

Carmel Foundation looks after Peninsula's seniors

FOUNDATION FOR LIVING

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Updated: 06/10/2009 08:40:43 AM PDT

Barbara Butler's studio apartment in Carmel faces east, which lets in just the right kind of sunlight — soft and gentle, usually from the southeast — for an artist who paints and sculpts.

She loves the location at a small complex called Norton Court between Fourth and Fifth avenues on Dolores Street. Much of what she needs in her life is nearby, within walking distance, and a volunteer from the Carmel Foundation will happily drive her anywhere else.



Butler, 88, is thankful for the Carmel Foundation, which has helped facilitate low-cost housing, as well as almost any other necessity under the sun, for Peninsula seniors for nearly six decades.

"Without them, I wouldn't even hazard a guess where I'd be living, or how," said Butler, who was a part-time teacher and a singer as a young person. "You know, when you get old, it's hard to do everything you used to do, and the people from the Carmel Foundation are so very kind. They're always there for you, for any little thing. They are aware that you exist, and it's important to have somebody like that when you get up in age."

One thing that seems likely is that very few of the people — perhaps none of them — who are living today in low-cost housing provided by the Carmel Foundation could afford to reside in that utopian little city otherwise.

"If it wasn't for the foundation, I don't know what I would have done," said Norton Court resident Clara Cherry, 75, whose childhood home

was on the corner across the street. "With the way house rents are today, I have no idea."

The average annual income of seniors who live in Carmel Foundation-funded housing is about \$12,000 a year. The foundation charges 30 percent for rent — usually about \$300 a month — using guidelines of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as its qualification standard to live at Norton Court (24 units), Haseltine Court (12), and what soon will be the palace of the group, Trevvett Court (nine today, 14 after renovation).

"We currently have 45 units of low-income housing in those three properties, and we're tearing down Trevvett Court, which was built as a motel in the mid-1940s, then was purchased by the foundation in the mid-'60s and converted into senior housing," said Jill Sheffield, president and CEO of the Carmel Foundation. "Trevvett has been maintained very well, but it's 60 years old now and we're going to update it."

The foundation has raised \$1.7 million toward a total estimated cost of \$2.8 million for the renovation of Trevvett Court. When it is finished, it will have 14 single-bedroom units, each measuring 500 square feet, wrapped around an ornate, U-shaped courtyard.

"Am I moving into Trevvett Court? Oh, I wish!" Cherry said with a laugh. "It's going to be beautiful."

The 14 units are spoken for, and there is a waiting list of 47 people. To be eligible to live at Trevvett, or any of the Carmel Foundation's 50 units, a person must hold membership in the foundation, must be at least 65 years old, must have lived on the Monterey Peninsula for at least two of the past 10 years, and must meet HUD's classifications as a low-, very low-, or extremely low-income person.

The money raised for Trevvett's renovation came mostly from other foundations and individual donors, many of whom gave \$10,000 or more. A letter was mailed last week to each of the Carmel Foundation's 4,000 active members, plus select people in the community, soliciting participation in the foundation's Signature Stone Campaign, which will honor donors with inscriptions on stones that will be installed in the courtyard.

"We're going public for donations. Once we get to a certain benchmark, we can go to the Kresge Foundation, which funds projects

like this one on a national level," said Linda Lee, director of development for the foundation. "And we're hoping to get some larger grants like that during the second half of our campaign."

The foundation's efforts have not gone unnoticed by those reaping the benefits of the organization's philanthropy. Cherry, who moved into Norton Court four years ago, says she can count on the group, with its 200 active volunteers, for virtually anything she needs.

"I can't say enough good things about them. They make life as easy and comfortable as possible for us," said Cherry, a former caregiver. "If we need anything, even something as simple as changing a light bulb, they're right there for us."

In the 2009 Annual Housing Report for Monterey County, the lack of affordable housing was identified as the most critical issue facing the county. Land values remain high and housing production is not keeping pace with the demand, especially in light of the recent economic downturn.

About half of all seniors in California — 1.8 million — struggle to cover the basic costs of housing, food, transportation and medical care, according to studies by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the Insight Center for Economic Development.

The 2000 Census reported that 21 percent of people living on the Peninsula are 65 and older, and with the aging of the baby boomers, the county's senior population is expected to grow by 50 percent by the year 2030.

The Carmel Foundation's 60-year efforts to make living easier for Peninsula seniors extends beyond low-cost housing.

"We like to say that we promote successful aging," Sheffield said. "We're always looking for volunteers because we're a seven-day-a-week operation. We have so much going on every day. We serve lunch four days a week. We provide transportation to our members to medical appointments. We deliver meals to seniors who are homebound. We have about 50 activities and programs (movies, lectures, classes, outings, etc.) every week, and we literally couldn't do it without our volunteers, all of whom are foundation members."

Anybody living on the Peninsula, in the Salinas Valley or in Santa Cruz County is eligible for foundation membership.

For information, call 624-1588, or see www.carmelfoundation.org.

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Senior demographics

- Since 1970, the number of Americans 65 or older has grown by 80 percent
 - Today, one in eight Americans is 65 or older
 - Almost 75 percent of people 65 or older report their health as good to excellent; slightly more than 25 percent consider their health fair or poor
 - Nearly one-third of people 65 or older live alone (about 40 percent of women and 18 percent of men)
 - About 10 percent of Americans 65 or older live in poverty, the majority being women and minorities
 - The median income of people 65 and older is less than \$15,000 per year
 - Social Security is the only source of income for 20 percent of people 65 and older
 - About 20 percent of people 65 and older are renters
- Source: The Carmel Foundation