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New Local Group Supports Aging in Place
Neighborhood Connections Helps Worcester Seniors
Remain Independent in Their Homes

Worcester, MA (March 13, 2009) - Neighborhood Connections, an innovative program that will help residents of Worcester's West Side fulfill their desire to remain living in the familiar surroundings of their homes and neighborhoods, will begin recruiting members at its kickoff event on March 20.

A program of JFS Worcester, Neighborhood Connections will sponsor a workshop entitled "Conserving Your Money NOW!" from 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. at Blessed Sacrament's Phelan Center, 551 Pleasant St., Worcester. Neighborhood Connections is part of a growing movement to make neighborhoods comfortable places to age by connecting members with community resources to address their changing needs as they grow older. The program links members with the services, programs and activities that help keep them healthy and socially connected.

Differing from traditional senior housing, Neighborhood Connections is a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) and the first in Central Massachusetts. It promotes intergenerational neighborhoods where seniors co-exist with young families and single-person households. According to AARP surveys, most American older adults do not want to leave their familiar surroundings, with 89% of those polled reporting a desire to stay in their current residence for as long as possible.

"After two years of researching, careful planning, and determining the needs of the West Side, it feels great that Neighborhood Connections is ready to start a needed program that helps seniors do what they desire most: to age in their current homes and stay connected to their community," said Jordan Robbins, chair of the Neighborhood Connections steering committee. "We couldn't have done this without the financial help of several important local institutions and we are very grateful to them." Neighborhood Connections will begin offering services in early May.

For an annual membership fee, Neighborhood Connections provides access to trustworthy, prescreened vendors and services – for example, plumbers, landscapers, computer technicians and massage therapists. Help is just a phone call away: members can call the program with questions as varied as "how do I rearrange my house to prevent the risk of falling?" to "what are the transportation options for getting from

point A to point B?” It will also utilize a network of volunteers to do things like escorting a member to a doctor’s appointment or checking in on a homebound senior.

Neighborhood Connections also promotes a healthy lifestyle for seniors that keeps them engaged socially. It will sponsor monthly programs on the West Side on cultural topics as well as important issues such as financial planning and navigating the health insurance maze. The program will work hand in hand with organizations like the Worcester Senior Center, the Jewish Community Center and Elder Services of Worcester Area. Neighborhood Connections is non-sectarian.

“In this tough economy, the need for a program like Neighborhood Connections is greater than ever,” said Laurel Blair, director of the program. “Seniors need to figure out how to spend their money wisely, and this is one of the many things that Neighborhood Connections can help with, for instance, connecting them with a fuel assistance program or negotiating group discounts on behalf of members.”

Neighborhood Connections traces its roots to Sam Gordon, a beloved West Side resident who teamed up with Jewish Family Service Worcester (JFS Worcester) in order to fulfill his vision of a community of neighbors aging together safely and with dignity. Greater Worcester Community Foundation recognized the need, and based on the reputation of JFS Worcester provided consultants to create a business plan and eventually awarded a five-year grant. Sam passed away in 2007 and sadly, was not able to see his vision come to fruition.

“Neighborhood Connections is very grateful for the support of Fairlawn Foundation, Jewish Federation of Central Mass., Central Mass. Agency on Aging and Weinberg Foundation and individual donors,” said Blair. “This has been a tremendously collaborative effort and we are indebted to everyone who has helped make this a reality.”

For more information about Neighborhood Connections and to RSVP the March 20 event, contact Laurel Blair or Kim Hall at 508-438-0964 or lblair@neighborhoodconnect.org.