



# 'Villages' let elderly grow old at home

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By Doug Kapustin for USA TODAY

Volunteer Margaret Missiaen tends a garden in the yard of Maurine Phinisee, 90, left, who is back in her Washington, D.C., home with the help of Capitol Hill Village.

The explosive growth of the USA's older population is fueling a grass-roots "village" movement in neighborhoods across the country to help people age in their own homes.

More than 50 villages in a neighbor-helping-neighbor system have sprouted in the past decade from [California](#) and [Colorado](#) to Nebraska and [Massachusetts](#). They are run largely by volunteers and funded by grants and membership fees to provide services from transportation and grocery delivery to home repairs and dog walking.

Most villages have opened in the past couple of years, an indication that the momentum is growing in the face of a demographic tsunami: The number of [Americans](#) 65 and older is expected to more than double to 89 million by 2050, according to the Census Bureau.

The oldest of 79 million Baby Boomers turn 65 next year, a turning point that will begin to put pressure on social services, retirement homes and assisted-living facilities.

The "village" concept is taking off in small and big cities and suburbs across the country as the percentage of elderly rises while the share of the working-age population that supports them declines. The percentage of people 65 and older is projected to climb from 13% today to 19% by 2050, while the share of adults age 20 to 64 is expected to drop from 60% to 55%, the Census Bureau says.

"We will hit a really pivotal point," says Julie Maggioncalda, a [University of Pennsylvania](#) geriatric social work student who is interning at the Capitol Hill Village in Washington, D.C. Nursing homes won't be able to handle all the elderly, she says.

"We simply don't have enough space, and if we don't have a village, that burden will fall on families," Maggioncalda says.

AARP research shows that 90% of people want to grow old in their home and community.

"Villages are one way people can lead the life they want to live," says Mimi Castaldi, AARP vice president for volunteer engagement. "They've caught the imagination of people."

How villages operate:

- Residents pay a membership fee that varies from \$25 to \$600 or more a year, depending on the types of services members want. Some villages have paid staff members; others are run completely by volunteers.

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•Most villages are opening in more upscale neighborhoods in cities and suburbs, but they all provide discount dues for lower-income elderly.

**Back home to stay**

Maurine Phinisee, 90, spent about a year in a nursing home. Her time there was "h-e-l-l," she says, but the nightmare ended when a friend helped her escape Christmas Eve 2008. "I didn't belong there," she says.

All she wanted was to be in the home she has lived in "since 1951 B.C. — before cellphones," Phinisee says. And that's where she has lived ever since.

Phinisee, a widow for 40 years, can get around her home on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., but she needs help opening jars and reaching things. She can't handle even minor repairs around the house or drive places (she gave up her car in 1993).

That's OK because Phinisee lives in Capitol Hill Village, which began operating three years ago and is the oldest of six such villages in the nation's capital. She calls the village office, and they send her folks who clean her garden, install a railing, fix her windows, bring her groceries or drive her to the bank.

Ed and Margaret Missiaen, both retired and in their late 60s, are Capitol Hill Village members who volunteer. Margaret has cleaned Phinisee's garden. Ed has helped fix her windows.

They're counting on the village to help them when the time comes.

"We like the neighborhood, and we want to be able to stay here as long as we can," Ed says.

**Origins date to 2001**

Beacon Hill Village in Boston was the first in the movement, created by residents in 2001. It charges annual dues and delivers paid and volunteer help.

The village movement is "consumer-driven and consumer-run," says Judith Willett, Beacon Hill's executive director.

"It's not a social service agency," Wilson says.

Beacon Hill received calls from people across the USA who wanted to create a village in their neighborhoods. This year, it partnered with NCB Capital Impact, a non-profit community development group, to launch the national Village-to-Village Network to help other areas. It is backed by funders such as the MetLife Foundation.

The housing bust also contributed to the growing interest in villages, says Candace Baldwin, co-director of the network.

"A lot of people couldn't sell their homes and move to assisted-living," she says.

Baby Boomers who are dealing with the financial burden and emotional guilt of putting their parents in retirement homes also are driving the movement, Baldwin says.

The village concept gives "peace of mind to children of older adults," says Cynthia Muller, director of strategic investments at NCB Capital Impact.

"I don't think it's *the* answer," says the AARP's Castaldi, but one in a string of good options.

"We think Boomers will change retirement," she says. "They're getting to the age where they're thinking, 'How do I want it to be for me when I get older?'"

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