



The Neighborhood Watch “Care” Ring Program

According to the latest census statistics more than 12% of the U S population, or 40 million Americans, are age 65 or older. ‘Senior’ populations have and will continue to spark creation of Neighborhood Watch Programs devoted specifically to these residents.

In Cumberland County people age 65 and older comprise 25% of the total county population, ranking Cumberland County first in Tennessee counties for retiree-aged adults. Seniors are changing the face of Cumberland County. In this county the 65 year and older population is expected to continue to soar.

Many service providers and agencies dealing with aging, who are attempting to offer services to the current seniors living in Cumberland County, or elsewhere in the nation, have encountered a **phenomenon** of knowing: “ There are far more persons out there needing help than we are currently serving.” Many people who are ages 55 -90 are unable to feel that it is “OK” to access and accept services and programs available to help them improve their wellbeing, safety and overall quality of life whether it is for themselves or as a ‘caregiver’.

As we look at why so many of our current seniors cannot or do not attempt to better meet their unmet needs we are reminded in AARP publications and through the results of large university departments of aging studies of a very powerful ‘behind-the-scenes’ set of attitudes that persons 55-90 years of age have developed over the course of their lifetimes. Pre-Baby Boomer and Baby Boomer generations lived during times when they were expected to deal with their own problems by themselves, internally, within the family unit. They lived with attitudes like: “Keep your problems to yourself, nobody else wants to hear about them.” “We are not a charity case.” “We do not expect or accept help from others, we need to help ourselves.” “We do not want to be ‘beholden’, or thought ‘less of’ because of our problems.” These attitudes and values created feelings of pride attached to **independence** . Now, 4 or 5 decades later these same persons, now age 55 to 90, are ‘stalled’ or ‘stopped’ by old attitudes that not only don’t work, but are counterproductive, as they try to meet their increasing needs of **dependence**.

Where do seniors (age 55-90) and their younger counterparts turn when the going gets tough? When a favor or help is needed most people turn to their ‘close-by’ neighbors or their friends. People feel most comfortable with those who are ‘immediately there’ and known to them. Some current ‘old-timers’ can remember living in a neighborhood that truly meant being a part of a community, where neighbors were friends and companions, and, in many cases, adopted family members. Even big cities had many small neighborhoods where people knew and looked

out for each other. Unfortunately we've really seen this type of environment dissolve over the years, primarily due to mobility which has also caused families to scatter widely across the nation.

There is a great need then to re-establish neighborhood communities of Care-Ring in counties like ours, to establish "*unique versions*" of Neighborhood Watch Groups. These groups can be clustered (anywhere and everywhere) throughout the community, geographically creating COMMUNITY CARE CELLS to provide assistance and care to members in times of need.

Belonging, safety and security needs can be met as neighbors help neighbors stay safe within their homes. Local neighborhood groups 'partner' with their local law enforcement agencies so that with help, support and resources they develop ways to meet all kinds of emerging and on-going needs.

Originally the Neighborhood Watch Program of the National Sheriff's Department, which began in 1972, started off as a crime prevention program. In 2002 its mission enlarged to Homeland Security efforts and making safe and secure neighborhoods the foundation of a safe and secure nation. At the local neighborhood level residents gather to discuss their "*unique concerns*" and they develop an action plan to meet those needs. Recently we have seen the emergence, nationwide, of Neighborhood Watch Groups with emphasis on "elder-care". In Cumberland County, Neighborhood Watch Groups work with the Sheriff's Department to help ensure both 'personal' and 'property' safety and security. Newly developed features and resources are available, free of charge, to all 'senior' and other residents of Cumberland County wishing to participate in *Neighborhood Watch*, *Vial of Life* and additional safety and security programs.

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