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Carmel Foundation: Your grandma's and your mom's and your senior center

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

WHEN HER only child departed for college this fall, it left a hollow echo in the hallways where, for 18 years, her daughter had filled the home with laughter and purpose.

Her father was taking it even harder. With his granddaughter gone, he really didn't know what to do with his day.

So she called The Carmel Foundation. Established in 1950, it began in a house on Scenic Road where a few men and women gathered to figure out, over a brown-bag lunch, how to provide services, support and socializing for seniors.

Nearly 65 years later, the nonprofit organization, located in a complex of buildings at the southeast corner of Lincoln and Eighth, serves a membership of 3,200, ranging in age from 55 to 106. For an annual donation of \$45 (or more), members are welcome from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday, to have coffee, take classes, work in the garden, meet for lunch, exercise and attend workshops on how to make life easier, safer, healthier fun. Many make a day of it.

"If you can think of a service or activity, we probably offer it," says president and CEO Jill Sheffield. "Yes, we have bridge and Bingo, but we also offer classes in our technology Center on the iPhone, iPad, MacBook and PCs. Plus we offer piano lessons, Pilates, woodworking and watercolors, safe driving, dancing, journal writing and jazz appreciation, fitness, photography and discussion groups."

"The Carmel Foundation is a community within our community," commented Sue McCloud, former Mayor of Carmel and a longtime supporter of the foundation. "It invented itself almost 65 years ago to provide services a city usually provides, and functions, as the group says, 'with the spirit and concern of a good and thoughtful neighbor.' And it has done it day in and day out since 1950."

Lots of offerings

In any given month, members will find upward of 60 workshops and classes at the foundation. The grandfather who's used to verbal sparring with his college-bound granddaughter would feel right at home in what is known as a rousing, intelligent Men's Discussion Group, which usually is based on the wisdom of a guest speaker.

"The Carmel Foundation is about meeting and socializing with friends your own age, about staying engaged



in life and in your community, and about receiving support in a friendly, beautiful setting," says Sheffield. "Members have a sense of ownership in the foundation; they feel comfortable here. We also have a huge volunteer network of 150 to 200 people, most of whom are members who take great pride in their contribution. We rely on them, and they know it."

Missing from the foundation is a strong representation of younger senior citizens, those from the Baby Boomer generation, who are now 55 to 68.

"Those who equate 'senior citizen' with elderly are reluctant to call themselves seniors," says Sheffield. "Baby Boomers, particularly those who are still working and plan to for another 10 years or more, categorically deny senior citizenship. But it works both ways. When I joined the foundation at 55, the other members thought I was a baby. The Baby Boomers will come to us later; we know that."

In the meantime, The Carmel Foundation is developing a roster of classes and services to interest and serve what Sheffield calls two generations of senior citizens. Members can receive transportation, medical equipment loans, income housing, blood-pressure checks, medication review and homebound meal delivery.

But they also enjoy line dancing, outdoor painting, photography and website consulting. Check out the foundation's Facebook page to get a better sense of its diverse offerings, and be sure to "like" the page while you're there.

Then, stop by the foundation to see, "up close and personal," all that takes place in the café, library, woodshop, art studio, garden, dance studio, tech center and dining room, where some 80 to 100 peers stop in on a daily basis for lunchtime or a lot longer.

"Lunch is a lovely affair, where people can sit down with friends, enjoy a hot meal or fresh salad, and the music at the grand piano," says Sheffield. "Some people set their clock by their noon meal. If we don't see them at the table, we know something's wrong. Others drop in depending on what we're serving. And many stay on for other activities. Some people think we are a little senior center with a couple of activities for the elderly." "We have so much going on in our community by the sea."