

Volunteers needed for friendly neighbor project

By Robin Hug Staff Writer
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Group connects volunteers with outpatients in need

Volunteers ranging from a six-year-old offering to mow lawns to the local fire chief donating his time to drive and deliver are the first of what organizers hope will become a large pool of community members signing up to help fellow citizens.

Healdsburg Neighbor Network is a new volunteer-based group looking for volunteers to help local residents that are returning home from a medical procedure and cannot manage daily tasks such as driving, yard work, grocery shopping, laundry, pet care and other routine responsibilities.

The group was formed by longtime Healdsburg resident Gail Jonas after a fall off her bike led to surgery and the need for extra help at home. Upon her release from the hospital, Jonas found tremendous support from neighbors, friends and family, which she said contributed to her speedy recovery.

"I put the word out in the community that I needed help and 30 people volunteered. I was just absolutely amazed," Jonas said. "I didn't know how to organize 30 people and didn't want to ask for a ride at the last minute or have three dinners on one night."

With the help of her friend Judy MacDonald Johnston, the two created a spreadsheet for Jonas of who would be helping and when. Through this process Jonas decided everyone in Healdsburg that needed a hand should have access to the volunteer base.

"Our goal now is to get 100 volunteers. And this is not just for older people, it is for every age...it is not means tested or intended to exclude someone who could afford this, it is for everybody," Jonas said of volunteers and people who need assistance.

The services will be available to outpatients a month before and a month after returning home from a hospital visit. Volunteers will assist with light housekeeping duties, driving or running errands but will not provide personal care.

"I'm volunteering for a couple of reasons, first is that I've lived in Healdsburg since 1987, plan to live here the rest of my life, love the town, and want to start contributing to making it an even better place to live. Second is that I believe in neighbors helping neighbors. Third is that I can see myself eventually needing the kind of help we're providing, and if I want it to be available to me, I feel I should help to make it available to others," said co-founder Nancy Roberts.

Healdsburg Fire Chief Steve Adams has also stepped up to offer assistance including encouraging members of the fire explorer program to help.

"Its interesting because it seems so basic, but it takes somebody like Gail to get it going and I think she will be surprised to see how many people will want to help, especially in this town...the level of service is far above what other communities provide their citizens. There are a lot of resources out there," Adams said.

Pamphlets describing the group's goals and information on how to get involved will be distributed at Healdsburg Hospital and other doctors' offices. Volunteers interested in signing up can contact Gail Jonas at 431-8451 or gail@gailjonas.com.