



Contact:

Linda M. Clark
Communications Manager
928.204.1238 office
928.300.1125 cell

For Immediate Release

Retired nurses comforting VVCC neighbors

April 16, 2020—Sedona— During this time of social distancing, our neighbors have stocked up on food and paper products and are staying home. Many are alone and need help in normal times. Twelve members of the Northern Arizona Retired Nurses In Action (NARNIA) volunteering with Verde Valley Caregivers Coalition are making phone calls to reassure neighbors and ensure their needs are met through this trying time.

The callers found that many of VVCC's neighbors are isolated and scared. Many also have underlying health issues, such as COPD which make them particularly vulnerable to the virus.

The phone calls, though, are making a big difference. "The (neighbors) have a chance to share their fears and anxieties, especially those who live alone, said retired nurse Penny Mathieu. "Even though we remind them of social distancing and other preventive personal care, at least they know that they are still a part of the community and someone still cares about their well-being."

While sheltering at home, VVCC services are necessarily limited to only essential services, such as taking neighbors to doctor appointments, picking up prescriptions and shopping for neighbors. Protocols have been put in place to protect neighbors and volunteers from the virus.

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In their conversations with neighbors, the nurses also learned how much the efforts of VVCC's caring and brave volunteers are appreciated.

Retired nurse Donna Chalmers quotes some of the comments neighbors have made to her, "Many said, 'I don't know what I would do at this time without you.' Some said, 'my family lives far away and they are worried about me because I don't drive anymore, and I don't know a lot of my neighbors.'" One of those she spoke with said, "I have COPD and I'm scared that if I have contact with someone with the virus, it could kill me."

As well as providing comfort, the nurses also inform the neighbors on how best to protect themselves from the virus through handwashing and social distancing. Most volunteer on a regular basis to provide in-home assessments of older adults applying to become neighbors, help neighbors understand medical recommendations and inform about other VVCC services.

"The nurses have really stepped up in any way they can during the COVID-19 epidemic," said Mary Jane Thompson, RN, and vice president of VVCC's Board of Directors. "We're still called upon by neighbors and friends for information and why our motto is: 'Once a nurse, always a nurse.'"

We thank the retired nurse volunteers and VVCC volunteers for helping to comfort our neighbors during this critical time," said VVCC Executive Director Kent Ellsworth. "The calls are heartwarming to our neighbors who are so thankful for their caring."

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NARNIA, which started in 2005, is a social organization that meets once a month, seven months out of the year. Their luncheons include informative speakers who present on healthcare or community organizations like Verde Valley Caregivers Coalition. Retired nurses who participated include: Carol Ann Chambers, Donna Chalmers, Stephanie Dempsey, Ann Eller, Penny Mathieu, Helen Paravano, Sharon Reiter, Marilyn Rexroat, Ann Steinbrunner, Jan Stilkey, Mary Jane Thompson, and Barbara Wall. VVCC volunteer callers include: Carol Lucas, Barbara Turner, and Judy Lewisohn.

VVCC is in its 28th year serving approximately 2,200 older adults throughout the Verde Valley. Volunteers drive neighbors to the grocery store, medical appointments, dialysis, physical therapy and other important appointments. Volunteers also provide home safety checks, shop for neighbors, provide business help, patient scribe, respite and pet assistance. VVCC also loans Guardian Angel emergency alert units to older adults at risk for falling.

For information about VVCC services and volunteering please call (928) 204-1238 or visit their website at: www.vvcaregivers.org for a full list of volunteer opportunities. You decide when and how often you can volunteer.

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