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River Bay Club seniors say ‘Yes we can!’ to MyWay Village social networking

By Sue Scheible



QUINCY — MyWay Village unveiled its new computer room and online social networking program Monday at the River Bay Club in Quincy.

At least 123 of the 308 residents of the River Bay Club senior apartments have joined the new online Connected Living program, developed by MyWay Village.

With one-to-one personal instruction and support from trained “ambassadors,” the residents are using the computers to communicate with family members as far away as Central America, share photos, write memoirs and form new friendships. The program is a closed system, with passwords and registration.

Co-founded in 2007 by Sarah Hoit of Hingham, MyWay Village describes itself as the “first senior-focused technology company to help seniors get online in an easy and social way. ”

It has contracts with 11 senior residences, including 10 Brookdale independent and assisted living centers. Nine are in Chicago, where Brookdale is based; the other Brookdale facility is the River Bay Club, where the Connected Living program was first used.

Geraldine Dussault, executive director of River Bay, said that she was skeptical that many seniors would become comfortable with online social networking.

To her surprise, she said, MyWay Village has spurred a dramatic increase in residents interested in learning about computers.

Some, like 89-year-old Sunny Walker, had used computers occasionally. Now Walker is online several hours a day, sharing photos with her 23-year-old granddaughter Leigh Bueso in El Salvador.

“I think my grandmother is amazing,” Bueso said Monday, visiting her grandmother, a former school secretary in Quincy.

Other seniors also use the social media technology and personal training to stay connected with other residents, family and friends.

Some have just signed on to the community digital directory to put in a profile for others to see.

The ambassadors show the Brookdale residents how to use a customized home page. Residents can choose from a variety of activities, including sending and receiving e-mail, sharing and viewing photographs, listening to audio books and music, recording their own personal memoirs, and receiving notifications of events happening daily at their residence.

Dorothy Parks, 84, enjoyed listening to big band music with another resident, Peter Guild, 55.

The ambassadors from MyWay include many younger people who are interested in hearing seniors' stories. They also lead group activities and classes on computer use, memoir sharing and book clubs.

"Seniors are excited to participate," Hoit said. "They have so much to share and, once connected, are spending hours writing memoirs and messaging with their families."

Baby boomers and other family members have a better communication link to their elderly parents and other relatives.

"It gives them peace of mind," Hoit said.

More information can be found at mywayvillage.com.

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