

Aging in Place merges with Darien's Gallivant service

Written by The Darien Times
Wednesday, May 18, 2011 09:17 AM



The Aging In Place + Gallivant Board now includes Rebecca Lippel, back left, Jean Baker, Peter Eder, Ann Mandel, Ernie Steiner, Dorothy Baker, Pete Wright, Kiki Karpen, Barbara Adams and Amy Squyres; Marge Harrington, middle left, and Nancy Cammann; and Diana Kalman, front left, Erica Bess, Beth Paris, Kaye Barker and Wyn Lydecker.

Aging in Place in Darien and Gallivant recently decided to join forces and are in the process of becoming a single not-for-profit organization.

The Gallivant was launched by enthusiastic Darien residents who wanted to provide more transportation for seniors. In 1984, they purchased a 12-passenger van with generous donations from private residents, community organizations and a cooperative agreement with the town. Today, the Gallivant operates on weekdays and will bring Darien residents 60 and older to any destination within Darien, Norwalk, New Canaan and Stamford.

Aging in Place was launched in 2006 by members of the Human Services Planning Council (part of the Community Fund of Darien) who were inspired by the Beacon Hill Village model. They assembled an Advisory Board comprised of community members and social service leaders. The initial board conducted focus groups, researched similar aging-in-place organizations and brought together service providers at a Senior Summit to explore how to best achieve the goal of enabling Darien seniors to live independently at home.

"It became clear that our older residents desired and deserved such a program and that we could foster the enthusiasm to make it a reality," Kiki Karpen, executive director of the Community Fund of Darien, said.

A coordinator was hired in 2007 with funding from the Community Fund and the program began providing free telephone information and referral services, vetted

service providers such as handymen, electricians and plumbers, and a free newsletter called Out and About to Darienites 60 and older.

"Over the past three years, Aging In Place + Gallivant have worked closely together to improve transportation and other services for the older adult population in Darien," Kaye Barker, the Aging In Place and Gallivant Board president, said. "Our respective boards agreed that becoming one entity made a lot of sense."

"Together we will build upon 27 years of Gallivant history of providing affordable transportation services while capitalizing on the information and referral services provided by Aging in Place," Ernie Steiner, an Aging In Place + Gallivant Board member, said.

The new organization will provide the following services to all Darienites 60 and older:

- Handicap accessible transportation within Darien, Stamford, Norwalk, and New Canaan;
- Free telephone referral, advice and counsel to seniors within 24 hours on weekdays;
- Discounted vetted services, such as electricians, plumbers, handyman and chore services;
- Volunteer leaf raking, snow shoveling, friendly visitors and shopping assistance;
- Bi-annual Out and About newsletter;
- Monthly e-mail blasts promoting events and services of interest to seniors; and
- Social and educational programs throughout the community.

Aging In Place + Gallivant has served more than 700 Darien seniors during the past three years.

"All of a sudden I felt my freedom come back. I can't tell you what the Gallivant did for my morale," said Hank Strauss, whose eyesight declined to the point where he could no longer drive.

"I am so happy Aging in Place is here to help me. I don't have any family in the area and it's nice to know that I can consult with Aging in Place," said Elsie Berl who called for a handyman and electrician.

Aging In Place + Gallivant is currently conducting its annual fundraising appeal. "Since rider donations provide only a small portion of the organization's revenues, Aging In Place + Gallivant will depend on the generosity of Darien residents for its operations," Barker said. "We are confident residents will support this worthy endeavor."

You may send donations to Aging in Place + Gallivant, P.O. Box 1242, Darien, CT 06820.

More info: 203-585-4094

For a ride: 203-655-2227 (24-hour advance notice, voluntary contribution appreciated)