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Sacramento Mountain Village community continues to grow

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After four years of watching the Sacramento Mountain Village grow, founder Sydney Calhoun said she is confident she made the right choice to push forward with the concept first forged in Boston as a way to allow the elderly to stay in their homes.

The community of member-volunteers, who reach out with emotional and physical support when needed, now boasts 54 memberships, with married couples counting as one, it has its own newsletter, a calendar of programs and a building at 1092 Mechem Drive that will be available for meetings.

The group also is celebrating its fourth annual "Friend Raiser" from 2 to 4 p.m. July 24 at Cree Meadow Country Club on Country Club Drive in Ruidoso.

"We'll have music and snacks and tell visitors about Sacramento Mountain Village," Calhoun, a retired teacher and educational administrator, said. "We also will have a wonderful silent auction."

Some of the items to be auctioned are hand carvings from Hawaii, prints and other artwork, necklaces and gift certificates from businesses such as The Wild Herb and Piñon Pottery.

The necklaces have become a signature for the mountain village, Calhoun said. At the last Christmas Jubilee, the group rented a booth but had nothing to sell. Calhoun had purchased some of Judy Pursell's crocheted necklaces at the Blue Portal and asked if the style could be duplicated to benefit the volunteer effort. She agreed and supplied a pattern with the promise from the group that it would not be divulged to

others.

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Eight women now create necklaces for the mountain village and they are sold at special events, at the new building, at the Lincoln County Medical Center's gift shop and Josie's

Framery.

The latest adventure, which Calhoun refers to as a "leap of faith," was the decision to rent the building next to the Lincoln Tower.

"We always said we had to have one-year's (financial) reserve, but with the building, we won't have it," she said. "But we decided to give it a try for 12 months. Three members donated one month's rent of \$700 and we have one tenant who pays \$250 a month, which helps lower the output. We felt if we didn't move, we would stagnate. The location gives us a chance to put out a sign and let the public know we're there."

As for generating income, the owner of High Country Insurance offered the suggestion that instead of seeking donations, which carry a tax credit cap for a business, the group instead sell advertising in its publications. The organization's members must approve all advertisers. Board member Betsy Seiler will present the idea to the full board in the absence of Ginger Gibson, the incoming president, who is ill, Calhoun said. Seiler began the Lincoln County Food Bank and serves on the mountain village's grant committee, she said.

Member dues are \$100 a year and several businesses also donate, including Advanced Hearing Care, Dr. Michael Clements, High Country Insurance, the Ruidoso Board of Realtors and Southwest Securities. The Episcopal Church of the Holy Mount and Community Methodist Church also have helped in different ways.

One of the more popular activities enlists Calhoun as hostess from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. every Thursday in her home for "Tea and DVD." Members are treated to her scones and to a program on the "Origin of Civilization" and "My Favorite Universe." Yoga classes also will be introduced again when the instructor is available. Weekly luncheons, game days and men's breakfasts also are scheduled.

"We drive people as far as Roswell, El Paso and Alamogordo," she said. "We take them shopping or shop for them. We have a handyman who will do the little things needed around the house and we have volunteers to handle paperwork. One woman had back surgery and lives alone. Two members call her every morning and evening to make sure she's O.K. Others bring over a lunch/dinner. They always are saying, 'How can we help you?'"

Their donated hours also help fill in during the spaces when caregivers from a home health organizations, who come three days a week, are not around, she said.

"It's great organization, full of wonderful people," Calhoun said.

Seiler also pitches in with grant writing. What Calhoun and others soon discovered is that organizations don't like awarding grants for operational expenses. They prefer grants for projects or equipment. A grant application is being written now to train patient advocates, someone to go with a member to a doctor's appointment to help ask the right questions and ensure instructions are understood. Calhoun said once the mountain village's members are trained, the group will reach out to the general community to offer training to help families dealing with a mother or father.

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(Sacramento Mountain Village founder Sydney Calhoun said activities, membership and services...)

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Calhoun said next year, mountain village is looking at a home-sharing program, something being done nationally. The renter and rentee each submit to a background check before being approved for participation, she said. Everything also is put in writing as a contract obligation and if a problem comes up, the assigned coordinator would determine if the placement was wrong and should be changed.

A counselor in the Capitan school system brought the idea to the group and Calhoun said, "It really fits us. We have a couple of people who could really use it."

Any business owner would be lucky to have one of the mountain village's volunteers as an employee, Calhoun said.

"They're dedicated and very bright. We have an attorney, a physicist from White Sands Missile Range, Realtors, a secretary, teachers and artists, all willing to put in their own time.

"They're independent types who want to do their own thing, not have someone dictate. I call them million-dollar members."

Barbara Cosentino puts together the newsletter and all computer paperwork. The membership chairman is Mary Lea Lane and Marilyn Miller is volunteer chairman. Miller also creates the refrigerator magnets bearing the phone numbers of all of the different committee chairmen for the mountain village, including medical questions, recuperation, repairs and rides.

For more information about Sacramento Mountain Village, contact Calhoun at 258-2120.

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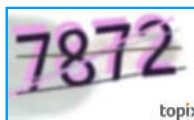
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