

OLD GREENWICH & RIVERSIDE

NEIGHBORS

JUNE 2023



**Meet Neighbors Volunteering to
Help Our Community Age At Home**



Best Version Media

Cover photo courtesy of Judy Rayner



15 Years of collaboration and volunteerism so our community may age at home

By JULIE HAMMER | Photos courtesy of JUDY RAYNER

It began with an article and a group of 10 friends 17 years ago. Marilyn Chou was swimming with a friend at the YWCA, having recuperated from surgery a few months prior when her friend asked her if she had read an article from *The New York Times* about aging at home. Marilyn said she had not, but quickly went home and read the article that talked about how a group of residents from the Beacon Hill neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts were determined to "grow old in familiar surroundings and to make that possible for others," as stated in the article.

This resonated with Marilyn who instantly recalled the outpouring of support she received from her long-distance friends and family after her surgery. She started to think about how challenging it would be for them if this were to happen again because they would be much older, and she couldn't expect them to be driving and picking her up. "The thought of an organization that would be able

to do that professionally appealed to me a lot," Marilyn shares. Then what she said next would become the beginnings of At Home in Greenwich (AHIG) - "Maybe this is something we could do in Greenwich?" she contemplated.

Soon after Marilyn and her friends uncovered the article, they were on their way up to Boston for their annual Alumni Symposium at Wellesley College. While there they set up an introductory meeting with Beacon Hill's founder to learn more about the model and how they could replicate it back home. "We told Wellesley we were going to skip out on the symposium because the subject was baby boomers and the topic that appealed more to them was about aging. Upon learning of their interest, Marilyn said Wellesley invited Beacon Hill to come and speak at the Symposium, and in addition, the founder of Beacon Hill came and met with Marilyn and her friends to share the organization's founding story and encourage them to move forward.

Marilyn said the founder's story has always stayed with her. She shares that the founders told her they were dreading the upcoming fall season because their husbands had to get on the roof to sweep off the leaves, and the idea of seeing their husbands on the roof gave them the impetus to start Beacon Hill. Plus, the notion that they all wanted to remain at home and avoid having to go to a retirement community or depend on adult children even after household responsibilities became difficult or dangerous.

At that point in time, Beacon Hill had been operating for five years and had published a manual that described how to replicate the village. Marilyn and her friends reached out to Greenwich Library and asked them to secure the manual for the library, and it has since become a very popular reference book, prompting a movement that has spread nationally and even globally, with each village a little different from the next because of the localization that powers the system.

"THIS LOCALIZATION IS WHERE WE DIG IN BECAUSE THE CONNECTED INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY THAT THE SMALL, BUT MIGHTY AHIG TEAM AND CO-FOUNDERS HAVE BUILT IS EXTRAORDINARY."



This localization is where we dig in because the connected infrastructure and community that the small, but mighty AHIG team and co-founders have built is extraordinary. What began with curiosity and exploration led to research and activism, which then grew into connections with key local organizations like Family Centers and CEO Bob Arnold who provided office space and counsel, which led to the founding of AHIG in 2007 and a published mission to "build a strong and supportive community in Greenwich of adults aging in place." You can see from the cascade of events, the incredible amount of work that was done in such a short period of time, particularly during the financial crisis of 2008 and the 2020 pandemic we are still navigating through.

Jameson, LCSW, Executive Director of AHIG. At the time, Lise was a social worker with Family Centers when she was approached with the concept, and inadvertently for her, became an entrepreneurial moment, and an opportunity to start a not-for-profit from the ground up. As Lise began to set up the AHIG's infrastructure and network, she saw a need, but she didn't want to duplicate what other organizations in Greenwich were doing, rather, she wanted to "be a bridge and help her members be successful in growing order."

"I tell members to go on with their lives and do fun stuff!" Lise exclaims. She tells them they can remain independent and in charge while being cultured and social. "Just because you may have lost many friends along the way, if you love going to the movies do you stop going to the movies or do you meet new people to go to the movies with?" She poses. "It's important to explore something different and maintain the things that are important to you," she adds.

At AHIG, we say "Here are the possibilities, with the hope that people can live their fullest lives at an advanced age." Lise says. An example of that possibility

When you unpack the notion of a village, you think about the binding threads of generations supporting each other, looking after one another, and fostering a community over time. When you think about a village in a modern sense, you begin to see the underlying infrastructure of vendors and doctors, medical staff, and volunteers that connect the system and make it strong.

Enter resident, Lise LaPointe

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Pictured Nicole LaPointe Jameson, Noel Jameson, René LaPointe Jameson, Lise Lapointe Jameson at Tufts University, Boston, MA for René's graduation. Photo courtesy of Lise LaPointe Jameson



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was when a member's family approached Lise with a request to help them get their mother to Greenwich Avenue. They told her she always loved to window shop but was hampered by her wheelchair and had trouble with vehicles. Lise found a way by working with the Transportation Association of Greenwich, (TAG) to coordinate their mother's transportation from her home to the top of the Avenue to meet her family, shop, and enjoy the day, and then have TAG pick her up at the bottom of the Avenue after she was done, which allowed the family to enjoy a beautiful memory with their mother. "We always find a way," Lise says, and shares how heartwarming it is to connect people to solutions and see the happiness those solutions bring to people.

These solutions are what many refer to as "Lise's List," which helps connect members and the town so that no one falls through the cracks. Over the past 15 years, AHIG has become a pathway to meet people and remain social while aging in place with the gift of independence. According to AARP, 80% of people want to age in their homes, and AHIG helps make that possible with their membership, their connected system of vendors and medical staff, their incredible network of loving volunteers, and the members themselves who vibrantly gather, and commit to strengthening the older population in Greenwich together. "As you turn the corner, you may find you need some help, and that's what we give," says Lise. "We help you build your team of doctors, volunteers, and vendors who can support your aging needs, all of whom have been vetted into the system," she adds.



Selectpeople Lauren Rabin and Janet Stone McGuian at the Annual Meeting with Board Member Joy Rendahl and Executive Director Lise LaPointe Jameson

A common theme that the co-founders shared throughout our interviews is to think of AHIG as a sort of 'insurance policy' for emotional guidance and support. "We are there when you need us, but you are the boss and we are here to help you navigate older age with guidance and resources when you need it," Lise states. She shares AHIG has members who say "Lise, I'll call you when I need you." She adds, "We joined because we wanted to know you're there when we need you, but we don't need you right now." Sharing that a third of their members are in this state and having a great retirement; about a third of the organization needs help here and there, with the remaining third being the group they are more involved with.



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"THESE SOLUTIONS ARE WHAT MANY REFER TO AS LISE'S LIST" TO HELP CONNECT MEMBERS AND THE TOWN SO THAT NO ONE FALLS THROUGH THE CRACKS."

Marylin shares how she's gotten to know the community better and has made lifelong friends with the co-founders and members. "That is one of the problems of aging – the loneliness that can occur," shares Marylin. "An active social life is critical, and we have a very active social program we offer our members," she shares.

Speaking of social, Marketing and Outreach Coordinator, Judy Rayner, shared AHIG's mobile website with me and the calendar of events when we met, which I found extensive, diverse, and awesome, quite frankly. I thought to myself, how wonderful it is that as a member, one can have such an active array of experiences at their fingertips with an engaged community right here in Greenwich. Not to mention a group of friends and like-minded individuals to plan outings with like book clubs, movie nights, museum visits, art shows, or whatever it may be so they can feel involved and active no matter their age or requirements. This connected community and the social aspect is a big part of being extraordinary when I think of At Home in Greenwich.

Member Elizabeth Parker says "At Home in Greenwich enhances my sense of well-being and comfort. I have made new friends and joined them on outings that I otherwise would not have participated in. Additionally, I know that I can call the office for a recommendation for a vendor that has been vetted, saving me a lot of time and stress."

Founding board member, volunteer, and Old Greenwich resident, Dr. Stephanie Paulmeno, DNP, MS, RN, NHA, CPH shares, "Recently I was invited to contribute a book chapter on long-term care in America. I included AHIG by name as an outstanding model of a program that contributes to coordinated and supportive care as well as socialization programs for seniors. (All are modeled after the original Beacon Hill Model out of Massachusetts.)"

Discussing how to thrive at any age inspired me to research the word: Thrive (v): to grow vigorously, to flourish; to progress toward or realize a goal



First Selectman Fred Camillo presenting a proclamation to Executive Director Lise LaPointe Jameson and Board President Marv Berenblum proclaiming April 18, 2023 At Home in Greenwich Day

despite or because of one's circumstances (Merriam-Webster). Discussing how to thrive as we age with Lise, the concept of starting to plan for retirement early sounds sensible. As Lise shares, planning for aging "is not just for older individuals." She adds that she reminds her daughters of this fact, even though they're young and working: one a CEO and the other a recent graduate focused on environmental engineering because "everyone deserves to live their best life at any age," she offers.

Having watched their mother and the co-founders build AHIG from the ground up ground up, in addition to their father who is also an entrepreneur, you can see



founding member and past president Marylin Chou receiving a plaque for her 15 years of service from Board members Michelle Beltrano (right) and Lori Contadino (left), Director of the Greenwich Commission on Aging

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"LISE SAYS I'VE SEEN MY KIDS BE AMAZINGLY KIND TO PEOPLE AND ESPECIALLY OLDER PEOPLE AND THEY CREDIT ME."

the influence is there. Lise says, "I've seen my kids be amazingly kind to people and especially older people and they credit me." "Kindness is a beautiful thing," she adds, and I can hear the sense of pride in her voice as she talks about the people they have become, "far surpassing her," she laughs while reminiscing about their involvement with AHIG and getting it off the ground.

This past April, At Home in Greenwich celebrated 15 years of extraordinary work and service. First Selectman Fred Camillo was there to commemorate the occasion and proclaim April 18, 2023 "At Home in Greenwich" day, along with many of the co-founders, Marylin Chou and Stephanie Paulmeno among them. With more and more residents of Greenwich being empowered to thrive, grow, and live safely, we can watch our community come together and care for a very important demographic of our area.

As you begin to think about your future, you can now consider Greenwich as a possible location to age in place thanks to the co-founders Marylin Chou, Berry Hauptman, Gerry Mayfield, Nancy Platt, Morley Kahn, Phyllis Herman, Eric Knutsen, Robert Krasnor, Stephanie Paulmeno, Hugh Taggart, and Lise LaPointe Jameson LCSW, and you can be assured that there is a loving system and community ready to embrace you and your loved ones as you take on the next stage of your life.

You can also make a difference in someone's life and strengthen this community network through volunteering. There are lots of opportunities, and you can find the right fit for your schedule. If interested, reach out to director@athomeingreenwich.org to get started.



(Above) AHIG members having a picnic at Tod's Point 2022

(Below) AHIG members taking the ferry to Island Beach



Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at jhammer@bestversionmedia.com.



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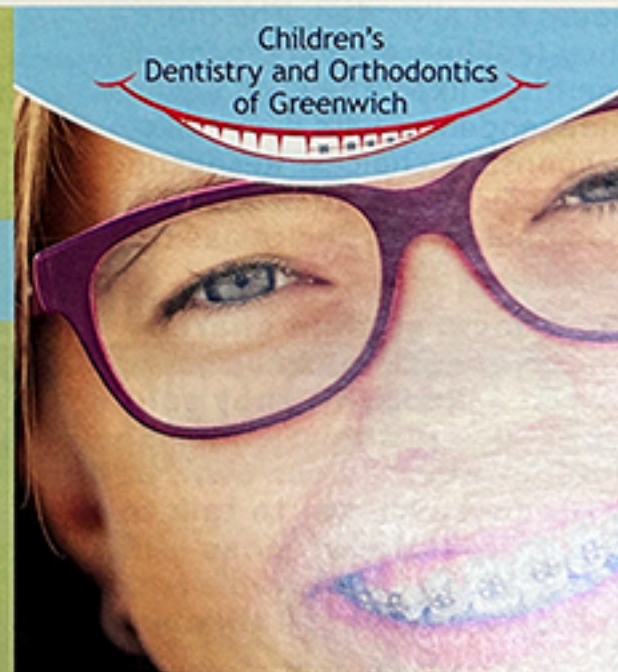
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