

# STL Village celebrates 10th anniversary helping older adults thrive in the CWE

By ABBY WOJCIK

STL Village is celebrating its 10th anniversary of serving older adults over the age of 50 in St. Louis. Founded in 2014 on the premise of neighbors helping neighbors, the agency has been carrying out its mission of supporting members in continuing to live at home and stay active in their communities.

The nonprofit organization is modeled on a project that began in Boston, where a group of neighbors who loved their community and homes wanted to continue living there. In 2012, a group of friends in the CWE formed a committee to bring the Village model to St. Louis. They began serving members on June 1, 2014.

Madeline Franklin, the founding executive director of STL Village, first became involved during the organization's exploratory phase. In April 2024, she received the Friedman Award for Excellence in Service to Older Adults.

"The concept is really a throw-back to days when people lived in their homes for all of their lives, raised their children and helped one another," Franklin said.

STL Village uses a network of reputable volunteers to meet the needs

of residents where they need additional assistance, from changing a lightbulb or a battery in a smoke detector to assisting with technology and providing transportation.

For members who aren't as active, volunteers make friendly visits or phone calls, and prepare meals for members who have been recently discharged from the hospital — all to make certain the member's able to function to capacity. A number of people have intentionally relocated to the CWE because of the walkability, access to services and resources available with STL Village.

As STL Village has grown and evolved, especially from the challenging time of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency's greater need has become providing programs and activities for the community. While continuing to meet basic home needs and provide transportation services, STL Village has shifted its focus to providing opportunities for members to get involved, have social interactions, get educational experiences and more.

"We want to make sure that our members are active, involved, not isolated, not lonely, but that they know they can call us and they



PHOTO COURTESY STL VILLAGE

A group from STL Village who drove to Farmington to view the Solar Eclipse together.

can call one another for support," Franklin said.

Some activities the village has hosted include visiting the Abraham Lincoln Museum in Springfield, Illinois, and taking a bus to Farmington for the recent Solar Eclipse. The group has hosted presentations and events with students from Washington University and St. Louis University as well.

"Intergenerational opportunities are very important," Franklin said, "and our members really appreciate those."

One of the community collaborations Franklin is particularly proud of is with the Delmar DivINE. STL Village partnered with six other organizations to operate the Wisdom Cafe, a forum where older adults can enjoy a variety of activities, demonstrations, lessons and more.

While it is a membership organization, all of STL Village's events and programs are free and open

to the public. In addition, funding from the City of St. Louis Senior Fund helps provide free and subsidized memberships.

"I want people to know that we're an open organization, not a closed group," Franklin stated. "I want people to know that they're welcome."

Over the organization's 10-year history, STL Village has been able to form a truly strong community network that serves and engages so many people, from its members and collaborating partners, to volunteers and the greater public.

"What I've seen over the past 10 years are some really great friendships that have evolved between people who probably never would have gotten to know each other, but through these organizations got to know each other. I've seen members form those kinds of lasting relationships," Franklin said. "Now we have a history to look back on."

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