

Alliance serves as a resource guide for seniors

By: JOHN ANASTASI
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Comprised of about a dozen area businesses, the Bucks County SR Alliance's main goal is helping senior citizens.

About a dozen Bucks County businesses that serve the region's senior citizen population have built an alliance to share information with older residents about the products and services that are available to them.

Created five months ago and still in start-up mode, the Bucks County SR Alliance offers a Web site - www.buckscountysra.com - which serves as a resource guide for senior citizens. It will meet regularly to share ideas, offer occasional free seminars and take part in health fairs at area senior centers and other locations.

Heading the Bucks County SR Alliance is Brian Fitzpatrick, of BrightStar Healthcare, a Langhorne-based home care and medical staffing franchise. Fitzpatrick conceded the alliance allows member businesses to communicate directly with potential clients, but stressed that helping seniors is the key goal.

"There's no doubt that an element of it helps us market our individual businesses," Fitzpatrick said. "But when we meet with someone, there are no expectations. It's not a pressure-type networking group. The goal is to make sure they know there's a broad range of services available to them."

The group is the Bucks County chapter of a national movement begun by a company called Programs Reaching Seniors. The Denver-based company helps potential alliances get off the ground, provides them with Web sites, information they can use, newsletters, publications and ongoing support.

"Once [an alliance] has its core together, they become an ongoing networking group," said national group manager Valerie Arnold. "We have close to 95 chapters."

The members of those chapters pay Programs Reaching Seniors \$24 per month for those services, said Arnold, who said that money accounts for the majority of the company's revenue.

Like the other chapters, each of the Bucks County alliance's member businesses covers a different area.

For example, Penndel's Cane & Able Inc. is a retail store where seniors and people with disabilities can shop for everything from walkers and motorized wheelchairs to household and hygiene products. Lower Makefield's Mary Lou Durkin is an independent agent selling medical, dental, life and disability insurance.

"We're up to 12 active members and growing," Fitzpatrick said. "The members are actively recruiting [business] people we know and trust. We have an elder law attorney, a downsizing specialist, an accountant and an audiologist. We've been debating people who we think would make a good addition."

He added that the group is looking for people who sincerely want to educate the senior citizen community and people who "aren't just doing it from a financial standpoint."

David Farrer, who runs Cane & Able Inc., called the alliance a "great idea" for both the seniors and the businesses. The knowledge and expertise that the alliance's members together represent is formidable, said Farrer. For instance, he said he knows all about how the Medicare system relates to medical equipment and home safety product purchases.

"It's a great idea from an educational standpoint," Farrer said.

Brian Duke, of the Bucks County Area Agency on Aging, said this week that he hadn't heard of the Bucks County SR Alliance before, but wished the group well.

"The more information that is getting out to older residents of Bucks County, the better," Duke said.

He said a similar group, the Senior Resource Network of Southeastern Pennsylvania, is operating in Central Bucks.

According to its Web site - <http://seniorresourcenetwork-pa.com> - that group includes Upper Southampton elder law attorney Richard L. Newman, Chalfont senior real estate specialist Will Schirmer, and Michael Ivankovich, of Doylestown-based Home Downsizing Consultants.

"When these groups form, we encourage them to inform us and collaborate with us," Duke said.

The Bucks County SR Alliance is taking part in two senior expos next month. The first is scheduled for 10 a.m. Sept. 10 at the Fairless Hills Volunteer Fire Department on Hood Boulevard in Falls. The second will be held at 10 a.m. Sept. 23 at the Lower Bucks Senior Activity Center on Wood Street in Bristol.

John Anastasi can be reached at 215-949-4170 or at janastasi@phillyBurbs.com.

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