

## **Older Adults Need a Thriving Community**

The health of our schools should be a concern of all Island residents, including older adults. Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard exists to help make the Vineyard a community in which "older adults thrive". We at Healthy Aging study the things that older adults need to live a full healthy life. "Community" tops the list. For an older adult to thrive, they need to live in a community that thrives. On June 2, Island citizens will have a once in a generation chance to vote for an investment critical to our community's vibrance and health—the funding for a revitalized high school.

The vital importance of education speaks for itself. The adage that "our children are our future" is more than a trite saying. It is a powerful truth. Strong education requires a strong educational infrastructure. The benefits of excellent education resonate through all aspects of a community. Research supports the association between a community's investment in their educational infrastructure and the desirability of that community as a place to live. Surveys demonstrate that communities with excellent education are more desirable places to live. Real estate values are higher. The quality of life that residents report is better.

Communities that support education are more satisfying places to live—for all residents.

Older adults need "community" to thrive. Social isolation is often a fatal disease for the elderly. This should be a stark reminder to all of us who focus on the needs of older adults that we need to think about the whole community, not just the part that older adults occupy. The education of young people leads to availability of

services that frail older adults depend upon. Young people often become professionals that enable older adults to live at home. Today's parents need first-rate education for their children if they are going to choose to live on the Vineyard. The services of health professionals, builders, store owners and many others who choose to live on the Island form the skeleton on which an excellent quality of life is built. Without them, no older adult can "thrive".

Investments in one's community can be costly. The future returns of any investment should be carefully scrutinized. We are at a time of rising costs. Financial pressures on many of our Vineyard neighbors threaten their security. These threats can impair their health. These pressures can be especially acute among older adults. We all need to be sensitive to acute financial issues and creative in addressing the needs of our neighbors. We also need to keep in mind that investments like the high school renovation are "long term". The consequences of our decision will span decades rather than years. Our attention to the acute stress many feel today should not deter us from making prudent long-term decisions.

We built our regional high school in 1959. The last significant renovation, the building of the Performing Arts Center, occurred in 1995. Our facility is well past the usual life of 50 years. Much study has led to the current recommendations that blend "addition and renovation". The plans envision the revitalized campus that will be a community resource for all. As a prime example, we have all experienced the vibrance that the Performing Arts Center brings to the Vineyard.

The facts are clear. Our high school needs re-invigoration. Substantial state funding to help is available now and will not be in the future. And, much more than having a “nice building” is at stake as we as a community make our decision on June 2. Our vote will reflect on the character of our community in a very tangible way. We are a great community because we have invested in it. It is where we live and where we all want to thrive. The vast majority of Island older adults want to live the rest of their lives on the Vineyard. For this to become reality and not a dream, we older adults need to support investments in our future and encourage our neighbors to do the same.

Robert Laskowski

Chair Board of Directors, Healthy Aging MV