

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pottstown a good place for elderly

On Tuesday, I pointed out a major demographic shift underway in Pennsylvania. The percentage of elderly residents will increase nearly 24 percent in the next ten years while the working age population will decline slightly.

Because the state does not tax retirement income, that means less state revenue and more demand for services such as health care.

But the increase in elderly is good news for Pottstown, because our borough is a great place for seniors.

In Pottstown, you can grow old in your own home or apartment. Our borough is small — just five square miles — and completely walkable. We have a hospital and medical offices that are accessible by short car trips, walking, and public transportation.

Seniors don't create a burden for Pottstown taxpayers, even if they have low or moderate incomes. They receive Social Security and Medicare benefits from the federal government.

They don't have school-aged children. Each Pottstown child costs about \$19,000 to educate in public schools.

And we don't have to worry about crime — muggings, housebreakings, or gangs of seniors hanging out on street corners getting into trouble.

About a third of America's population is over 50, accounting for half the nation's disposable income. As couples age, they look to downsize their housing and move places where they can walk to some of their destinations.

My mother lived the last five years of her life in Pottstown, where she could walk to some destinations and easily drive to the rest (she voluntarily stopped driving at 90). Once, she fell down, and Good Will Ambulance was there within five minutes to take her to the emergency room. It was easy to visit her at the hospital (she had several stays the last year of her

life), and running errands didn't take long, either.

A 73-year-old friend lives in the boondocks of Lehigh County, an hour away from us. His closest child lives in Easton. Recently my friend broke his ankle walking the dog. His wife has her own health issues and no longer drives. Transporting him to the doctor's office, and running errands as simple as buying groceries, became a logistical challenge for family and friends.

As a growing number of my fellow baby boomers are discovering, it's a major convenience to live in a town where friends, family, and services are nearby.

Even if you're in great shape, it's much easier to be independent if you live in a town. Taking a walk is as simple as stepping outside your door, and there's plenty of humanity around. That's why they call places like Pottstown NARCs — Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



My mom is shown with her cat, Fred, above, who was her constant companion until she died in her Chestnut Street home at age 92.