



Chevy Chase News & Notes

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LET'S GET TO KNOW STEPHANIE CHONG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORTHWEST NEIGHBORS VILLAGE

This [regular feature](#) profiles Chevy Chase businesspeople and organization leaders. This month we spoke with Stephanie Chong, the Executive Director of Northwest Neighbors Village. This piece was gently edited for space.

Q. Hi Stephanie, so tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

A. I have been working with older adults since I was 18. I was a certified home health aide when I was in college pursuing my social work degree. I didn't realize it at the time, but this would set the path for my career. Thirty years later, I have worked in all levels of senior living, and geriatric care management before coming to Northwest Neighbors Village.

Q. How did that prepare you for your role as Executive Director of [Northwest Neighbors Village](#) (NNV).

A. Throughout my career, so many of my clients could have benefited from earlier preventative measures that would have delayed or precluded them from requiring a higher level of care. Relatively simple, low-cost interventions like regular grocery shopping, social engagement, and transportation could have helped them avoid a

crisis. These crises often came at a significant financial cost and had a dramatic impact on their quality of life and that of their families. Working with Northwest Neighbors Village (NNV) offered an exciting opportunity for me to help older neighbors access preventive support. It is never lost on me how fortunate I am to work with older adults. It is such a shame that our society values youth when we have so much to gain from older generations. By building supportive, engaged communities of neighbors, Villages can positively change the way people relate to aging. I am grateful to be a part of a local organization that actively works toward our vision of a generous, supportive community where all older adults are valued, can age with dignity, and enjoy growth and engagement opportunities.

Q. What is the mission of NNV and what is the geographic area that it covers?

A. Our mission is to enable all older adults to thrive as they age in our community by offering a robust network of resources and opportunities. We serve neighbors who live in American University Park, Barnaby Woods, Chevy Chase, Forest Hills, Friendship Heights, Hawthorne, Tenleytown, and Van Ness. The DC Metro area boasts the largest concentration of Villages in the nation. There's a good chance that neighbors outside of our area can find a Village near them (in [DC](#) or [MD/VA](#)).

Q. NNV is now in its 15th year and you are in the 8th year of being in your position. How has NNV grown and changed over the years?

A. Northwest Neighbors Village has grown in every way with more members, more volunteers, robust programming, and greater visibility in the community. Currently we have 292 members, 183 supporting members (those who support our mission and enjoy exclusive access to NNV's full breadth of programming and vendor referrals) and 109 full members (who benefit from volunteer services and professional support, in addition full access to our programming). I am most proud of our Village's ability to be nimble and meet the changing needs of our older neighbors. During the height of the pandemic, it felt like we were pivoting our programs and services every week. We learned a lot from that experience and continue to make thoughtful changes, albeit less frequently, to become a more inclusive organization. Today, much of our programming is open to the community, we offer waived membership fees to neighbors with low-income, we've become a trusted resource for information on aging issues, and we have made thoughtful steps toward increasing diversity in our organization.

Q. I know you have many members and membership levels but as integral as members are to NNV so are its legions of volunteers. How does it all mesh?

A. The secret lies in the neighbor-to-neighbor relationships. Every [volunteer service](#) is an opportunity to make a meaningful connection. Volunteers are the eyes and ears in our community. Because volunteers are trained to recognize and report concerns, we are often able to help our members get the help they need before a small concern becomes a big issue. Our volunteers also serve on working groups and help with administrative tasks that are vital to our ability to do all that we do.

Q. Are there any concepts or [programs](#) that you are looking to implement for 2024 or in the near future?

A. I'm very excited about our work to become a more diverse and inclusive Village. There are so many people to meet and opportunities that we have yet to explore. This spring, we will share NNV's new strategic plan, which incorporates a multiyear plan to make sure that our community is better reflected in every aspect of our Village.

Q. Finally, what is something about you that people would be surprised to learn?

A. I love Pilates. In fact, I love all things wellness. I attribute this to the many older adults that I've known. I want to be like the 90-year-olds that I know who still volunteer, exercise, drive, create, learn, and laugh. In order to do that, I know that I have to take care of myself today. I'm turning 50 this year, and thanks to my many wonderful role models, I know there's so much to look forward to in the coming decades.

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