

## Neighbors network helps community members

Monday, August 25th, 2014 - Ann Carranza [acarranza](#)

<http://healdsburg.towns.pressdemocrat.com/2014/08/news/neighbors-network-helps-community-members/>



Caption: Penny Chambers, right, had knee surgery in February and got help through the Neighbors Network of Healdsburg. In March and April, Julia Dolph, 7, walked Chambers' 3-year-old Newfoundland, Hank. (Christopher Chung / The Press Democrat)

Gail Jonas, a self-employed Healdsburg attorney, broke her leg while dismounting from her bike in June, 2011. Almost a year later, because of bone complications, she had to have surgery.

Jonas was in tremendous pain, but she couldn't afford to lose her practice or to let down the twin grandchildren she cares for. She sent out a plea for help through the Healdsburg Peace Project, and 30 people stepped forward with offers for various services.

"I recovered quickly but for the first week or two, I really needed that help," said Jonas, 74. "But I thought afterward, everyone needs help like this."

Jonas envisioned a group of neighbors who could be called on in times of need, and the Neighbor Network was born.

The organization is a loosely formed group of neighbors helping neighbors with temporary challenges like a medical procedure that makes it difficult to manage day-to-day living. It isn't a nonprofit, isn't incorporated and doesn't provide medical or personal care.

Its 100 volunteers include a broad spectrum of Healdsburg residents, from police officers to firefighters, retired teachers and young students.

Jonas heads the steering committee and considers herself the “glue that holds it together” right now. Her long-term goal is for the Neighbors Network of Healdsburg be her legacy to Healdsburg. Other original members include Nancy Roberts, Gabriel Fraire and Scott Landers.

Laurel Holmquist and Marta Núñez were instrumental in launching the network. Despite chronic health challenges of her own, Holmquist answered phone calls and coordinated volunteers until the current structure was put in place. Núñez translated fliers and brochures into Spanish.

The City of Healdsburg endorsed the neighbors network to the extent of printing fliers and enclosing them in customers’ utility bills.

A number of people ages 7 to 75 helped Penny Chambers for about a month when she was unable to drive while recovering from knee replacement surgery.

“I was the test baby of the program,” said Chambers, who saw a flier for the group in her electric bill. “While my sister and book club helped me a lot, I relied on the people from the neighbor network, too. It was a relief. My helpers were reliable, consistent and provided short contacts with people during a time of deep stress.”

One of them was Julia Dolph, a 7-year-old volunteer who walked Hank, Chambers’s 110-pound Newfoundland. Several days a week, she and her mother, Catherine Dolph, took Hank on mile-long outings.

“I want to meet new dogs and learn how to be responsible for my own animal,” said Julia. “Hank was good for me because he’s playful, and it felt good being with an animal that was really big.”

“We include all our neighbors,” stressed Jonas, “both English- and Spanish-speaking. It’s important to me to get the word out. Our Spanish-speaking neighbors deserve our help, too.”

The Neighbor Network of Healdsburg, 477-2727, offers rides to medical appointments and help picking up prescriptions, preparing meals, shopping for and delivering groceries as well as doing basic yard work, pet care, light housekeeping and laundry.

Volunteers also can help move and arrange furniture to accommodate recovery.

To volunteer, visit [www.nnoh.org](http://www.nnoh.org) or call Jonas at 431-8451.