

## Housing, Village Concept Take Center Stage for Senior Action Coalition

*By Carol Harrison*

With 30 committed regulars and another 60 “e-activists” ready to respond if needed, the nonpartisan Senior Action Coalition is making its voice heard in Humboldt County.

SAC formed in March 2012 as a grassroots, volunteer-run community group that targets issues that affect local seniors.



Current focus areas include housing, traffic safety and health care.

“I want to help people now and put in time now so that the senior situation is better a decade from now when I’m 68,” said JoAnn Schuch, the SAC point person on joint effort with Area 1 Agency on Aging to rally the community around bringing the “Village” concept of eldercare to the North Coast.

“SAC is an active and mature group, filled with people who hang in there and have the long view.”

“We’ll speak up if we need to bring out the numbers, but we’re more interested in contributing what we know and what we can offer from a lifetime of experience,” said Bonnie MacGregor, a charter member of SAC. She is one of two SAC members to attend every meeting of the county’s General Plan housing element over several months earlier this year.

“They attack issues, needs and problems,” said Sylvia Shaw, a first-year member who is now heading the SAC effort to work with Danco on the conversion of the Downtowner Motel into subsidized senior housing next to the Eureka Inn.

“They are activists,” she said of the SAC members. “They are people who are doing things and they do them with a plan.”

SAC marked its second anniversary in March by hosting the first Eureka Traffic Safety Summit in the aftermath of the deaths of a couple of senior pedestrians. Sylvia Ryan and Paul Pitino spearheaded an event that drew nearly 40 people from different agencies to Humboldt Bay Aquatic Center to identify strategies for traffic safety along the Hwy 101 corridor on 4th and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. *One of the “simple” changes – more public service announcements – has already been implemented, Schuch said.*

*“We’re in the process of doing a follow-up to see how progress is coming,” Schuch said.*

*Humboldt Area Foundation gave SAC a small grant to host the summit.*

*“The grant was a credit to the reputation so many of our members have in the community,” Schuch said.*

Summit results can be found at [www.humseniorsinaction.org](http://www.humseniorsinaction.org).

Shaw and SAC have been informally surveying local seniors to prioritize amenities that may become part of the Downtowner facelift.

“Danco puts a pool in many of their projects and says people love them, but could that same space and funding go to something that might fit local needs better?” Shaw asked. “We want to gather that information and some of what we’ve learned from the experience of Plaza Point residents to better inform that project before funding comes through.”

Not a physical place like Plaza Point, a “Village” is a membership organization that first started in Boston as a way to help seniors get a little help with tasks so they can remain their homes. A1AA is providing administrative support until the Village becomes a reality.

Schuch said a “Village” movement update will happen from 12 to 1:30 p.m. on Wed., Dec. 3 as part of the OLLI Brown Bag lunch program at Humboldt Bay Aquatic Center. Anyone is welcome. Preliminary results of the Northcoast at Home survey conducted by A1AA will be discussed.

“We had 70 people there last time,” Schuch said. “We’ll also talk about different examples of rural villages. Every single one is different.”

The Senior Action Coalition traces its roots to a start-up grant from the SCAN Foundation to A1AA for its Project for Senior Action.

The SCAN Foundation is a nonprofit charity “devoted to transforming care for older adults in ways that preserve dignity and encourage independence.”

The Senior Action Coalition meets the third Wednesday of every month from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Jefferson Community Center at 1000 B Street in Eureka.

Meetings are brown bag luncheons open to anyone or any age.

*“Getting older is a great leveler,” Schuch said. “We are all concerned about health care. We are all concerned about seeing and helping our neighbors and relatives be cared for compassionately as we get older.”*

SAC can be reached at 707-440-9365, through e-mail at [senioractioncoalition@gmail.com](mailto:senioractioncoalition@gmail.com), or through the A1AA offices at 434 Seventh St. in Eureka, CA, 95501.

*Area 1 Agency on Aging paid Carol Harrison to write this article.*