



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Senior Programs Go Remote

Putnam Office for Senior Resources Gets Innovative

BREWSTER, NY— Seniors have been singled out as “vulnerable” since the COVID-19 outbreak first began. The physical health of older Americans necessarily became a priority, but as the benefits of staying at home are obvious, so are the troubling social and emotional effects of isolation. Every May, the national Administration for Community Living brings into the spotlight the observance of Older Americans Month. The theme for 2020 is "Make Your Mark," paying tribute to the countless contributions seniors have made in their communities, and invites communities, in turn, to pay it forward by supporting the health and well being of the older generation.

“The connections created by our senior programs are truly a bright spot during this difficult time. We know our seniors are anxiously waiting to be able to reconnect in person at their local centers. The staff at our Office for Senior Resources have designed and implemented wonderful ways to serve the community. From fresh, home-delivered meals to connecting seniors with pen-pal groups in their local towns, we are supporting our seniors in ways we may never have imagined before,” says Putnam County Executive, MaryEllen Odell.

“Many of us are counting down the days until we will again be able to visit with the seniors in our lives,” says Michael Cunningham, Director of Putnam County’s Office for Senior Resources (OSR). “The reality is, we aren’t sure yet when our doors will safely reopen— but that uncertainty drove us to create

and implement innovative program offerings for all Putnam seniors using both voice and video conference calling tools.”

All seniors in Putnam, whether or not they have previously participated in a senior center program are encouraged to call the OSR. Their staff, currently working remotely, will assist in identifying programs that suit both the callers’ needs and their interests.

“It is important to remember that social distancing does not have to mean isolation, especially for seniors. Loneliness is bad for your health, but you don’t have to face the uncertainties alone. It is our goal to support seniors and offer them various ways to connect with one another, connect with professionals and connect with their larger community all while staying safe at home,” adds Michael Cunningham.

“The response to our one-on-one wellness calls and remote group events such as ‘Coffee and Conversation,’ have been very positive,” continues Michael Cunningham. Other popular programs include: Book Club meetings, Brain Fitness Activity Groups, Zoom Social Dancing, Strength and Balance Exercise and Caregiver Support Groups. TeleBingo and other new programs are being rolled out as well.

An innovative program called robotic pet companionship is one of the many new offerings from OSR. Robotic pets look, sound and feel like real pets. This alternative form of pet therapy has been proven to enhance the well-being, sense of purpose and quality of life of individuals living with dementia. During COVID-19, these robotic pets are being utilized to address the emotional challenges that often accompany social distancing. To learn more about the programs offered visit putnamcountyny.com/OSR or call 845-808-1700.

Putnam County Office for Senior Resources is responsible for stimulating, promoting, coordinating and administering local programs and services for older Putnam County residents. In carrying out this responsibility, the Office for Senior Resources’ primary emphasis is on the development of long-term care programs and services necessary to meet the long term care needs of Putnam County’s elderly and to support informal caregivers.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services, provided directly and through collaboration, include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at www.putnamcountyny.com/coronavirus; or visit our social media sites @PutnamHealthNY on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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