

Queen Anne's County Housing Authority

Creating A Model Community for Active Aging

The library at Terrapin Grove has a special place in Shirley Johnson's heart. When she moved to the senior community she had an extensive library and was not sure what to do with it. At the suggestion of her children, she donated her books to the Terrapin Grove Library, and now she is able to visit her "old friends" whenever she wants. She and some of her fellow residents have also started purchasing large-print books for the library, to meet the needs of residents with limited eyesight.

In addition to using the library, Johnson enjoys walking the trails around her home at Terrapin Grove, which is located in Queen Anne's County, Maryland. She likes the Saturday-night pot luck dinners with neighbors, community bingo, working in the adjacent senior center's country store, and trips to area shopping and attractions.

Describing Terrapin Grove Johnson says, "It is just a wonderful place to be."

Terrapin Grove is a model community for active aging, created by Maryland's Queen Anne's County Housing Authority. It is situated on a 15-acre site which was donated to the county by the Kent Island Lion's Club. The development is a natural complement of the nearby Kent Island Senior Center.

In recognition of the success of Terrapin Grove, the Queen Anne's County Housing Authority was awarded the Environmental Protection Agency's 2007 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging.

Some 13 percent of the residents of Queen Anne's County, in the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, are aged 65 and older, and more than seven percent of these seniors live below the poverty line. Terrapin Grove offers attractive, low- to moderate-income housing, designed as a 94-unit residential facility. All of the units are designed for fully independent living, but are wheelchair accessible. Adjacent to the center is the Kent Island Senior Center which offers an array of opportunities for physical activity including low-impact and chair aerobics, exercise classes, dance, Tai Chi, and yoga.

She comments that well-rounded healthy individuals are not only physically active. Mental health and social networks also play an important role in maintaining healthy lifestyles. At the senior center people are able to take computer training or attend lectures. Timely topics include crime prevention and how to be aware of fraud targeted to older adults. There are also art classes and nutrition counseling. Legal consultation is provided by local attorneys who volunteer their time. The Chesapeake College Institute for Adult Learning, located near Terrapin Grove, offers residents classes, luncheon lectures, and events such as museum outings. In addition, a tuition waiver program is available to Maryland residents who are aged 60 and older.

There is a weekly "crab walk" sponsored by the Kent Island Crabbers Club. The walk utilizes the scenic Cross Island Trail that runs parallel to the senior center. Groups also gather to play bridge and pinochle, and there are book clubs and knitting circles.

The Queen Anne's County Department of Aging and Community Development sought to create the community with housing choices for people of all income levels. In addition, they wanted to provide opportunity for access to area services, and provide a variety of transportation options for seniors. As a result of the success of Terrapin Grove, Queen Anne's County has now opened the Foxxtown Senior Apartments and Sudlersville Senior Center in Sudlersville.

A major key to the success of the county's efforts has been broad community collaboration. "Never before had such a collaboration of private and public-sector entities been involved in a project like this," notes Darling. She adds, "Strong citizen involvement has helped to shape this community into what it is today." As a case in point, Terrapin Grove is managed by an active resident association. The purpose of the association is to promote the economic, social, and cultural welfare of the association and its members.

Darling explained that before ground was broken for Terrapin Grove, a large contingent of community groups were already actively involved in the decision process. The extensive collaboration partners included the Kent Island Lion's Club; Safe Harbor Presbyterian Church; Chesapeake College's Institute for Adult Learning, and the county's departments of aging, health, social services, and parks and recreation. "The different agencies collaborated, and incorporated their various needs into the project."

As a result of the work there was an increased awareness of the needs and capabilities of the county's aging population. In addition, Darling notes that safe affordable housing was provided to many people, enabling them to remain independent.

"Everything we need is right here," says Carolyn Davis, who moved to Terrapin Grove with her husband Allen in 2007. If the Davis's had not been able to move to Terrapin Grove they would not have the social and recreational activities afforded to them. "It's a nice, safe community and we feel good being here," says Davis.

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About the Award

2007 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

The award honors the communities that are planning for, and beginning to use, smart growth and active aging. Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through structured and unstructured opportunities for physical activity. Active aging is supported by safe, walkable environments. Smart growth strives to minimize the impact of the built environment on both human health and the natural environment by integrating environmental considerations into development patterns. Using smart growth, communities create attractive, walkable neighborhoods that give people of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities a range of safe, affordable and convenient choices in where to live and how to get around.

For additional information, please visit the EPA's Aging Initiative Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards/index.htm>.