

Here's what you need to know if you're getting older

By Ellen Waldman

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Recently, I heard that Ashland has the highest per capita rate of education in Oregon, outside of Portland. Ashland is also known as one of the top 10 small retirement communities in the country.

Clearly, this means our residents have a great deal of knowledge and life experience. Here is the surprise, though. On topics related to aging, such as what documents you need to have in place, local resources for support and living options and costs, people have a lot less information than you'd expect.

This column will fill in those gaps with stories, interviews, and my on-the-ground experiences as a certified geriatric care manager. There will be room for your own questions to be addressed as well. You'll see that although we are all unique, there are many common threads.

Aging happens and it touches all our lives. I will bring you a fresh view on how aging affects not just the elderly but their families as well. If you are an adult child and having concerns about your parents, are currently in mid-life yourself, or have reached 80 years and up, you will find this column has relevance for you.

After 15 years in this field (and 25 years living in Ashland), I have had the great good fortune to have a front and center role in the lives of many of your neighbors. Working with people just a bit further down the road in life feels like an honor. I'll take you behind the scenes with many families (while maintaining confidentiality) and explore our local facilities and resources that support them. Here are some examples of what you will be reading about:

- You will meet people from their 40s to their 70s who had an aging parent and realized they had no idea how to begin helping them or what help was available. Their lives were already full to the brim with their own families and jobs and they were not sure where to turn.
- Here's a woman in her late 80s. Her daughter suggested she stop climbing a ladder to change her own light bulbs. She called her daughter a worry-wart and would not accept any help at all. How does a family handle this? Should they interfere with her choices?

The area of our life map labeled "aging" has its own set of circumstances that are often unfamiliar to most people. Since I have been through this terrain many times, I would like to be your navigator and give you a tour of the territory. It can be rocky with obstacles, but also rewarding with successful outcomes.

It's an amazing journey. I hope that as we share it together, you'll feel more at ease and better educated. Local retired cardiologist Dr. John Forsyth says, "Do what you can to learn about and prepare for this time of life, and then get back to living it."

I hope to provide a guiding hand to help you along the way.