

Homesharing

<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/evanston/lifestyles/currents/625604,on-homeshare-110107-s1.article>

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By [STEPHANIE FOSNIGHT](#) Staff Writer

After years of apartment living, in 1995 Bonnie Jackson became the proud owner of a near-perfect north Evanston home.

"I loved everything about the house and neighborhood," said Jackson, who bought her house after a divorce. "It had the right sunny southern exposure and a garden that wasn't too big or too small and, for the first time, I had painted my house all of the colors I wanted."

But six years later tragedy struck--within one week Jackson was laid off and diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

Selling the house seemed imminent. But Jackson learned of the Homesharing program at the Interfaith Housing Center and now she rents two of her rooms to carefully screened renters. Her roommates help pay the mortgage and also contribute to a sense of community.

"I have a dog but he doesn't talk, so it's nice to come home to a person who can actually say hello," said Jackson, who has a slow-progressing form of Parkinson's and now works part-time. "It's been a wonderful program for me."

The homesharing program has been quietly making matches in the northern suburbs for 20 years. The program's main goal is to allow senior citizens to age in place despite fixed incomes, rising property taxes and health challenges, said coordinator Jackie Grossman.

A renter pays between \$450 and \$600 per month for a room and access to most of the house. If the homeowner has special needs, the renter may help in other ways like running errands or making dinner in exchange for lower rent, and all such arrangements are written into a homesharing contract.

"A senior is able to stay at home and it also gives affordable housing to a working person," Grossman said. "Rental fees have skyrocketed and there are fewer rentals available because of condo conversions."

The service is also ideal for homeowners like Jackson, those who've suffered life transitions that would otherwise prevent them from keeping their homes. Grossman oversees all of the homesharing matches and said the rigorous screening process helps ensure safe and companionable living situations.

"We find scam artists are just not interested in having an agency looking over their shoulders," said Grossman.

Right now she's searching for more seniors interested in providing rooms, so Grossman has been touting homesharing benefits to Baby Boomers who find themselves caring for elderly parents.

Bonnie Jackson doesn't need any assistance from her renters yet, although she knows someday she might require help as her disease progresses. For now, though, she's just happy to make the mortgage and have some companionship.

"It's wonderful to meet people with different backgrounds," Jackson said. "We don't necessarily spend hours talking, but you get to know people over time."

Jackson's tenants have included academics from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Italy, Yemen, Russia and Singapore, as well as a middle-aged woman who moved in for a few months while separated from her husband and an older woman who was waiting for a spot in a retirement home to open up.

Kai Kang moved into Jackson's house in June. The Chinese man works in Chicago but travels a lot, and says a room at Jackson's house definitely beats staying in a hotel or temporary housing.

"I like staying with people and not being alone," said Kang, who also enjoys chatting with neighbors and being part of the local community. "I want to live in a house so I can better understand American culture."



Kai Kang, who is from China but is spending a few years working in Chicago, hangs out on the porch with Bonnie Jackson, his landlord and friend. Kang is a carefully screened renter who lodges in one of Jackson's guest rooms, enabling Jackson to pay her mortgage. The two were matched through the Homesharing program of the Interfaith Housing Center. - Tina (Jean Wagner/For Pioneer Press)

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How house sharing works

http://www.pioneerlocal.com/evanston/lifestyles/home_design/625606,on-homeshare-110107-s2.article

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Homesharing is a free program of the Interfaith Housing Center matches home seekers and providers

Their providers include senior citizens, divorced men and women and those who are disabled living in the following communities: Evanston, Lincolnwood, Skokie, Morton Grove, Niles, Park Ridge, Glenview, Wilmette, Kenilworth, Winnetka, Glencoe, Highland Park, Northfield, Northbrook, Deerfield and Highwood.

Home providers offer one or two furnished bedrooms, a shared or private bathroom, shared kitchen facilities and use of most common areas within the house. The owners set the house rules that are written into the homesharing contract.

Home sharers, who may come from many north suburban communities and even other countries, pay \$450 to \$600 a month, as well as for their own phone, Internet and food and agree to a month-to-month homesharing contract.

Coordinator Jackie Grossman carefully screens both renter and homeowners and works hard to put compatible people together.

"Some people just want rent. They do not want a friend," Grossman said. "Some people are looking for companionship and somebody who shares mutual interests."

When making matches, Grossman carefully examines details, like what both parties watch on television, what their hours are, how clean they both are, how they feel about drinking and entertaining friends.

"When I feel like two people could really fit, then I set up a match meeting," she said. "They can take as long as they want to decide whether they want to live together."

Grossman also mediates any conflicts that arise during the partnership and makes adjustments as the needs arise. A senior, for example, might suffer a minor stroke and suddenly require more assistance than the renter can give.

Evanston homeowner Bonnie Jackson said most of the many renters she's been matched with over the years have been just right for her living situation.

"We each do our own thing but we are compatible and interested in each other," she said. "It isn't exactly a family, but it certainly is a gathering of friends."

For more information, call (847) 501-5732 or visit www.interfaithhousingcenter.org.

--Stephanie Fosnight

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