

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Monterey Bay Village opens doors for seniors in their own homes

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

CARMEL'S COASTAL beauty, benevolent climate and sparkling air make it a place where lots of people decide to stay for the rest of their lives.

Thus, they buy homes with single stories or the master bedroom on the first floor, in anticipation of making life easier down the road. But "aging in place" means a lot more than just not having stairs.

In fact, looking for ways to safely age in place is a relatively recent movement which has spawned associations and certifications to help people realize their goals. But it is not a new concept. For generations, people raised their children at home and then, after they grew up, the children cared for their parents in that same, extended-family home.

Nowadays, children and grandchildren tend to leave home as they reach maturity. But this leaves their parents without the support they'll need as they age.

Certainly, some people look forward to moving out of a large family home in favor of a smaller, independent residence or assisted-living facility, where they can enjoy the garden without tending it, come to dinner without cooking it and socialize without throwing a party.

Yet for those who are determined to spend their senior years in the house that wraps them in memories and familiarity, there is help. In 2012, The Carmel Foundation launched Monterey Bay Village, a member-based virtual village whose services are designed to provide the assistance senior citizens need to safely and securely age in place.

"Our parents' generation expected to go into assisted living, but we don't want to," says director Nettie Porter. "A lot of people think the village is senior housing. It's actually a community of services, one-stop shopping tailored after a nationwide model, where people can make one phone call for a variety of services. The village fills the gap for seniors who are still healthy enough to remain in their home but may have issues with vision, hearing, balance, dexterity or strength. And they don't have to navigate through the maze of services available in this area to get help."

Monterey Bay Village opened with 75 service providers carefully vetted to offer professional services, including but not limited to plumbing, carpentry, remodels, repairs, electrical work or cleaning. The group also works with a corps of volunteers, available on call to replace an overhead light bulb, change a bed skirt or get the seed into the bird feeder. They might provide a ride to a doctor's appointment, go grocery shopping or give a senior a chance to sink her feet in the sand by escorting her on a walk along the beach — the smaller things that can make a huge difference in someone's day.

"I'm a fairly handy guy," says golf-course superintendent Jeff Markow, who heard Porter make a presentation about the village and signed on to volunteer. "I can fix a lock, adjust a

door, do some drip irrigation. I defer to licensed contractors for larger projects, but I can lift boxes, move furniture, do minor plumbing repairs. It's a great way to give back quietly, to help people who need it. And sometimes I get paid in cookies."

Markow's wife, Heidi, a personal trainer, is an equally devoted village volunteer who provides transportation, grocery shopping or that walk on the beach.

"Senior citizens are very special people in our community," says Heidi. "If you can just sit and listen to them talk, you will learn so much. I look at helping them as a real privilege. These are members of the Greatest Generation, yet they are often overlooked. They have given so much, and now it's our turn to give to them."

Author, senior advocate and president of Monterey Trust Management Liza Horvath has long been investigating, writing about and championing the aging-in-place movement.

"With so many Americans wishing to stay in their homes throughout the golden years," says Horvath, "an entire cottage industry has evolved to work with seniors in identifying, adapting and retrofitting existing homes to accommodate the changing needs of aging owners. The National Association of Home Builders, in partnership with the AARP, developed the CAPS (certified aging-in-place specialist) certification Program to train and regulate professionals who are providing home modification services to seniors. I am so glad people are focusing on this."

For the more technical referrals, Monterey Bay Village calls CAPS contractors, such as Roman Kristl, owner of Kristl Konstruktion in Carmel Valley. Kristl begins by assessing a home and the way the residents move and live within it. Then, he introduces the modifications they will need to continue living there in comfort and security.

"I had always done this kind of work anyway," says Kristl, "so I decided to get certified. If my clients have to make the changes, they will do it, but they would rather spend their money on their grandchildren's schooling instead of their own safety. And, they want to believe they can still do everything. I say, do it before you need it."

Kristl has opened his notebook to go over the various modifications he makes on behalf of his senior clients:

- Let's start with looking at how you walk into your house — down the steps, up the path, in through the garage. Do you shuffle? Use a walker or a cane? Your walk is very important in determining whether you should have carpet or a smooth, firm surface. When you step into your living space carrying groceries, do you reach for the wall? Maybe you need hand rails or grip bars.

- If you never go outside because you are afraid of falling on the uneven patio pavers, I will replace them with a smooth, solid surface with railings. Sometimes it's as simple as level-



Jeff Markow, a volunteer with the aging in place organization, Monterey Bay Village, helps Sue Wulfmeyer with the drip irrigation in her beautiful garden. The group has volunteers to help with many household projects that get more difficult for older people to handle on their own.

leveling elevation changes.

■ In the kitchen, I will watch to see where you grab the table, the chair or the wall. I will see where you are not stable, and install bars to make it safer. If your kitchen seems too big, I will install an island with bars around it, or I may move appliances closer, so you can cook without moving so much. I can install pull-out cabinets instead of high shelving. I prefer to remove gas appliances and replace them with electrical cook tops, so no one is reaching over flames. I also color code surfaces for hot versus cold. And I can modify a kitchen for wheelchair access.

■ If you use a walker or a wheelchair, your hallways and doors should have at least a 36-inch clearance. And I'll make sure your doors have a full swing. Instead of doorknobs, I will install levers or handles, which are easier to pull or push. Knobs can be too hard to grasp and turn.

■ Sometimes the house number is not visible, but it should be, for emergency medical assistance. I will try to make the numbers and the front door accessible. In Carmel by-the-Sea, where there are no addresses, we need to make the house distinguishable, perhaps by putting in a blinking light for emergencies.

■ In bathrooms, I want to make sure there are good ventilation, good lighting, and perhaps motion sensors for lights and the fan. I can install grab bars, a sit-down shower with a hand-held showerhead, and an emergency pull cord. And I will set the water heater at no more than 120 degrees, so you won't get burned if you turn the faucet the wrong direction. I prefer to replace faucets that pull out or turn, with handles. I also focus on the electrical issues, as it is easy to get shocked with water so close to electrical outlets. I make sure the bathrooms, particularly in older homes, have ground-fault interrupters.

■ I want to make sure you have plenty of working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors throughout the home.

■ For security, I can install a movement monitor, a computer program which will track your daily patterns during waking hours. If there is no movement for a certain amount of time, a friend or family member will be alerted to check on you.

■ I can install chairlifts, ramps and, on the expensive end, I can build an elevator. I also can move your master bedroom from upstairs to downstairs. Maybe your family room will become your master bedroom and bath, and your office will come downstairs as well.

■ I do a lot of lighting improvements inside the house, and security lighting outside, so when you come in at night, you don't have to search for the entry. Nowadays, you can use your iPhone to open your door, and never carry a key. Or, if you forget your key, you can call someone who can punch in a remote code to open the door. "I wish people would do more to protect themselves," says Kristl. "I know it costs money, but if you want to stay longer in your home, it's important. It's about prevention. Bring in a gardener to clean up the yard; clear the ground, remove sharp edges, clear away roots and rocks and leaves on pathways. One fall can change everything."

Monterey Bay Village volunteer John Downer (at right) with a client of the aging in place service. Downer visits him at home weekly to read and discuss historic books.

