A Small Investment = BIG Impact in 2016

"From a small seed, a mighty trunk may grow." This quote is attributed to Aeschylus, the ancient Greek playwright who lived over 500 years B.C. With each act of volunteering, you are planting a seed in your community that grows over time and makes a meaningful impact. In 2016, 499 Friends Retired & Senior Volunteer Program volunteers contributed close to 70,000 hours of service in Rockingham, Strafford, Belknap and Merrimack counties. Our volunteers supported local soup kitchens, food pantries, senior centers, arts organizations, and non-profits and public agencies of all kinds.

Friends RSVP Bone Builder leaders contributed just under 7,000 hours, holding 2,140 classes at 26 different locations during the year – a class typically averages 12 participants. This is an increase of over 1,200 hours and 264 classes compared to 2015. Overall participation has increased by 20 percent.

Friends RSVP Caregivers provided nearly 2,800 rides to seniors and the disabled last year, plus more than 200 visits providing companionship or helping with simple tasks at home. More drivers are always welcome. We can provide more rides in 2017 with your help! Together, Friends RSVP volunteers can help make a difference.

Would you like to help make an impact in 2017? Please contact us at 603-228-0139.

Friends Executive Director Jerry Madden to Retire

Jerry Madden, Executive Director of the Friends Program, announced his retirement from the organization effective April 2017. Madden has served as the Executive Director of the Friends Program since March 2007. Prior to that he worked for the Concord Police Department and spent his last 6 years on the force as the Chief of Police.

“When I joined Friends, I thought I understood the role the organization played in the community. After spending the last ten years witnessing firsthand the incredible power of community service I now realize how much I had underestimated the power that volunteers have and how their gifts of time and compassion have impact for those less fortunate,” reflected Madden on the lessons he learned during his tenure. Madden’s entire career has been dedicated to public service, building volunteer partnerships and helping the vulnerable. During his tenure, the Friends Program implemented a structured case management component to the Emergency Housing Shelter program to offer the opportunity for shelter clients to participate in a transitional housing program; expanded the Foster Grandparent Program and became the program sponsor for New Hampshire; and grew the RSVP Program from Rockingham County to include Merrimack County. Madden will continue to serve until April 7, 2017. The Friends Program will initiate a search for a new Executive Director immediately. Inquiries may be directed to Catherine Devaney, Chair of the Personnel Committee, at friendsEDsearch@gmail.com.

Friends RSVP serving communities in Merrimack, Rockingham, Belknap & Strafford Counties
New Partnerships, New Opportunities to Serve

We have joined forces with the Merrimack and Belknap county Conservation Districts to engage volunteers with **NH Gleans**. The NH Gleans program takes excess produce from farms and gardens and brings it to local food pantries, senior programs and schools. Even with the drought, Merrimack County farmers donated over 13,000 pounds of food in 2016 to local pantries.

In addition we are now affiliated with **NH Incredible Creativity Connection**, a statewide non-profit dedicated to encouraging teamwork, creative problem solving and innovation among students from grades K-12. For more than three decades, NHICC has prepared NH youth for college, career and life by developing important 21st Century skills through the application of STEM principles.

Join the news renaissance that is taking shape now. In an era of fake news and the disappearance of real journalism, we at **InDepthNH** are working to change the tide and bring real news back. As we expand, so does our need for dedicated volunteers. If you can give us a few hours a week, we can give you an experience of a lifetime and the satisfaction of knowing you are part of the news renaissance that is taking shape. We are interested in all experience levels – from people willing to take the stories on our website and post them on Facebook to people with sales, marketing and grant writing experience. For information, please contact Rene Philpott at renephilpott@gmail.com or 603-692-7037. To learn more about our news organization, visit our website at www.InDepthNH.org. InDepthNH.org is a nonprofit, online news organization published by The New Hampshire Center for Public Interest Journalism. Founded by Nancy West, a 30 year investigative news journalist, InDepthNH.org was selected in its first year as "Best of NH 2016 for Nonprofit News," an editor's pick from New Hampshire Magazine.

Preventing Food Insecurity for Penacook Children

Friends RSVP, in partnership with the Merrimack Valley School District Food Service Department and Friends of Forgotten Children, is launching a backpack program for food insecure children at the Penacook Elementary School. Penacook Elementary School was identified for this pilot program due to an overwhelming number of students receiving free or reduced cost meals. The backpack program will provide food insecure students with nutritious meals over the weekend. Studies have shown that students are more engaged and ready to learn while displaying fewer disruptive behaviors when they have adequate nutrition. Friends RSVP has an immediate need for an energetic and motivated volunteer to take an active leadership role with this project, working independently and with other volunteers and partners to coordinate packing backpacks, securing food items, school drop off or pick up. Are you or someone you know interested? Contact Jen at 603-228-7608 or jarmy@friendsprogram.org. Thank you!

Support RSVP & Invest in Your Community

Thank you for supporting Friends RSVP! If you or someone you know is interested in supporting our program for the first time or at a new level, please contact Laura Scott at 603-228-7604 or lscott@friendsprogram.org. Donations may be made to Friends RSVP as one-time support, a recurring amount, or as a legacy gift. Remember to note "RSVP."

Your donation makes it possible for us to support our RSVP Caregivers program, recruit new volunteers to support our most vulnerable populations, and provide new Bone Builders classes.

Need heating, cooling, furnace or duct work in February? Choose Sanford Plumbing, Heating & Cooling to receive $25 off any service or replacement AND they will donate 5% of the total invoice to The Friends Program. Only one offer per household, offer ends 2/28/17. Visit www.chooseSanford.com or call 603-709-4111 for more details.
RSVP Upcoming Events

Volunteer Orientation
Calling all volunteers! Whether you're an experienced RSVP volunteer or new to the program, everyone is invited to attend volunteer orientation class. This is an opportunity to ask questions, share your experiences and learn about the benefits of volunteering with the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program. All orientations will be held at The Friends Program, 202 N. State Street, Concord from 2-3 pm. Dates are: February 22, April 27, June 29, August 31 and October 26. Please RSVP by calling 603-228-0139 or email rsvp@friendsprogram.org. We look forward to seeing you soon!

State House Tour & Lunch
RSVP is hosting a tour of the State House on Wednesday, March 22, 2017 in Concord. Arrive at 9:45 am, the tour begins promptly at 10 am and lasts for one hour. Meet fellow volunteers and learn all about the oldest statehouse in which the legislature still sits in its original chambers. The event is free and everyone is invited to bring a friend. Folks may join us for lunch at the Barley House immediately following. Lunch is Dutch treat. RSVP to Jen at jarmy@friendsprogram.org.

NH Gleans Info Session
Join RSVP and the Merrimack County Conservation District on Thursday, March 23, 2017 to learn about the NH Gleans program and how volunteers can expand the supply of fresh vegetables to vulnerable people in the local community. The presentation will be at 1 pm at The Friends Program, 202 North State Street, Concord. This is a free event; please bring a friend!

Bone Builder Refresher Classes
The Annual Bone Builder Refresher class for leaders in Merrimack and Belknap counties will be held on Thursday, April 18 from 12-2 pm at Horseshoe Pond Place in Concord. Join your fellow volunteer leaders for an afternoon of networking, sharing and fun. Light refreshments will be served.

Coordinator Addie Tarbell will host three refresher events for Rockingham County Bone Builder leaders this Spring. Stay tuned for dates, times and locations.

Future In Sight Tours
Have you ever wondered about the help that is provided by the New Hampshire Association for the Blind for people with severe vision loss? You can learn all about the important work we do and hear stories from people whose lives have been transformed as a result of our programs and services. Come see for yourself by taking a one hour Future In Sight tour of our mission. Tours are held on the first and third Wednesday of every month from 8:30-9:30 am at the McGreal Sight Center, 25 Walker Street, Concord, NH 03301. Future tour dates are February 15, March 1, and March 15. To reserve a space, please contact Marcia Clark at mclark@sightcenter.org or by calling 603-565-2425.

Attention Volunteer Drivers, Did you know....

If you use your vehicle for volunteer service and you itemize your deductions when filing your federal taxes, you can deduct your accumulated mileage for your volunteer service at a rate of $.14 per mile. Here is a link to the standard mileage rates for 2016 from IRS.gov. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-16-01.pdf

This link provides additional information and breaks things down even further. It also gives you alternatives to the standard mileage rates which you may find helpful. http://seriousgivers.org/volunteers-and-taxes/

We’ve received requests from a few of our volunteers for a letter from us stating the number of miles recorded over the last year for their 2016 federal tax filings. At your request, we will be happy to supply a letter to you. Please call 603-228-1193 or email rsvp@friendsprogram.org.

RSVP Advisory Committee
We want YOU! Do you support the Friends Program and want to get more involved? We are looking for active, visionary volunteers to serve on the RSVP Advisory Committee. Share your ideas and community service vision that will shape the future of Friends Retired & Senior Volunteer Program. For more information about this opportunity to serve, please contact Nancy Paul at 603-228-7606 or npaul@friendsprogram.org.
We are a group of women who meet on Monday mornings at Ray-Fre Senior Center in Raymond, NH. When we first started in 2011, a few members of Ray-Fre met to learn knitting and crocheting and to share in the company of fellow members. Our club President at the time, John Pfifflering, supported our effort and included us in the club schedule.

We started out making afghans, which were given to homeless people. Items that didn’t turn out that well were given to animal shelters. We began making hats and scarves. More members joined the group, and new members were attracted to the center. In the process, women learned new skills or resurrected old skills. A ninety-three year old member learned to crochet for the first time in her life and found great satisfaction in contributing her new skills to a worthy cause. She crocheted hats in support of her grandson, who was in the military.

This was only the beginning. We began making crocheted hats for our service people transiting through Pease Air Base, through the Pease Greeters. The Knitting & Crocheting group grew to over twenty women. We sought donations of yarn, from full and partial skeins to scraps, to keep up with demand. Some people gave cash to buy yarn. Raymond’s Ace Ben Franklin Hardware and Wal-Mart Distribution Center provided cartons of yarn. On hearing of our work with service people passing through Pease, a Raymond resident who owned a business in Manchester gave a very generous cash donation so that we could continue providing hats. The Raymond Rotary also provided a much-needed financial donation. The number of items that we produced expanded to include lap robes for cancer patients, hats for the Purple Hat Program for Shaken Babies, baby afghans, shawls, dish cloths, mittens, Christmas stockings, and others. The Collaborative Business Connection of Raymond gave a gift of red and white felt which was used to make decorated Christmas stockings for our military, especially those in hospitals. The list of charities grew to include cancer patients, cancer treatment centers and hospitals, homeless shelters, safe houses, schools, Meals on Wheels, wounded warriors and nursing home patients. Hats given to an elementary school started a fad—every student had to have a “crazy hat!” There was a waiting list.

Did we ever think that our little group would help so many people? We found a hat pattern that would keep a stage four cancer patient’s head warm that she could wear to bed. Chemo patients are offered a lap robe on their first day of treatment. We receive cards stating that on the worst day of their life it was nice to think someone was thinking of them. Soldiers ask if they could have one for their spouse or child. With a soldier’s mission, it could be the last thing they have to remember them by. Could we ever imagine that kids in Afghanistan would be wearing our hats, a gift from a U.S. soldier? Girls that I teach to crochet never thought they could do anything. We are now making mats for the homeless out of plastic bags. Each mat is waterproof and takes 600-700 bags to complete. We will help anybody that we know.

It all started with a hat. Please don’t think that the hats we make are “just hats” —that they are nothing more than that. It is the start of bringing a lot of people together.

*A 2016 Ray-Fre knitting & crocheting donated almost 3,500 items to local charities—thank you!

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A little about us....
Ray-Fre was established in 1968, when the Raymond and Fremont senior centers decided to combine. In 1971, as membership grew, a permanent place to meet was needed. The old A&P at 64 Main St., Raymond was purchased and has been used as a senior center ever since. By-Laws and Rules and Regulations were established and officers were elected. Since then, seniors 55 and over from all over the area have enjoyed the fun and activities that the center provides.

Email us at rayfre@comcast.net
www.rayfre.com

Hours:
Monday 9 - 1, Tuesday 9 - 4, Wednesday 9 - 4,
Thursday 9 - 3, Friday 9 - 4

64 Main St, Raymond NH 603-895-3258
RSVP Hats Benefit Friends Youth Mentoring & Caregivers In Merrimack County

Some of the many hats made by RSVP knitters in Merrimack county. These were donated to the Friends Youth Mentoring Program and distributed to 100 at-risk youth through match gatherings and holiday giving this winter. One young boy was so grateful he immediately put on his new blue hat and was inspired to write a thank-you note, insisting that it be given to the knitter who made his hat. It is truly wonderful to see how one act of volunteering can help lift others in the community. Thank you!

Pictured above is RSVP Program Coordinator Jennifer Army with volunteer Shirley Denoncour. Shirley leads a Stitch & Chat group and enjoys knitting hats and mittens made from donated yarn. On the left: Hats knitted by volunteer Ann-Marie H. On the Right: Hats by volunteer Barbara P.

A BIG THANK YOU goes out to the Henniker White Birch Knitwits. Beth Ann Paul and Sandi Lowman, representing the Knitwits, are shown here with Program Coordinator Cindy Yanski (middle). Beth Ann and Sandi stopped by to see us during the holidays with a donation of hand-crafted hats, scarves and mittens along with stuffed stockings for clients of the Friends RSVP Caregivers Program. Thank you Knitwits!

Have content to share? We’d like to hear from you! Contact a program coordinator to submit your pictures and stories. Thank you!

Friends RSVP serving communities in Merrimack, Rockingham, Belknap & Strafford Counties
Bone Builders Spread Healthy Holiday Cheer!

Newmarket Bone Builders
Led by
Jan Geremia, MaryAnn Watson, Geri MacGregor-Smith, Donna Weisman and Karen Cotton

Derry Bone Builders
Led by
Elaine Connors, Meredith Hatch, Donna Proctor and Tom Mosco

Epsom Bone Builders
Led by
Tom Barker and Barbara Pine
Survey Says.... Friends RSVP Bone Builders Works

Bone Builders is a free strength training, balance and exercise program to prevent osteoporosis and is offered at 26 locations in Merrimack, Rockingham and Belknap counties. These classes improve the sense of well-being and socialization of seniors in our communities. If you haven’t joined an RSVP Bone Builders class yet, please contact us for details. Check out the impressive results reported by our participants in this year’s survey:

- 41% of registered attendees responded to the survey
- 20% of participants have attended for 5 or more years
- 85% attend the recommended twice per week
- 90% reported moderate or significant improvement in strength
- 85% reported moderate or significant improvement in balance
- 87% reported moderate or significant improvement in flexibility
- 46% reported moderate or significant improvement in bone density; 42% did not know if there had been any change
- 83% reported an increase in their ability to perform the daily activities of living
- 87% reported an increase in their sense of well-being
- 97% reported increased socialization; 72% reported their socialization as “very much” increased

Here’s what you had to say....

“I enjoy exercising with people my age, sharing laughs and that the instructors are easy going and keep the program fun.”

“Great ‘team spirit’ and involvement. Look forward to class and always feel better. I learned of this thru fellow knitters; I can’t afford gym fees so this works plus inspires me to walk and strengthen certain parts of my body more.”

“BB is important to me because I have osteoporosis and fell. This is one way I can keep myself going and slow bone loss.”

“I have been a leader for 10 years. It has been a great experience to see how my group has progressed since they first came on board. We have made awesome friendships during this time. I myself have improved my balance immensely. Thank you so much for this program. I want to thank Addie for her patience with me as well.”

Friends RSVP Bone Builders is possible through the support of our dedicated volunteer RSVP Bone Builders leaders, local senior centers, recreation departments, 2016 sponsorship from Concord Orthopedics, and active, engaged participants. Thank you for making life a little better and a lot healthier in our part of New Hampshire.

Calling All Bone Builders!

Save this date too.... All RSVP volunteers, Bone Builder leaders and participants are invited to join “The Boneheads” team. Epsom Bone Builder Leader Tom Barker is forming a team to participate in Merrimack County Savings Bank’s 15th Annual Rock-n-Race to benefit Concord Hospital Payson Center for Cancer Care on Thursday, May 18 at 6 pm. To become a Bonehead, contact Coordinator Jen Army at 603-228-7608 or jarmy@friendsprogram.org. www.rocknrace.org

Great Year for Talking Books

Kudos to RSVP volunteers Jim, Gerry, Kim and Gary at Talking Books for your contributions in 2016. These folks cleaned and repaired 456 cassette and digital reading machines for recirculation. The Talking Books Program is a division of the NH State Library and exists to meet the reading needs and interests of New Hampshire residents who are physically unable to see, handle or process printed material comfortably. Talking Book Services provides library materials to over 2,000 New Hampshire residents, lending over 70,000 audio and braille books each year.

Friends RSVP serving communities in Merrimack, Rockingham, Belknap & Strafford Counties
Caregiver Match Opportunities In Merrimack County

Who couldn’t use a new friend? Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity with a HUGE return on your investment? Then consider being a caring companion with the Caregivers Program. You determine your time commitment with full flexibility - an hour or two a week or a month just being the wonderful YOU that you are to an older person in our community. You’ll feel great knowing you’re helping someone stay in their home by doing something that’s so easy for you to do. Here are a few of the opportunities we currently have available:

Companion Opportunity #1: Is a young-at-heart female in her late 80s living in the Hooksett area and a real hot ticket. She’s active, friendly and a true sweetheart. Her biggest need is to get out shopping twice a month but she would also welcome friendly visits.

Companion Opportunity #2: Female in her mid-eighties. She lives in the Concord area, could use someone to visit and check in on her on occasion until the time comes where she’ll need 24/7 care. She is a former piano teacher and in a choir so would truly enjoy a friendly volunteer with musical interests.

Companion Opportunity #3: A woman in her early 70’s from the Suncook area. She enjoys all kinds of crafts like cooking and baking. She also likes to knit, crochet and sew but is not able to do as much as in the past due to health issues. She is looking for a volunteer for friendly visits as she’s not able to get out much.

Companion Opportunity #4: This gentleman in his late 70s from the Concord area could use a little help at home with some light housekeeping and assistance taking his laundry across the street to be washed.

Companion Opportunity #5: In his early 70’s, a gentleman from Bow would enjoy another guy to “hang with” by going out for coffee or maybe even lunch. In addition to cooking he also enjoys oil painting, wood carving, and plays rock and the blues on his guitar.

For more information, contact Cindy at RSVP Caregivers at cyanski@friendsprogram.org or by phone at 603-228-7615.

Volunteers Sought for Key Leadership Roles

Hey, great work gang! The RSVP Caregiver’s Program is the only door-through-door volunteer driver program with a companionship component in the Greater Concord area. 2016 was a great year as evidenced by the statistical data you’ll find on the front page. And we’re going to keep that positive momentum going with some big plans for 2017. We want to make this a fun and productive year. We’re planning new recruitment opportunities to bring in more volunteers, expand our program impact to include a larger area, and we’re even looking at the possibility of using driver software to help streamline our processes and adding a “Fix-It” component to our services. We’re planning volunteer enrichment and recognition events as well.

We are looking for a few passionate volunteers with a couple of hours a month to assist us in leadership roles to help drive our program to the next level in advisory positions. We are also actively recruiting for volunteer(s) that would like to work 2-6 hours a week here in the RSVP Caregiver office as Caregiver Volunteer Coordinator(s) to assist with ride coordination, follow up calls, etc. Call Cindy for more information at 603-228-7615.

Friends RSVP serving communities in Merrimack, Rockingham, Belknap & Strafford Counties
New Year, New Volunteer Opportunities

Merrimack County Ongoing

Food & Nutrition
*The Friendly Kitchen is looking for a team of volunteers to plan, prepare & serve a dinner meal six Sundays during the year. We need six energetic volunteers to make this happen.
*The Friendly Kitchen is also looking for one volunteer to assist with preparing and serving lunch on Fridays from 10:30-1 pm.
*A team of six volunteers is needed at Friends of Forgotten Children to assist with the set up and clean up for a free community meal every Thursday at lunch. Meals are prepared by an experienced cook but can’t be served without a volunteer crew.
*Friends Emergency Housing Shelter is looking for a caring individual with every day basic food preparation and meal planning experience willing to share this knowledge and expertise with homeless families four times per year.
*Volunteers are needed to assist local farmers in Merrimack & Belknap counties with collection & distribution of produce through the NH Gleaners program. All gleaning will occur during the growing season and benefit people in need—sign up today!

Transportation & Companionship
*We need volunteer drivers for our Friends Caregiver Program! Our volunteer drivers help seniors do the simple things...like a visit to the doctor, a trip to the grocery store, a stop at the pharmacy. One ride a week or one ride a month—you can make a difference in someone’s life. Find personal satisfaction giving rides to a senior in our community! Please consider being a volunteer driver today.

General Assistance
*Family Promise of Greater Concord seeks volunteers to assist at their Day Center for homeless families. Time is flexible.
*The Children’s Place in Concord seeks volunteers for two hour shifts to read, clean, tie shoes, help get children ready to go outside and play. They might also prepare snacks, play with play dough or cuddle a little one who might be missing his or her parents.
*AARP is in need of volunteers to help seniors with free tax preparation. AARP Foundation Tax-Aide offers free tax-filling help to those who need it most. We’re looking for compassionate and friendly individuals to join a team of local volunteers for this tax season. You’ll receive training and continued support in a welcoming environment. Learn new skills and get a great feeling from helping someone else.
*Merrimack County Nursing Home seeks active volunteers interested in helping with companion visits, activities and gift shop operations. An additional orientation and training are needed before you are placed. Times are flexible.
*Concord VNA Hospice House needs volunteers to serve in all capacities. Involves additional training up to 8 weeks depending on task.

Merrimack County On Call & One Time

Health & Wellness
*The American Red Cross in Concord is seeking volunteer greeters at upcoming Blood Drives. Volunteers do not work directly with blood and no medical background is necessary. Red Cross personnel will provide a brief orientation. Time commitment varies from 2 – 5 hours per day.

General Assistance
* A team of 7 volunteers is need for clean up at the Cold Weather Shelter in Concord on April 3 and 4. Assist with packing cots, removing bedding, washing bins and general cleaning.
*Ushers are needed at Concord City Auditorium for all shows throughout the Spring. Involves 3 hours at evening shows. Building codes require a minimum number of ushers in order to host public performances.
*Concord based organization needs a volunteer to help with office organization tasks. Times and days are flexible.

Rockingham County Ongoing

Nutrition & Companionship
*Food Pantry help needed at both Seacoast Family Food Pantry & Newmarket Food Pantry. Seacoast is open Monday through Friday and Newmarket is open Friday and Saturday.
*Visitors needed at Rockingham County Nursing Home. Visit with residents who don’t have family in the area. An orientation is required by the nursing home. Very flexible hours.
*NH Association for the Blind needs volunteers to drive and for companionship. A great need for volunteers in the Rochester/Somersworth area. Volunteers also needed in many other towns.
*Adult Day Care volunteers needed in Salem helping those with memory issues.

Statewide Assistance

General Assistance
*Thrift Shop helps needed in Durham and Newmarket. Times will vary.
*One Sky Community Services in Portsmouth seeks office volunteers for multiple projects, including a records project, Human Resources general support, and database support.

Literacy & Education
*NHICC--Destination Imagination seeks volunteers to help at STEM-based learning challenge events in Bedford (4/11/17), Goffstown (3/18/17), Kingston (3/11/17), & Swansea (3/18/17). Volunteers are needed to serve as Appraisers which involves listening to grade school age student teams make presentations and provide positive feedback. Training is 6 hours and the challenge event is 8 hours. Meals are provided. Appraiser training will be Saturday, Feb 11th 8:30-3:30 at Merrimack Valley Middle School in Penacook.
*NHICC-Destination Imagination also has opportunities for event volunteers. No training is necessary, involves 2 hour shifts—greeters, door monitors, raffle table monitor, & information table.

*InDepth NH is a statewide nonprofit online news organization needing dedicated volunteers with interests in writing, sales, marketing and grant writing experience. InDepth NH focuses on vigorous, independent in-depth news coverage and stories are shared with any news outlet in NH.
*NH Food Bank Community Garden is looking for folks to assist during the spring, summer, and fall with gardening tasks like planting, weeding, harvesting, and preparing the fields. These tasks are performed outdoors and volunteers should be prepared for physical activity in whatever weather conditions are expected for the day.
Providing Lonely Seniors With Companionship Can Help Keep Them Healthy

By Anna Gorman January 5, 2017 Kaiser Health News

Emil Girardi moved to San Francisco on New Year’s Eve in 1960. He loved everything about the city: the energy, the people, the hills. And of course, the bars, where he mixed drinks for most of his adult life.

About 10 years ago, the 83-year-old New York native had a stroke and collapsed on the sidewalk near his Nob Hill home. Everything changed.

“I didn’t want to go out of the house,” Girardi said, adding he only felt comfortable “going from the bedroom to the dining room.”

He started to fear the city’s streets — and growing older.

An out-of-state friend worried about his isolation and called a San Francisco-based nonprofit called Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly. The organization works to relieve isolation and loneliness among the city’s seniors by pairing them with volunteers.

Little Brothers matched him with Shipra Narruhn, a computer software trainer who became involved with Little Brothers after her mother’s death. The organization started in France after World War II and now operates in several U.S. cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Cathy Michalec, the executive director of the local nonprofit, said older adults often become less mobile as they age. Cities like San Francisco, because of their hills, crowded streets and old housing stock, are difficult for many seniors. That can lead to isolation and loneliness, she said.

“Those 50 stairs you used to be able to go up and down all the time, you can’t go up and down all the time,” said Michalec. “The streets are crowded and sometimes unsafe. ... Sometimes, our elders say, it’s easier to stay in the house.”

Across the nation, geriatricians and other health and social service providers are growing increasingly worried about loneliness among seniors like Girardi. Their concerns are fueled by studies showing it is linked to serious health problems. Researchers say that loneliness and isolation are linked to physical inactivity and poor sleep, as well as high blood pressure and poor immune functioning. A 2012 study showed that people who felt lonely —
whether or not they lived with others or suffered from depression — were at heightened risk of death. It also showed that 43 percent of people over 60 felt lonely. "If someone reports feeling lonely, they are more likely to lose their independence and they are at greater risk of dying solely from being lonely," said Carla Perissinotto, a geriatrician and researcher at the University of California, San Francisco, who did the study.

Perissinotto said there are many causes of loneliness, including illness, hearing loss or life changes such as retirement or the loss of a spouse. "The usual social connections we have in younger life end up changing as we get older," she said. At first, Narruhn, 67, said she and Girardi would just visit at his apartment. She'd tell him about her travels and her adult daughter. He'd tell her about his adventures in San Francisco. He described what the city was like for a young gay man, and told her about the friends he had lost to AIDS. They talked about music, books and cooking. "I could tell from talking to him that he had a lot of interests," she said. "At one time, he was very sociable."

Narruhn started bringing him music from Italy, India and Mexico. Girardi liked the ones he could snap his fingers to. Finally, Shipra convinced him to go out to lunch and to visit a hidden, tile-covered staircase in San Francisco with her. "Shipra came to see me and came to see me and came to see me," he said. "Finally, she said, 'You have to get out of the house.'"

Soon, they were going to jazz shows, on walks and to the park. Narruhn said she invited him to do eclectic things with her — chakra cleansings, Reiki healing sessions — and he was always game. Over time, his fear subsided. So did his loneliness.

"After she took me out of the house, then I didn't want to stop," Girardi said.

There isn't much research on programs like Little Brothers. But Perissinotto said they can help seniors build new social connections. Other efforts to address loneliness include roommate-matching services in various states and, in the United Kingdom, a hotline.

"Maintaining connections, that touchy-feely thing, is actually really important," Perissinotto said. "It's hard to measure, it's hard to quantify, but there is something real. Even though we don't have the exact research, we have tons of stories where we know it's [had] an effect in people's lives."

AARP Foundation also recently launched a nationwide online network to raise awareness about social isolation and loneliness among older adults. The network, Connect2Affect, allows people to do a self-assessment test and reach out to others feeling disconnected.

AARP, the Gerontological Society of America and other organizations are hoping to help create more understanding of isolation and loneliness and to help lonely seniors build more social connections. "Loneliness is a huge issue we don't talk enough about," said Charlotte Yeh, chief medical officer of AARP. "There is a huge stigma."

One afternoon in November, Narruhn came by to take Girardi out to one of their favorite restaurants on Polk Street. The waiter greeted them by name. Over Italian food, they planned more visits together. Girardi said he doesn't fear growing older anymore. He's surrounded by his new family. And, he said, "by snapping fingers."

Serving You at Friends RSVP - Call Us Today

Addie Tarbell, Program Coordinator, Rockingham & Strafford Counties
603-228-7614 or atarbelloffriendsprogram.org

Cindy Yanski, Program Coordinator, Merrimack County, Caregivers & Bone Builders, 603-228-7615 or cyanski@friendsprogram.org

Jennifer Army, Program Coordinator, Merrimack & Belknap Counties
603-228-7608 or jarmy@friendsprogram.org

Nancy Paul, Director of Senior Programs
603-228-7606 or npaul@friendsprogram.org

Friends RSVP serving communities in Merrimack, Rockingham, Belknap & Strafford Counties
RSVP Events - Join Us!

- **February 22, 2017** - Volunteer Orientation, 2-3 pm at The Friends Program
- **March 22, 2017** - Volunteer Enrichment, State House Tour at 10 am followed by lunch - rsvp to Jen at jammy@friendsprogram.org. All are welcome ~ Bring a friend!
- **March 23, 2017** - NH Glean's learning and volunteer recruitment event at The Friends Program All are welcome ~ Bring a friend!
- **April 18, 2017** - Bone Builder Refresher for volunteer leaders from Merrimack & Belknap counties, 12-2 pm, Horseshoe Pond Place, Concord
- **April 27, 2017** - Volunteer Orientation, 2-3 pm at The Friends Program

Watch for these upcoming spring events....

- Rail Trail walk in Boscawen followed by light lunch at local restaurant
- Rockingham County Bone Builder Refreshers with Addie, three locations and times to be announced

Do we have your email? We send news by email to our volunteers on a regular basis. If you are not receiving it, please update your email address today at rsvp@friendsprogram.org.