

NeighborLNK Provides Support, Friendship

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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many aging adults were hesitant or unable to get out into the community to pick up necessary items. That's why Aging Partners and Seniors Foundation launched the NeighborLNK program last year.

NeighborLNK connects volunteers with homebound aging adults or persons with a disability. Volunteers assist with errands such as picking up groceries, medications or library books, and help reduce isolation through phone or video call check-ins.

Currently, there are 70 active matched pairs, including Jill Groshans and Don West.

West, 84, lives alone in Hickman, Nebraska. He uses a walker and finds it difficult to navigate walking in a store for long periods of time.

That's where Groshans comes in. She makes the drive weekly from her home in Roca, Nebraska, to Lincoln to pick up West's groceries and medications, along with a few classic western and war movies from the Lincoln City Libraries. She then delivers the items to West's home where she's occasionally helped him order items online as well.

"Now, I don't have to drive the 30 minutes to and from Lincoln to get groceries," West said. "I only have to drive if I have a doctor or dentist appointment. So, that's a big help."

Groshans, a retired teacher, felt the call to volunteer as her parents are getting older too, but they currently don't need extra assistance.

"It's nice to be able to assist him so he doesn't have to get out and make another trip," she said. "But for me, it's about the relationship."

West doesn't have any family nearby to call if he needs something; and although he visits the Hickman Senior Center every Wednesday, he needs just a little bit of help from time to time.

"He knows he can call if there's something urgent as I'm just 20 minutes away," Groshans said.

The pair has been matched since May 2020, and Groshans finds their friendship has evolved throughout the past year.

"Now he'll occasionally reach out and ask for help with something other than groceries — and that's a good thing," she said. "Recently, we walked through ways to recognize scam phone calls and ways to avoid them."

Groshans makes a point to spend time with West when she drops off his groceries by bringing a chair to sit socially distanced or wear a mask while chatting in West's garage or driveway depending on the weather.

West retired from construction in 2002 and enjoys telling Groshans his construction stories and passing along his knowledge about Nebraska's native plants and animals. He even gifted Groshans some Sweet Rocket flower seeds from his property.

"I enjoy hearing about his perspectives on life and various other things he shares based on his 84 years of living," she said.

Residents age 60 and over and persons with disabilities can fill out the application for NeighborLNK at aging.lincoln.ne.gov and email the completed packet to NeighborLNK@lincoln.ne.gov. You also may call 402-441-7575 to request an application packet. Applicants should note any special requirements on the forms. Volunteers must complete an application, sign a waiver and pass a background check. Volunteers must be at least 19 years old and complete a brief online training.

Aging Partners staff will review all volunteer applications and assistance requests to pair people based on location and services requested. Once a match is made, both parties will be notified by phone, text and/or email.