YOUR PHOTOS

We Want to Share Photos from Your Neighborhood

Send your high-quality photos to VillagesPics@gmail.com or 1100 Main St., The Villages, FL 32159. Include your name, phone number and village. Don't forget to name the people in your photo.
Note: Many of these photos occurred before stay at home advisory was issued.

Sports: Jason Rowe, of the Village of Belvedere, met his favorite rider, Paige Boone, at a polo match.

Celebration: On Sept. 26, Jack and Joanne Fitzpatrick, of the Village of Springdale, celebrated their 61 years of marriage.

Longtime Villages Researcher To Direct New Program

By MACKENZIE RAETZ
Daily Sun Specialty Editor

Residents will soon have the opportunity to make their voices heard when it comes to research in the community.

Carla VandeWeerd, director of research for The Villages Health, recently added director of the new UF Clinical and Translational Science Institute research program at The Villages to her responsibilities.

Carla VandeWeerd

In the position, she will conduct focus groups to find out what older adults' health concerns and needs are, as well as the kind of research they'd like to see here, then work to bring that to the community.

"The goal is to bring the best academic minds, cutting-edge clinical trials and community health research to The Villages, and it is my job is to help to be that bridge," VandeWeerd said.

VandeWeerd has worked with The Villages on research for more than a decade. She spearheaded research efforts such as a population health survey that led to the creation of The Villages Health's patient-focused system. She also led an ongoing Brain Network Activation study to look at cognitive health in older adults. She earned the Erickson Foundation Award for Excellence in Aging Research by The American Public Health Association twice for those efforts.

In the spring, she collaborated with UF Health to bring COVID-19 testing to The Villages Polo Club, where they tested around 4,400 people.

"We are extremely excited about the expanded opportunities for community and clinical trials research that will stem from The Villages's partnership with the University of Florida," said Dr. Elliot Sussman, chair of The Villages Health, in a UF Health press release. "The Villages represents a very unique opportunity to conduct aging research, and we are confident that the work done here will not only benefit the Villagers who live in our community, but it will lead to improvements in scientific understanding and clinical practice."

VandeWeerd said they will soon open a research space next to UF Health The Villages Hospital. Though research will take place around the community, that will be home base for the research. Multiple projects are on the horizon for the program, including getting involved with ACTIV-4, a study investigating blood thinners affects on COVID-19.

She will also participate in a study looking at whether the use of statins can reduce dementia risk; a study testing if a certain food supplement can help reduce the risk of B12 deficiency; and a study looking at technology that can monitor the health and welfare of seniors in the home.

VandeWeerd said that's just the beginning, and she and her team plan to be responsive to community feedback and focus groups.

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