

| HEALTH CARE HEROES |



JANET ADAMS | BUSINESS FIRST

Upper Arlington Fire Capt. Lyn Nofziger, left, administrative assistant Tammy Kirkpatrick and InCare coordinator Sharon Simons work together to help seniors continue to live in their homes.

| INNOVATOR |

Honoree

Stay UA

For some, nothing says security like roaring fire engines and firefighters in full gear. Senior citizens too often turn to 911 and the fire department when they are feeling out of sorts, ill or isolated.

And that is a problem.

Few understand this better than Terry Allton, vice president of InCare, which offers skilled home care to elderly residents so they can live at home. When a senior has a non-critical issue, they do not often think to call a social-service agency, she said.

In 2009, representatives from the city of Upper Arlington and National Church Residences, InCare's parent, created Services to Age in Your Upper Arlington, also known as STAY UA. The idea is to help residents remain in their homes for as long as possible, connect elderly and disabled residents with in-home services and save the city money, said Patrick Higgins, spokesman for National Church Residences, which provided \$30,000 to fund the program for a year.

Upper Arlington has more elderly citizens per capita than Miami, Allton said. According to Census 2000 data, nearly one-third of Upper Arlington's population is older than 55. City officials are expecting Census 2010 data to reveal an even larger senior population, said Emma Speight, Upper Arlington deputy city manager.

STAY UA is designed to show seniors that the fire department is not their only link to the outside world. Services include in-home skilled nursing care, prescription assistance, meal programs, transportation, counseling, adult day-care, hospice, home-safety, financial planning, and social networking.

"We had been told by firemen for years that they wished they had one of our service coordinators on staff," Allton said.

Now, a service coordinator rides with firemen responding to 911 calls that

involve senior citizens. Once on the scene, the service coordinator can refer the resident to the appropriate service agency.

It's an issue of trust, Allton said.

"Seniors trust firemen. They don't know what a service coordinator does, so they are not likely to trust her or take her advice. But when the service coordinator is riding along with the fire department dressed in a fire-department uniform and wearing a badge, they are going to trust her," Allton said.

Six months prior to the start of the program, Upper Arlington residents dialed 911 more than 260 times.

During the first 10 months of the coordinator's intervention, the number dropped to eight and the service coordinator logged 184 referrals to social-service agencies on behalf of Upper Arlington seniors.

Allton said the program keeps service agencies on the same page. It has also helped the fire division, said Lyn Nofziger, fire captain in Upper Arlington's training and EMS office.

Higgins said the program is a local response to a national health-care problem. It responds to individual needs by connecting health care, social services, long-term care and first responders.

Linda Mauer, director of the Office of Geriatrics and Gerontology at Ohio State University Medical Center, said the program protects the health of seniors because it cuts down on unnecessary trips to the hospital, which can put older adults at risk.

Allton said the program has been so successful that another was started in Chillicothe.

"Several fire departments have called us with an interest in the program," she said.

- JILL MCCULLOUGH is a freelance writer