

Dear Friends,

The primary focus for **At Home In Darien** has been to provide reliable and compassionate transportation services for Darien seniors. In 2023 we provided over 4,000 rides, most of which were for medical appointments. While we will continue to prioritize this service to meet the growing demand, we are acutely aware of the increasing threat of isolation and loneliness. Seniors, who have contributed so much to our community, are particularly vulnerable. In a world that is constantly evolving, it is paramount that no one is left behind. In 2024 we are committed to expanding our services to bridge the gap and foster deeper connections between seniors and the broader community.

Mobility is not just about covering physical distances but about overcoming the emotional distances that isolation can bring. By offering a helping hand and providing increased social engagement, we are aiming to further reduce the barriers that may hinder our seniors from participating more fully in community life. None of these efforts or the services we provide would be possible without the incredible support we receive from this community. As we embark on the journey to reduce isolation among our senior community members, we invite you to join us.

This issue of **Out & About** covers some of our recent activities but more importantly, highlights the efforts of Joe Pankowski, Chairman of Darien's Commission on Aging. Joe and the dedicated group of volunteers who sit on this commission represent the very best in unselfish service, and exemplify what continues to set Darien apart from other towns.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and would love to hear from you. We welcome your questions, recommendations, and of course, any consideration of a donation that can help us continue to uniquely support Darien seniors. Please give us a call at (203) 655-2227.

All the best,



William Carney
Co-President of the
Board of Directors
At Home In Darien



Peter Sosnow
Co-President of the
Board of Directors
At Home In Darien



Chris Jones
Executive Director of
At Home In Darien
Chris@AtHomeInDarien.org

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Valentine's Day Deliveries

Special Valentine's Day cards and crafts were created for Darien seniors, and were delivered by some of **At Home In Darien's** dedicated group of volunteers. Special thanks go to our friends at The Darien School's Early Learning Program, Ox Ridge School Kids Care Club, Brunswick School and The Community Fund of Darien's Youth Give Back program for their creative talents and time. The cards and crafts were included in gift bags with other treats and generated a lot of smiles from appreciative seniors!

our mission:

"Helping Darien seniors live independently, comfortably and with dignity in their own homes and the community as long as possible"

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Make sure you know what's going on around town... subscribe to our monthly calendar of events!

Stay connected this fall and make sure you know what's being offered around town... subscribe to our monthly calendar of events! Call **203.655.2227** to request to receive it by mail or email. You will also receive our BLOG notifications where we share important information on various subjects of interest.



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Commission on Aging— Q&A with Joe Pankowski, Chair of the Commission

In the last issue of *Out & About*, we focused on Darien's Department of Human Services, led by Director Ali Ramsteck, and learned about her team's service to our town. Another special group that advocates for Darien seniors is the Commission on Aging. This dedicated group of volunteers, led by Commission Chair Joe Pankowski, meets monthly to identify and discuss issues central to Darien seniors. Joe represents the very best in unselfishness and volunteerism that is so critical to Darien. He is licensed to practice law in New York and Connecticut, where his focus for more than 30 years has been on wills, trusts and probate. Joe is also a graduate of Yale Divinity School and is a Trustee of the Andover Newton Seminary at Yale. For fun, Joe kayaks year-round in Long Island Sound and drives through Fairfield County in his 1930 Model A pickup, including down the Post Road on behalf of the Mather Center in the Darien Memorial Parade. We also understand that Joe is looking forward to receiving his At Home In Darien membership card this month when he turns 60! We recently chatted with Joe to get his thoughts on the Commission's efforts in Darien.



Joe Pankowski, Chairman of Darien's Commission on Aging

AHID: *What is the role of the Commission on Aging?*

Joe: The Commission on Aging was chartered by the town in the 1970s to serve the needs of Darien's seniors and future seniors. Originally, the Commission oversaw the finances of the Senior Center, when that facility was on Edgerton Street. However, over 20 years ago, the town decided to have the Commission focused purely on monitoring seniors' needs and advocating for them both at the local and state levels.

AHID: *What would you say is your Commission's biggest success as an advocacy organization?*

Joe: Well, without question, it was the construction and opening of the Mather Center in 2014. The old Senior Center on Edgerton Street was in a former 1950s elementary school and was completely run-down by the early 2000s. Yet, town officials, pressed by other issues, kicked the Senior Center can down the road, deferring maintenance and forcing seniors to use child-sized toilets. Upon becoming Chair of the Commission in 2008, I'd seen enough and went before the Selectmen. While the Selectmen at that time did make some cosmetic changes to the Senior Center, it wasn't nearly enough. The good news was that the speech did draw the attention of one man, Dave Campbell. When Dave became First Selectman, he realized something had to be done about the Senior Center and came up with the idea of the Shuffle—that is, after necessary renovations, he would move the Board of Education to the old library's vacated building on Leroy Avenue and move the Senior Center to the vacated space of the Board of Education. An added bonus was the extra space available at the Town Hall due to the old locker room in the basement. The Commission on Aging partnered with Dave, fought hard to get the necessary approvals and funding, and we thought we were at the finish line. Unfortunately, enough signatures were gathered by our opponents to force a referendum at the polls to stop the project. Ultimately, we won in December of 2011 and the Mather Center became a reality. Being located at the Town Hall, of course, resulted in synergies with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health and At Home In Darien, which we are seeing on a day-to-day basis. The Mather Center is now the premier jewel of senior centers in Connecticut and is run by an amazing staff and a team of volunteers led by Beth Paris.

AHID: *What are you focusing on now?*

Joe: We're very blessed to have one member of our Commission, Peter Eder, who keeps us posted on state legislation and how we can push senior-related bills with our local representatives. For example,

we successfully advocated for the state to force assisted care facilities to allow patients to install video cameras in their rooms. Such cameras allow patients' loved ones to communicate with them—something which would have been really helpful during the worst days of Covid. On a local level, we're currently focused on ways to make our town more pedestrian-friendly.

AHID: *Do you ever have disagreements on policy?*

Joe: Absolutely. We have eleven members and each of us comes from a different point on the political spectrum. Thus, on some hot-button topics, we sometimes agree to disagree and not have the Commission take on an advocacy role. The most recent example before the Commission was the "Aid in Dying" issue, which opponents call "Physician-Assisted Suicide." Some of us are strong advocates for allowing terminally ill people to choose to end their

lives with the help of their doctor; others are strongly against allowing physicians to issue prescriptions for this purpose. What's great is that our members on both sides were very respectful of each other's positions and the debates did not get heated. Imagine if Washington politicians could do the same?

AHID: *How do you stay abreast of town issues?*

Joe: We are privileged to have Beth Paris, Director of the Mather Center, Ali Ramsteck, Director of the Department of Human Services, and Chris Jones, Executive Director of At Home In Darien, provide us with updates of what's going on in each of their organizations at each of our monthly meetings. In addition, we invite town leaders to do longer presentations. Just last month, our First Selectman, Jon Zagrodzky, covered everything from the future of Great Island to tax policy. Previous speakers have included local developer, David Genovese, our Board of Finance Chairman, Jim Palen, and our P&Z Chairman, Steve Olvany. Each of these individuals provides a different perspective on what's going on in town and allows us to support their efforts on behalf of seniors going forward.

AHID: *Members of the Commission are volunteering their time, correct?*

Joe: Yes, we're all volunteers. I think the vast majority of our members are here because we have a strong interest in our seniors and issues which impact them.

AHID: *What do you do when you're not volunteering for the Commission?*

Joe: I'm a partner in the law firm of Wofsey, Rosen, Kweskin & Kuriansky in Stamford and I chair the firm's Trusts & Estates Department. Serving seniors on a daily basis definitely helps me in my role as Chair of the Commission, as I see the challenges faced by my clients. I'm also a Justice of the Peace, serve as the Historian for the First Congregational Church and act as the Secretary for the Salem Straits Association. My spouse, Annie, and I have lived in Darien since 1992 and we were blessed to raise our two boys here.

AHID: *How would a person become a member of the Commission?*

Joe: We don't have an opening right now. However, Darien residents interested in joining the Commission can contact me and I'll keep them posted about when we have a vacancy. They would then follow the town's vetting procedures and, hopefully, be appointed by our Selectmen. Our meetings are open to the public, so anyone can come see us work in Room 119 of the Town Hall. We typically meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 9 a.m.

Thank you Joe, for your stewardship of this Commission and for your commitment to Darien seniors! For additional information and details regarding the Commission on Aging, please call Joe at (203) 694-0545 or visit <https://www.darienct.gov/> and go to the Commission on Aging link. You may also get a closer look into this Commission by watching one of their meetings, which can be found by searching for this group at <https://dariantv79.com/>.



MEMBER
Your Name Here

203.655.2227
AtHomeInDarien.org
2 Renshaw Road
Darien, CT 06820

Membership Discount Program

At Home In Darien provides a variety of services and programs for Darien seniors, all designed to help seniors continue to live at home and in the community for as long as possible. One of these noteworthy programs that perhaps doesn't get as much attention as the others is the **Membership Discount Program**. Through this program and when presenting an AHID member card, seniors are able to receive unique discounts and offers from a growing list of Darien businesses. We are grateful to the following businesses for participating in this program, and look forward to adding more businesses to this special list:

- Barrett Book Store
- Robert F. Carroll, Esq., CPA
- Darien Diner
- Darien Eye Care
- Darien Flowers
- Darien Plumbing
- Fabricare Cleaners
- Four Forks
- The Gardener's Center & Florist
- Karen Goersch, CPA, CRPC at Ameriprise Financial
- Gofer Ice Cream
- Hands on Pottery
- Lou Iacono Landscape and Masonry
- LYMBR
- Mayflower Home Organizing
- Michael Joseph's
- Museum of Darien
- NEAT Coffee
- Nedder & Associates
- Nielsen's Florist and Garden Shop
- North Star Wealth Advisors, LLC
- Palmer's Market
- Salt Cave of Darien
- Shirley Sykes Massage Therapy
- The Seana Method
- Scena Wine Bar & Restaurant
- Sipsters
- Sweetgreen
- UPS Store
- YMCA

Please visit our site at <https://athomeindarien.org/> to receive the most updated list of partners and offers, and if you are a Darien senior and don't have one yet, call our office at (203) 655-2227 to request an AHID Membership Card

AHID Annual Meeting



AHID's Annual Meeting guest speaker Terrie Wood

Terrie Wood, a longtime Darien resident and previous Connecticut State Representative, served as the guest speaker at **At Home In Darien's** Annual Meeting in December. Ms. Wood emphasized the importance of civic responsibility, while also detailing recent voting regulations that impact seniors. Ms. Wood highlighted early voting and absentee ballot opportunities as important processes that can support seniors during voting cycles.

Co-Presidents of the Board William Carney and Peter Sosnow also spoke about the continued strength of the organization, highlighting year-over-year increases in all services including over a 50% increase in rides provided for seniors for medical appointments, shopping, and other purposes. Mr. Sosnow outlined the organization's goals for 2024, including providing additional solutions to help seniors address both isolation and loneliness. He noted that "isolation and loneliness are problems across the globe and while not age specific, groups who aren't as mobile and social are believed to be at greater risk". The organization is well poised to meet these challenges!

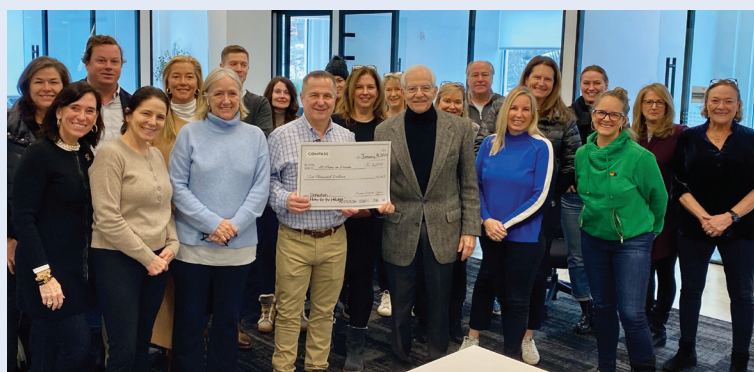
Check Out Our Monthly



If you are a senior and are not following **At Home In Darien's** monthly blog, then you are missing (we believe!) some diverse content and information. Our blogs cover a variety of topics centered on health, nutrition, and entertainment, as well as available services and support in Darien and surrounding communities. For example, you can read our May 2022 entry titled **Regular Low Impact Exercise** to learn about quick and easy exercises, or our April 2023 blog titled **Medical De-Prescribing** to learn how to potentially work with health care providers to review current medication and formulate a plan to reduce or completely discontinue usage of prescription and over-the-counter medications or dietary supplements. Please visit our site at <https://athomeindarien.org/blog/> to access all of our blogs. We not only welcome your feedback, but would also appreciate any suggestions for future blog topics!

Compass Real Estate Supports At Home In Darien!

Agents from Compass Real Estate gathered in their Darien office in January to present **At Home In Darien** with a generous donation. The donation will be used to provide a variety of services to Darien seniors to help them remain living independently and in the community for as long as possible.







Compass Agents taking a break from planning meeting to present check to At Home In Darien



Vicki D'Agostino, Compass Real Estate Sales Manager (Far Right), presenting check to AHID Board Vice President John Hess (Far Left) and AHID Executive Director Chris Jones (Center)



At Home In Darien provides the following free services to all Darien residents age 60+:

-  Transportation within Darien, Stamford, Norwalk and New Canaan, Monday - Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Half-Price Taxi Voucher Program.
-  Telephone referral, advice and counsel.
-  Communication and Programs — *Out & About* newsletter.
- Monthly calendar of events.
- Monthly blog.
- Membership Cards that provide discounts with local businesses.
- Social and educational programs.
- Handy Services —
-  Volunteers including Friendly Visitors, Shoppers, Helpers, Callers, and Drivers along with seasonal services such as snow shoveling of public sidewalks and leaf raking.
- Referrals to discounted vetted property and home maintenance services.



Thanks for your Support!

At Home In Darien is supported by hundreds of people. Are you one of our generous donors? We depend on your charitable contributions to serve Darien's senior citizens. We are a private, tax-exempt, non-profit 501(c) 3 organization.

Please send your gift today to:

At Home In Darien
2 Renshaw Road, Darien, CT 06820

THANK YOU!

Please remember **At Home In Darien** in your will or trust!

Snow Shoveling Volunteers

After a nearly snow-less winter last year, Darien residents have already been met with a few separate storms early in 2024. Shoveling snow is rarely fun and can often be challenging but there is help for Darien seniors. **At Home In Darien** continues to provide FREE snow shoveling for public sidewalks for any Darien resident aged 60 or over. As winter weather has blanketed the streets, our volunteers have once again stepped up to make a difference. The dedication of these volunteers does not go unnoticed and we would like to thank the following individuals for their commitment to our organization and, more importantly, to the seniors that we collectively support

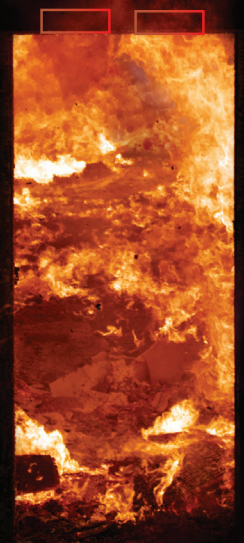


Thomas Aponte	Andrew Li	Lucas Meier	Declan Shwetzier
Eric Bellingham	Ryan Lombardy	Dalton Moss	Nate Smith
Jason Bellingham	Ethan Lublin	Shawn Rideout	Liam Tomaszewski
Luke Halvorsen	Andrew Mastellone	Drew Sharron	Luke Zerbe

If you are a senior and would like to have your public sidewalk shoveled, please call us at (203) 655-2227 and we will add you to our list.

Fire Prevention Tips: Lithium-Ion Batteries

Lithium-ion batteries have become more prevalent and supply power to a growing list of important items like laptops, smart phones, smoke alarms and now even automobiles. Unfortunately, if not used properly, the batteries can catch on fire or even explode. Some tips to keep in mind to help prevent this from happening:



- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Only use batteries designed for the device and only use charging cords that come with the device
- Do not charge a device under your pillow, on your bed, or on a couch
- Do not keep charging the device once fully charged
- Keep batteries at room temperature and away from anything that is flammable
- If possible and do not charge at temperatures below 32 degrees F or above 105 degrees F

If for any reason you notice any odor, change in color, change in shape, leaking, or too much heat, then stop using the battery immediately and move the device away from anything flammable and call 9-1-1. You may also call the **Darien Fire Marshall's Office** at (203) 656-7345 for more information regarding lithium-ion batteries or for any other fire safety tips. The Fire Marshall's Office, led by Fire Marshall Bob Buch, is responsible for enforcing Connecticut state laws and represents the Darien, Noroton, and Noroton Heights fire departments.