Livable Communities of the Future
Alexis Abramson, PhD

As our society moves towards more sustainable living practices, one trend that will benefit people as they age is the increased availability of livable communities where convenience and socializing are built-in luxuries. Hopefully, as we continue to upgrade our neighborhoods they will be universally to be more aesthetically pleasing and accessible for all. Features such as safer, barrier-free buildings, parks and streets will make neighborhoods easy to navigate for both an 80-something senior with a walker and a 20-something mom pushing a stroller!

"While some streets do provide a safe pedestrian environment, it may not be a pleasant one; the absence of benches, scarce landscaping, and storefronts set back from the sidewalk do little to encourage walking" writes the advocacy group Smart Growth America. Well-planned livable communities, for all intents and purposes, allow one the benefit of living in a city without the stress of high-crime rates, run down buildings, streets without sufficient lighting, etc.

Furthermore, successful livable communities have organized activities to promote intergenerational interactions, such as reading programs where older adults are paired with young people through the public library system. Without a doubt, closer-knit communities also offer more spontaneous moments to enjoy activities such as musical performances, farmers markets with local produce and lively streets lined with outdoor dining choices.

One thing to remember is that with increased socialization and independence comes the need to make sure you surround yourself with products and services that allow for constant *personal* independence. A folding cane is good to keep with you in case you feel the need for a bit of extra assistance while walking the streets of the neighborhood. Purchasing an all-in-one telephone and safety device such as the Vtech CareLine™ system can help make sure you communicate and stay connected with your family members. Also, a full page magnifying reader to assist you as you tackle the morning paper can be quite helpful in reading small print size. These are all great devices to add to the enjoyment of a livable environment.

As our population continues to age, better access to healthcare is also a key feature offered in this type of living. If older adults can easily get to their medical providers by themselves, they will feel empowered by not having to continually rely on others for routine health matters. Also, with respect to health, there is no debate that

livable (and walk-able) communities make it easier to integrate exercise into daily living. Yoga and meditation in the park, community swimming pools, and simply not getting in a car as much will do wonders for your overall physical self.

Partners for Livable Communities is a group that promotes invigorating activities with its overall central focus on basic *good living,* especially through cultural outlets. Dance, theater, writing and painting are just some of the outlets they recommend we all embrace as we age. As a part of my 30 Bonus Years™ initiative, I also highly encourage people to explore activities they didn't have a chance to take on earlier in life. I firmly believe livable communities promote a sense of engagement – clearly a critical component to fully embracing your later years.

I recently had the opportunity to be featured in a PSA supporting livable communities that was presented at the National Conference of Mayors in Washington, D.C. The goal was to showcase the importance of creating environments that are more user-friendly for all members of our society – regardless of age! In order to produce the infrastructure needed to support more livable communities, numerous task forces and initiatives have been formed. These policymakers realize that the need for livable communities is not a generational issue, it simply makes good sense for the future of America.

MetLife, in collaboration with Stanford University, recently released a study citing Livable, mentioning a wide range of bustling metropolises and university towns working toward creating age-friendly environments. The takeaway here is to choose a place where there is accessible healthcare, solid employment/retirement opportunities, cultural outlets and a strong community of engagement. As the Internet and technology have made us a more distant society, choosing to live in a sustainable, livable community enables us to connect with people face-to-face, one of the healthiest forms of interaction we can enjoy!