

# Program aims to make it easier for seniors to stay put

By TOM EVANS

Villager Staff Writer

WILTON -- A trio of concerned residents is trying to make it easier for residents over age 50 to stay in their homes.

Phil Richards, his wife Anne, and Ken Dartley are modeling their fledgling program after Staying Put in New Canaan, launched in October, 2007, "a private, nonprofit corporation founded to give New Canaan residents both the practical means and the confidence to live their lives to the fullest in their own homes as they grow older," according to the group's mission statement.

"We want to create a social community like the old days," Phil Richards said.

Dartley quickly added that this effort was going to be independent from any local government support.

"Like the old days, with people helping people, the way things used to be," Dartley said. "We tried to get the Board of Selectmen interested, but there was no interest there. We've gotten strength from the New Canaan effort."

That New Canaan effort came about when a group of residents learned about Beacon Hill Village, a Boston "virtual retirement community" or "aging in place" initiative that began about 12 years ago, according to the Web site [www.stayingputnc.org](http://www.stayingputnc.org).

At this point, the Wilton trio meets with the New Canaan group where Dartley had connections.

"I started this idea when I completed my term on the (town) Board of Nursing and

Home Care," Richards said. "The concept was in discussion, and we heard about the New Canaan program. I was interested in getting this started, and I tried a few things, and Ken was bugging me to get it started."

Dartley read about a group called the Lunch Bunch, which invited a speaker from New Canaan who talked about this group that had been meeting for a couple of years.

"With Phil's enthusiasm and my contacts in New Canaan, we were off and running," Dartley said. "Hopefully we'll bring this to a successful conclusion. We thought we'd stay with (New Canaan) until we can spin off on our own. The sooner we get on our own, the better."

To that end, 2,133 information questionnaires were mailed out late last week to households with residents age 60 and older. Richards said that at a party Saturday night "people were enthusiastic, and volunteering to organize and get things going."

On Tuesday, the Richards' home on Old Highway received a dozen responses. The couple said that while some folks gave non-economic reasons for their plans to leave Wilton, all the comments were positive and supportive.

The questionnaire, printed on canary yellow to stand out from other, white-enveloped mail, describes what Staying Put in Wilton hopes to offer older residents, along with six, multi-part questions.

"Through partnerships with proven providers of services, they are able to offer their members preferred access to social and cultural activities, household and home maintenance services, transportation and shopping assistance, home health care services, and assisted living at home," the questionnaire reads. "Volunteers are able to help with transportation, errands, small jobs in the home, and some technology support."

Dartley said the keys to Wilton's program -- which the trio hopes to get off the ground in a few months -- are volunteers and donations, as they are in New Canaan.

"New Canaan doesn't cover costs; they're looking for donations and grants, and so are we," Dartley said. "I was on the last Elderly Tax Committee, and we found some 200 people in Wilton were living under the poverty line."

Richards encourages anyone with questions, comments or to volunteer for any aspect of the program to call him at (203)762-0033, send a fax to (203)762-2079, or send an e-mail to [pcr@ieee.org](mailto:pcr@ieee.org).

For more information about the program, visit [www.philrichards.net](http://www.philrichards.net), or [www.stayingputnc.org](http://www.stayingputnc.org).