

Older locals staying connected despite COVID - Volunteers needed in several areas

- By Jake Ekdahl - Dec 16, 2020

Amid the pandemic, caretakers, families and the community as a whole are working to maintain quality experiences for older adults.

WAUKESHA — With the COVID-19 pandemic set to continue through the holiday season, caretakers, families and the community as a whole are working to maintain quality experiences for one of the most vulnerable segments of our population: older adults.



Due to coronavirus precautions, typical in-person visits are less viable this year, so people are getting creative.

At Shorehaven in Oconomowoc, where hundreds of seniors live, residents tune in to channel 900 for a morning show produced by staff that includes news on events for the day, recipe ideas and more. There's also online worship from the chapel with pastors from various denominations available to provide virtual spiritual services, and single entertainers are brought in on a periodic basis to broadcast live.

"Our activity staff is trying their very best to be innovative and creative," said Shorehaven Director of Community Relations Sarah Williams-Berg.

Williams-Berg said the cards and letters being received are appreciated, but digital content — which can be safely shared with many — can go even further. Shorehaven has received YouTube links and flash drives with homemade skits and songs.

"The more bloopers the better, the more homespun the better," Williams-Berg said. "We've had a surge of communities all across the Lake Country area asking 'what can we do?'" FaceTime and Skype calls are also held regularly to make sure residents have access to see and hear their families.

Shorehaven staff have been doing 100th birthday celebrations, mini parades, ice-cream deliveries via trishaw, theme days like sporting events, crazy hair days and costume contests, special Sunday shopping hours for residents only at Forgotten Treasures Resale Shop, outdoor walks, in-house craft fairs, competitive games and virtual family visits.

"We're leaning into the hope of Christ and the power of prayer to maintain community connections, and enhance resident lives during some very trying times," said Shorehaven Director of Social Services and Activities Denise Jefferies.

Eras Senior Network Development Director Heather Uzowulu said there are several ways people can get involved to help the older adults in our communities. Helping with transportation is currently much appreciated, as COVID-19 has led to a shortage of drivers that enable trips for seniors.

"We're looking for folks to take an older adult to a medical appointment or they could go grocery shopping on behalf of an older adult," Uzowulu said.

Eras also has a weekly friendly phone call program that's cultivated relationships during a time of what might have otherwise been isolation. Eras will also need help with shoveling to clear out driveways. "If we could more people to help with that, that would be great," Uzowulu said.

As winter sets in, Eras has ordered many plain greeting cards ready for people to decorate, which will be handed out to older adults in the area.

"We've heard people really liked the handmade items," Uzowulu said. "We're looking for more ways of helping our community's older adults (know) that we're thinking of them."

Prospective volunteers can visit www.eras.org if they'd like to help or drivegiveserve.org if they're interested in volunteer driving.

To send digital content for Shorehaven residents, email Williams-Berg at Swberg@lho.org.