, particularly with their families.

“Technology has passed seniors by to a large extent,” he said. “The ability to communicate with grandchildren 1,000 miles away — via FaceTime or Skype — is something a lot of seniors are not aware of.”

That is something that can add to a person’s quality of life, and quality of life among Wilton’s seniors is a priority for Dodds.

As for the technology, Dodds wanted to hold information sessions for seniors, but thought “pre-engineering students” would be needed.

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"It turns out," he said with a smile, "high school students are more than adequate." He looked for students who were patient and invested in helping seniors and found the Candy Strippers club at Wilton High School. They have helped out at Stay at Home events and have also helped with technology questions.

"That intergenerational aspect is important to Wilton," he said.

Dodds is like many seniors in town, having moved here with his wife and young family. The Dodds family arrived in 1982 and their social life revolved around school and becoming friendly with the parents of their children's friends.

"Now the kids are out of the house and you have to develop new social contacts," he said. While Stay at Home has had social activities around events and day trips, Dodds organized a walking club that meets regularly at the Norwalk River Valley Trail and then goes out for a bite to eat.

"There are a lot of trails in town but many are undeveloped, a little rugged and somewhat remote," Dodds said. "The NRVT is of enormous benefit to us ... it's wide enough to walk two and three abreast and carry on a conversation." The group has had three walks so far and 11 people showed up for the last one two weeks ago.

"We are hoping next month to get an amateur ornithologist to point out some birds along the trail," he said. People may walk as far as they want and as quickly or slowly as they are able. "We try to accommodate all levels," he said.

Walking enables social interaction that sitting at a table may not, although Dodds said he has had interesting conversations while at breakfast with members. In one case he sat next to a woman who went to high school with Warren Buffett, and in another, he learned the ins and outs of curling from a man who participates in the sport.

"Unexpected things come up in a social organization," he said. "You get to meet people you never really got to know otherwise."

Dodds has sampled all Stay at Home events to gauge interest and joked he "is the only man in the history of the world to play Mah Jongg," a popular activity among women at the Wilton Senior Center.

At the senior men's breakfast held regularly at Orem's Diner, he met a number of retirees, some of whom were veterans and some engineers. "We talked about computers and the Hubble Telescope," he said.

#### Volunteers

Like many organizations, Stay at Home relies on volunteers and Dodds participates by driving, one of the most sought-after services among members who no longer drive. The most requested rides are for doctor visits, shopping, social events, and the post office.

"We are a pretty rural area," he said. "Our community tends to be spread out and transportation is an issue."

Volunteers who can do minor home repairs are also needed. Most needed is assistance with changing batteries — particularly in ceiling smoke detectors — cleaning gutters, hanging pictures, moving furniture, replacing light bulbs, and small painting and plumbing jobs. The organization offers vendor referrals for larger jobs.

One new project that depends on volunteers is the Friendly Visitor service for homebound members who enjoy company.

While the group has many volunteers it welcomes more including drivers, handymen, and board members. Volunteers help keep down costs incurred by the organization, which also receives support from community groups.

"We are very grateful for our generous donors who keep membership fees affordable," Dodds said.

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When asked if people have stayed at home longer by joining the organization, Dodds answered in the affirmative but said that is not the purpose of the organization.

“For people who want to stay at home, we are eager to help,” he said. But he has an open mind on the issue of whether people are better off at home or somewhere else, such as an assisted living center, and there are members who live in such situations.

“Some people prefer to be independent, but some go from their home to The Greens or Meadow Ridge, but they stay in the organization,” he said.

“Stay at Home in Wilton has a broader scope than might be anticipated from the name.”

Information on the organization and what it offers is available online at [stayathomeinwilton.org](http://stayathomeinwilton.org) or by calling 203-762-2600.

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