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# Senior couple seeks a little help, gets a lot more

VISTA — When Larry and Janell Schneider reached out to Seniors Helping Seniors, they weren't looking for more than a little help around the house. What they didn't anticipate was the friendship that would come with that help.

Their story isn't an unusual one for Kathryn Johnston, owner of Seniors Helping Seniors San Diego North County. She is a consummate matchmaker, pairing seniors who need nonmedical assistance with caregivers she carefully selects for them. As anyone who has ever been set up in any capacity knows, a successful relationship takes much more than a match that sounds good on paper.

Introducing Steve Pettersen to the Schneiders is a perfect example. Johnston spent time with the Schneiders, learning their personalities and needs. Larry was stricken with East African "Sleeping Sickness," which has left him in an electric wheelchair and his wife uses a walker. From her database of hand-selected caregivers, she chose Pettersen to bring over to meet the Schneiders.

"I liked him right away," Janell Schneider, 78, said. "He's very outgoing and friendly. He's educated and strong and confident and qualified."

Larry Schneider, 80, enjoys Pettersen's company as well, and appreciates some of his qualities



Steve Patterson, center, works for Seniors Helping Seniors. He's formed a strong bond with his clients Janell and Larry Schneider.

that you wouldn't find on any job application. "We just enjoy talking, we're always discussing things about our lives," he said. "We have man-to-man chats all the time." Both men have business backgrounds, and find that they never run out of things to talk about. Pettersen especially enjoys hearing stories about Larry Schneider's time as a Navy pi-

lot. Pettersen, 65, began working with the Schneiders in September of 2013. He heard about Seniors Helping Seniors from a fellow volunteer at Scripps Hospital Encinitas. It was a perfect fit for a man who has spent many years doing a variety of services for the community. While many of his efforts have been focused on

helping area youth, he recognizes that what he is doing now is equally important.

Pettersen helps the Schneiders with transportation to doctor appointments and trips to the grocery store and pharmacy. Their visits will also often include sharing a meal together. And it isn't just about what they do together, it's about what they talk about while they're doing it.

One recent scary experience that Larry Schneider and Pettersen shared underlined just how valuable their relationship has become. The two men set out for a routine dental appointment, which turned out to be anything but. "It turned into a fiasco," Pettersen said. "Larry had a wisdom tooth and the root had grown into the bone. He was in excruciating pain. The dentist had to call an oral surgeon. And I took Larry as fast as I could."

However, the story didn't end there. A water main break caused a delay for them as Larry Schneider's pain and bleeding increased. When they finally arrived at the surgeon's office, he didn't have the equipment necessary to help. They needed an operating room. "We rushed Larry to the ER at Tri City," Pettersen said. "I wheeled Larry in and there must have been 60 people waiting." Pettersen was able to get Larry moved to the top of the list. "We got there at 5 p.m. and his surgery was at

11:30 p.m." Pettersen said of the ordeal.

Although he is now on the mend, Larry Schneider had to spend two days in the hospital to recover. "I was so worried about him," Pettersen said. It's understandable given how close they have become.

"Steve and I are very close," Larry Schneider said. "I find him very dependable. Always on time. Upbeat and friendly and is always willing to help anything he can do for us."

Janell Schneider had more kind words to describe Pettersen. "He is just like family," she said. "We admire him."

The feeling is mutual. "These two people give me hope," Pettersen said. "Although they are homebound and a lot has been taken away from them, they deal with it in a very positive way. They remain very positive and they don't let circumstances affect their lives in a negative way. These are loyal, good people."

Seniors Helping Seniors offers a variety of services, pairing together qualified caregivers with their peers to offer companionship as well as services such as light housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation to doctor's appointments and more. To learn more, or to find out about caregiving opportunities, visit [shssandiego.com](http://shssandiego.com), call (760) 591-7474 or email [info@SHSsandiego.com](mailto:info@SHSsandiego.com).