

Valpo planning to handle the boom of older baby boomers

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VALPARAISO | With the baby boomers reaching retirement -- another one hits 60 every 7 seconds -- the city has hired a consultant to develop a master plan for meeting the needs of seniors for the long term.

As part of the parks department's Fit City program, the city entered a partnership with Pines Village Retirement Communities four years ago to take over the programming at the Banta Senior Center, now called the Village Park Enrichment Center at Banta.

The ElderStyle program provides seniors with a network through which they can get services and information to help them live a full life.

The program also led to the creation of a task force that did surveys and met with groups to research what resources are available for the elderly in Valparaiso.

Laurie Mullet, Pines Village chief executive officer, said the task force found Valparaiso is rich in resources, but, to develop a plan that makes the best use of what is available and what additional services might be needed, the task force agreed it was time to bring in an expert.

They found a model program in San Jose, Calif., which was drafted by MGT of America and involved several partners as part of a 10-year plan. Valparaiso sought proposals for a five-year plan and hired MGT with funds provided from the Anderson Foundation, the Porter County Community Foundation, the parks department and Pines Village.

"The baby boomer generation will have different expectations than what people have now," Parks Director John Seibert said. "We want to see how to do a more efficient and effective job, and make Valparaiso a community of choice for seniors as it is for families and young people."

In the past, people retired and moved to the sun belt. As people live longer, they are moving back home to be near their families.

The longer life span also is creating three generations of seniors: those from 55 to 75, those 75 to 95 and those over 95. Each has different needs that will have to be addressed.

MGT started its study in December and is expected to complete it by early summer.

The study will look at four main areas: essential needs, such as food, housing, and legal assistance; health and wellness, including exercise, pharmacies, insurance and mental health; independence, focusing on transportation, and in-home care and support, and community engagement, which involves social, educational, spiritual and vocational opportunities.

"The Valpo Y and the parks have a lot of programs for multigenerational things," Seibert said. "The master plan will help develop more things specifically for the older generation and how to get seniors connected to what they need. We want to provide a one-stop shop for resources."

One of the components will be working with the area universities on continuing education programs for those interested in a second career. Seibert said few such programs exist nationally, and, as Valparaiso looked to San Jose for its example, Seibert said others are looking to see what Valparaiso does.