

Fall-Winter 2019-2020

50+**PLUS**FYI[®]

Lifestyle GUIDE & "Little Black Book" of Resources



50+Plus Lifestyle Profile:

Annette Kelly

Neighbors Network



Volunteer support in the past quarter...

- Friendly visiting
- Rides to temple or church services
- Review household files w/member
- Read aloud for low vision member
- Rides to medical appointments
- Help with organizing home clutter
- Help preparing for a garage sale
- Move desk and set-up
- Hang a mirror
- Smoke detector setup
- Organize a kitchen cabinet
- Pet care assistance
- Water outside plants during absence
- Tidy patio area/ remove debris
- Secure loose closet shelves
- Pick up meal from a restaurant
- Install blinds & curtain rod
- Tighten up a door knob
- Hang a painting
- Remove recycling items
- Deliver items to donation center

50+Plus Lifestyle Profile

by Pamela Ruben

Annette Kelly

Keeps Aging Community Connected

Annette Kelly can see the future, and it is a silver one. “Ten thousand people will be turning 65 every day for the next decade or so. In 2035, for the first time, there will be more seniors than people under 18,” comments the Ph.D. and expert on aging.

“Most of us are unaware of how we think about our own aging and are not conscious of how we view ourselves as the days go by,” notes Dr. Kelly, an adjunct professor with Florida Southern College and founder of “Neighbors Network,” a nonprofit that helps older adults stay independent, connected, and active in their communities.

Now a senior in her own right, the 77-year-old nursing professional is all about aging with intention and building interdependent communities where older adults can thrive in their own homes for as long as possible. “Through the passing decades privacy and independence have become more and more a way of life. When I was a kid, growing up in Long Island, we would take family drives on Sundays, stopping along the way to drop-in on friends. Can you imagine the reaction you would receive today if you just showed up on someone’s doorstep?”

Growing up in a close blue-collar family, which she describes as “ordinary, with lovely, simple lives that reflected the times.” Summers were spent in Mastic Beach, New York. The family “beach house” was a disassembled military installation sold in pieces \$250 by the government following World War II. Annette’s father and his brothers reassembled it with their own hands. Living in a multi-generational household

that included her grandmother as a significant member, gave Annette a life-long regard for elders and was a catalyst for her career in geriatric nursing.

“One of the goals of Neighbors Network is to recreate communities that foster inter-dependence and to promote health and prosperity in our older community as well as a connectedness amongst the generations,” Annette remarks.

Years ago, the nursing professional attended a conference of the American Society of Aging and became aware of the “Village Movement”, founded in the Beacon Hill area of Boston. Older residents came together to find the resources they needed to help them stay comfortable and independent in their homes as they aged. Annette and her colleagues brainstormed ways to bring this interdependent type of living back to the Orlando area. A grant from the Winter Park Health Foundation helped get the idea off the ground, and today the nonprofit services residents who are fifty-five and older in the Maitland, Winter Park, Eatonville, Casselberry, and College Park areas. Attaining a membership is as easy as clicking a few buttons on the computer to get to NeighborsNetworkFL.org.

Typical projects include simple home fixes, friendly visits, freshening up or decluttering living spaces, and the occasional ride. Sometimes the requests can be a bit more involved. Annette shares a story of a local woman who wanted to host her family from far-away Dubai but had limited guest quarters for her grandchildren. With help from her crew of volunteers, she borrowed a crib, bedding, and supplies for the children.

Volunteers came and set up the woman's home for guests, and after a successful visit, they helped pack it away.

"Learning to listen to the needs of others is a great reward garnered by spending time with the 55+ crowd," remarks the organizational founder. Annette recalls visiting with a sight-impaired woman whose home had fallen into disarray. Assuming the Neighbors Network member was looking for organizational help, she was ready to roll up her sleeves and to get sorting. However, when the member explained her needs, they were entirely different than Annette had imagined. As the woman could not see the mess, it did not bother her. Instead, she wanted help typing and editing a manuscript of her life story that she had compiled. Annette was able to find some of the woman's local friends to help with the job. After that, she stopped assuming what kind of help was needed and remembered to ask and listen before acting.

As social isolation is a growing issue in aging, Neighbors Network has expanded its offerings from helping independent older adults with simple projects or tasks (that may make it more challenging for a senior to stay at home), to

creating a place for social connection and activity. Monthly lunches, book clubs, museum tours, nature walks, and play attendance keep members active and engaged. "Last month, we had a great discussion of the popular and excellent book, *Where the Crawdads Sing*," she remarks.

With meetings held in Annette's dining room, the book club's round table discussions are intimate and inclusive.

Annette shares that the desire to grow and age in her own home is in her DNA, as she cared for both her parents as well as her father-in-law until they passed. In 1976, her



Semi-retired Jerry and Annette Kelly

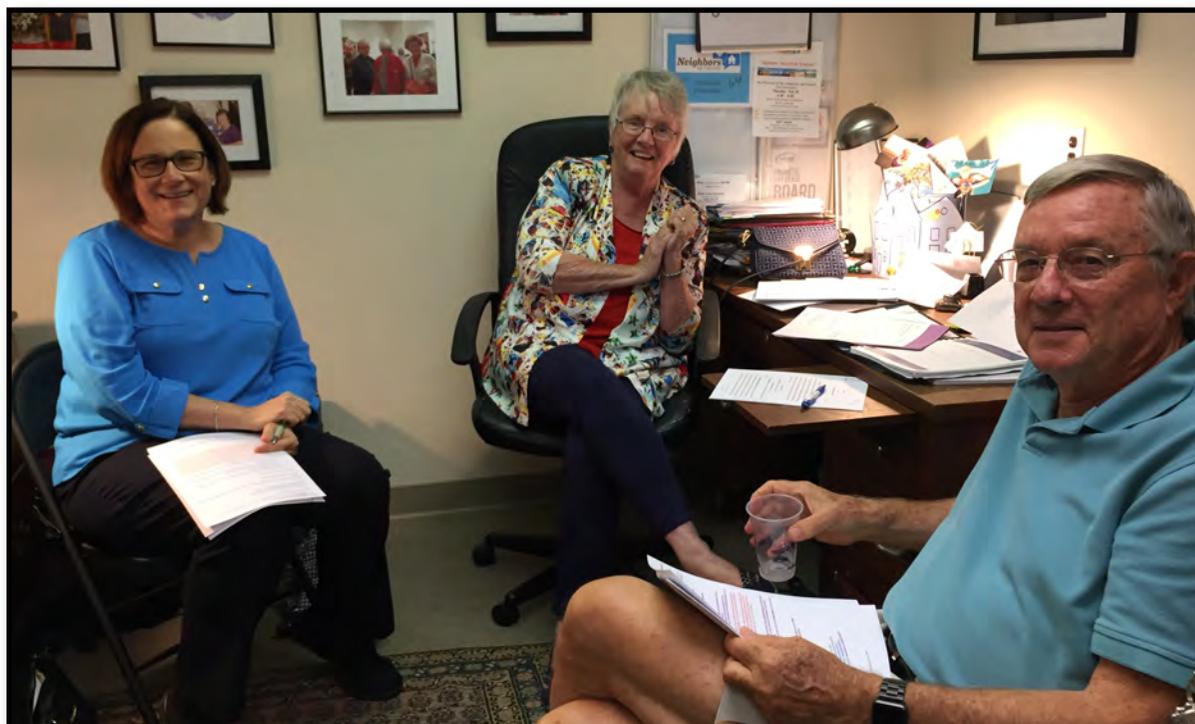
husband's father, Kenneth Kelly, came to live with them in the Winter Park area when he needed a warmer climate. Later, her parents, May and Jim Nasie, joined them in their family home. When Annette's father passed, her mother lived independently until she was in her nineties and she once again lived with Annette.

Annette Kelly was CEO of the Central Florida Alzheimer's Association, which grew from serving three to 37 counties

while she was also caring for her mother. With the help of a daytime caregiver, the busy professional was able to work and complete her doctorate in Geriatric Nursing at the University of Florida, all while making her mother feel comfortable and secure. As Mrs. Nasie began to lose her memory, Annette employed the skills she promoted in her day job as well as from her training in geriatric nursing. In the evenings, she would sit at the

table completing her day's to-do-lists as her mom with work of her own. While Annette typed away on the computer, her mom sat across from her working with memory building and other purpose-filled activities. "Mom would complete puzzles, sort silverware, and socks. She would feel busy and useful. These were pleasant times together."

Annette has learned many lessons through experience and encourages the community



Neighbors Network brainstorming

“to befriend their own aging and to prepare earlier. Research shows that older people are actually happier. We are not the sum total of our losses but the accumulation of our gifts and experiences. One way to prepare is to learn to ask for help when needed. Another way is to keep our bodies strong and active.”



Annette with her book collection

Annette praises the new Center for Health and Well Being in Winter Park for promoting classes that help the community maintain cognitive and physical strength as they age. The social aspect of group exercise is also beneficial. Annette also makes use of the gym in her apartment community room, remembering to add strength building exercises in addition to cardio machines. “The Florida climate makes it so that seniors can exercise anywhere. There are so many trails where you can get out and see people, while also building strength. Maintaining muscle health helps us recover better as muscle loss is a part of aging.”

She notes that a key health indicator is one’s ability to get up from a chair unaided.

Now semi-retired, the adjunct professor has a list of active projects, charities, and board relationships that would be impressive at any age. After moving fifteen times with her Marine Corps pilot husband, Annette and Jerry Kelly have called Maitland and the Orlando area home since 1982.

Annette, a pioneer in creating inter-dependent communities, carefully planned her own downsizing from the family home to a local apartment community. When it came time for the professional on aging to downsize, Annette and Jerry took advice on simplification from her experience in the field. Annette remarked, “I didn’t want to wait for the emergency or frailty that causes people to make life changes on a moment’s notice.” After selling the family home, the couple have shared a cozy apartment for the past four years, giving them time and space to foster both individual and joint interests. It really has been “up sizing.”

Annette remarks that moving with intention has made their life more comfortable, and the smaller quarters have brought them even closer as a couple. “Imagine growing even closer after 56 years together. We joked that our kids were taking bets to see if we would survive in much closer quarters, but instead, we grew stronger.”

Annette loves her planned community and the decreased responsibility of renting versus owning. She shares that one reason people are uncomfortable with the aging process is that they see life either as an independent or a dependent venture when interdependence is the real goal. “We want our neighbors to age within their community, and to have meaningful connections rather than to grow old in isolation.”

While Annette considers herself semi-retired, in addition to running Neighbors Network, she is President of the Board of the Brain Fitness

Academy (BFA). BFA was created by Peggy Bargmann, a colleague of Annette's at the Alzheimer's Association. This program for older adults with early dementia provides a curriculum of success-based, brain-healthy activities. When programs first began in 2007, five or six people would attend. Today, BFA is available in Winter Park, Oviedo, with other locations planned.

Attendance has grown, and now is divided into two sessions, one meeting Monday and Thursday, the other Tuesday and Friday. With the program divided into 14-week semesters like the college calendar, the BFA has been able to partner with both UCF and Rollins College. "College students studying communicative disorders love working with the program. When the students see the impact they can make in the life of an older adult, they become engaged," comments Annette.

She adds, "Peggy is devoted to excellence in this award-winning curriculum." The BFA program gained non-profit status three years ago and is looking to expand to more sites.

Husband Jerry is also fully-invested in the community, serving as an active Deacon at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church in Altamonte Springs since 1994. After serving for



Neighbors Network volunteer

twenty years in the United States Marine Corps and ten years in the defense industry, Jerry taught theology for 10 years at Bishop Moore High School. Now retired for fifteen years. The couple enjoy taking walks in the uptown area just steps away from their front door.

Despite her busy schedule, Annette makes sure to carve out free time, and makes a point to intentionally set aside time for herself. She noted that when she was working full-time, it was impossible to set aside two Saturdays in a row. Not long ago, she did just that and took a Audubon society course on birding. Additionally, Annette has grown as a water-colorist following a six-week course on painting. Though she shed

much of her personal library before her move, the avid reader holds seven library cards, making sure she is never overdue for a good book. With family coming first, Annette always makes time for a visit or a phone call with children Moira, Kathleen, Deirdre, and Patrick, and she is also close to her four grandchildren.

Neighbors Network helps older adults stay independent, active, and connected to their homes and community. To become a volunteer or to learn about membership, go to www.neighborsnetworkfl.org or call 321-209-2775.

Age is only a number for Pamela Ruben, who is a blogger and columnist on aging related issues. For the past ten years, the educator, author, and award-winning features writer has been dedicated to composing articles, life histories, and biographies on behalf of the 50-Plus set. Her book, "Laughing in the Face of Lemons," uplifted readers of all ages with her personal story of finding laughter when it was most needed. Earning a Certificate in Grant Writing from the Edyth Bush Institute at Rollins College, Pam has a passion for helping nonprofits and organizations win grant funding through the use of storytelling and interpersonal connections. Contact Ms. Ruben at pam@pruben.com. ■