

Continued from Pg. 4

Set generational priorities. An all-too-common pressure point for many 50- and 60-year-olds is providing support to adult children

Get paid. That you are doing this out of love is not in question. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't be compensated. If you have stopped work, a basic goal should be to get paid enough to cover your own personal health insurance and not have to touch your retirement savings until you are at least 65. If the person you are taking care of has the resources, you should discuss being paid. You may want to consult with an elder care attorney for advice on drawing up a personal care agreement (a contract). The National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys has a free online search tool.

If you are taking the caregiving lead among siblings, there should be a family plan for paying you. This is not about money so you can buy groceries for Mom or Dad. That's a separate issue. This is about you being compensated for the time you are putting into caregiving.

Also explore state-run plans that provide income to a caregiver. The most common programs are limited to individuals who are on Medicaid, but many states have programs that are not tied to Medicaid. For example, in Maryland, a caregiver who meets certain requirements can qualify for up to \$600 or so in monthly payments for taking care of someone with income below \$120,000. The Paying for Senior Care website has state-by-state information on financial assistance for caregivers. ▶



Senior housing

Time to plan for move is before you need to do so

By Ed Avis

When do you think you'll move into senior housing? When you get tired of taking care of your house? When you get sick? When your kids nag you into it?

Rather than wait for any of those events, experts suggest planning and packing up while you're still in good financial shape, and healthy enough to enjoy the benefits senior housing provides.

Not convinced? Consider this: A 2019 University of Chicago study estimated that only 19% of middle-class people age 75 years or older will have enough income to pay for

senior housing in 2029. If you start seeking senior housing before a crisis hits, you'll be more likely to be among that lucky 19%.

"Most people do not have a realistic view of how they will age or how they will pay for care," says Patricia Hanson, managing director of IKOR of Western Pennsylvania, a firm that assists seniors with medical, social and financial issues. "(We help) them have a realistic view while they are still healthy and well and able to make good decisions."

Hanson says she believes planning for senior housing should begin even before retirement. Near-retirees should take a proactive approach to plan for aging, she says, considering issues such as family medical history,

Continues on Pg. 6

Continued from Pg. 5

finances and their personal vision for aging. Her organization helps seniors create long-term plans based on that information, aided by elder law and financial experts.

“It is around the time of this conversation (that) I recommend they begin looking at facilities,” she says. “Many people view care communities as dark, dingy places where people go to die. The reality is most communities today are amazing and beautiful places where seniors go to live and thrive.”

Sara Zeff Geber, a retirement consultant and author of “Essential Retirement Planning for Solo Agers,” also recommends taking an early, broad look at senior housing options.

“One of the biggest factors I see among my clients and my book and talk audiences is a total lack of knowledge and understanding of what is out there for them,” Zeff Geber says. “Most people’s experience of senior housing is having visited a grandparent in a nursing home 30 years ago. What I encourage people to do is start early to visit some of the senior housing near them. Visit a few assisted living communities, some independent living communities, a couple of CCRCs (continuing care retirement community), a board and care home.”

Investigating your options early doesn’t necessarily mean you need to move in while you’re in your 60s. But if you know the available options and what you’ll need to pay for them, you’ll be ready when the time comes.

The key to deciding when to move is not waiting until the decision is forced upon you, experts say.

Moving into a senior living situation while your mental and physical capabilities are intact has numerous advantages.

For example, if you think you’d enjoy the social outings, fitness

classes and educational events found at many senior housing options, it makes sense to move in while you can still take advantage of them.

And moving in early helps you make friends who can support you



“Many people view care communities as dark, dingy places where people go to die. The reality is most communities today are amazing.”



Continues on Pg. 7

Continued from Pg. 6

as you age.

“I recommend moving earlier than later—when the senior is capable of creating their own comfortable ‘community,’” says Suzanne Asaff Blankenship, author of “How to Take Care of Old People Without Losing Your Marbles.” “Without the means to build a community, either due to physical limitations or cognitive limitations, the seniors are likely to be unhappy, feel isolated and never feel like this new place is ‘home.’”

Cathy Richards, who spent eight years as the director of lifestyle and wellness for a large CCRC, echoes that advice.

“There are definitely advantages to moving in early, including actually enjoying all the lifestyle amenities vs. moving in at a later age when you are more likely to need care,” Richards says. “Also, especially for couples, you can forge relationships so that when one of you passes, the other already has a support system. Too often, a widow or widower moves in after their spouse dies and they are grieving and it’s hard to get involved.”

On the other hand, it is possible to move in too early, Richards notes. For example, if you move into a retirement facility when you’re 60 (typically the earliest age at which one is allowed to move in) and the average age of your neighbors is 80, you’ll probably feel out of place.

The age one moves into senior housing depends on many factors. But for those who can afford it, an earlier move-in often pays off.

As Richards concludes, “I recommend moving in well before crisis time and while you are still healthy enough to enjoy the benefits.” ➤



Step up, seniors

Use your career skills to help others

By Ed Avis

Last year, Ian and Flo Thornton, a retired baker and nurse, respectively, spent 13 weeks as volunteers on Africa Mercy Ship, a vessel that delivers health services to impoverished areas.

“I met somebody from Mercy Ships and they said to me, ‘What did you do as a job?’ I said, ‘Well, I was a baker, nothing more or less than that,’” remembers Ian Thornton in a video recorded after the couple returned. “And then he said to me, ‘We need bakers.’”

Ian baked for the 400 crew members on the ship and Flo served as a housekeeper in the ship’s hospital

wards. Being able to use their skills developed over decade-long careers was a rewarding experience, the couple say.

“This is the beginning, not the end,” Ian says. “We don’t know where the journey will take us next.”

Retirees often volunteer, of course, but what set the Thorntons’ experience apart was that they were able to use the skills they’d honed over their lifetimes (even though Flo did not work as a nurse on the ship, her medical experience helped her effectively work among the patients). That made the experience better for them and helped the organization more than if they had taken on roles unrelated to their work experience.

Many organizations rely on such

Continues on Pg. 8

Continued from Pg. 7

skilled retirees to fill essential roles.

“Retirees are a particularly strong source of support for our charity partners, as they have the time and wealth of experience that is crucially useful for organizations, particularly smaller grassroots NGOs and community-based organizations who need help building up and strengthening their basic accounting, book-keeping and budgeting systems,” says Jessica Jackson, a marketing and recruitment assistant for Accounting for International Development, an organization that places experienced finance professionals in volunteer positions.

“A majority of our volunteers (and repeat volunteers) fall into the 55+ age category and engage in our volunteering program as a way of using their wide portfolio of skills to give back in their free time,” Jackson says.

Local Hope, a charity that helps indigenous people in Guatemala, also tries to match a volunteer’s background and skills with positions.

“The retirees who have worked with us have brought with them a body of knowledge and hard-won experience, as well as a work ethic that cannot be taught, but that has evolved organically over time,” notes Leslie Baer Dinkel, executive director of the program. “This means less training, and a higher degree of confidence from the moment they start with us.”

How do you find a volunteer position that matches your skills? Dinkel recommends starting locally by examining volunteer positions in your community and seeing which seem suitable.

One good way to identify local options is through a

teermatch.org, which allows you to search for opportunities in your zip code area based on the type of work you’d like to do. Similar sites are idealist.org and allfordgood.org.

If you’d like to consider opportunities outside your community, one option is Senior Corps, a program of the Corporation for National & Community Service (better known for its AmericaCorps program). Senior Corps is a network of volunteer opportunities across the United States for people who are 55 and older.

If you’re really adventurous and want to volunteer abroad, google “senior volunteer opportunities overseas” and you’ll find a list of organizations seeking older volunteers.

Dinkel emphasizes that you don’t need to commit fully to the first opportunity that seems promising.

Instead, if it’s feasible, consider a short-term commitment to begin.

“To find out if the charity really values what you have to offer, ‘date’ by offering a month-long commitment and see what happens,” Dinkel recommends. “If it’s a fit and you see that your work is adding value, and the charity acknowledges that too, you can stick with it. If not, at the end of your commitment, you can look for a better fit.”

The bottom line is that you should feel that your talents are being put to use.

“Doing charitable work isn’t an obligation, and shouldn’t feel like one,” Dinkel says. “It is a commitment, but one that should fill you up with a sense of accomplishment, joy and gratitude for your own good fortune at having found a new role after retirement.” ➤