



Vital Aging Network  
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**Dr. Bill Thomas to Speak at Vital Aging Network Forum on February 14**

Thomas is a national expert on innovative housing options for older adults

**ST.PAUL, Minn.---Feb. 1, 2006---**Dr. Bill Thomas, a Harvard Medical School alumnus, author, and nationally recognized innovator who has created several alternative housing options for older adults, will preview his new intergenerational housing concept, Eldershire, at a Vital Aging Network (VAN) free public forum on Feb. 14, 2006 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Minnesota Masonic Manor in Bloomington, Minn. For more information about the event call 612-626-5555 or visit [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu). The forum is supported by Twin Cities Public Television (tpt), Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging (MAAA), and Evercare.

Eldershire is an alternative to the traditional gated or continuing care retirement model. It is an intergenerational housing option that empowers residents to collaborate in the design and ongoing development and management of their communities. The first Eldershire community, called Avalon, is currently under development in Sherburne, N.Y. All Eldershire communities will consist of private homes grouped together with common indoor and outdoor spaces, such as walking trails, gardens and a central house that will offer shared meals, meeting spaces, recreational activities, and basic services. But what will truly set Eldershire communities apart will be their shared values, including respect for the contributions made by elders, accessible housing design, economic and environmental sustainability, commitment to life-long learning, diversity, and self-governance.

“The time is right for Eldershire,” said Jan Hively, founder of VAN and an Eldershire advisory board member. “Older adults need more housing options that foster independence and community engagement, because those factors result in better health and wellbeing for elders and tangible benefits for communities.”

Eldershire is Thomas’s third alternative housing concept for older adults. He and his wife Jude revolutionized nursing home care and culture when they created Eden Alternative in 1991. Today, more

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than 10,000 Eden Associates have been trained nation-wide and hundreds of nursing homes across the country have implemented this non-institutionalized approach to elder care that is based on resident empowerment and a respectful, nurturing culture that includes plants, children, and pets. The Green House Project, specially designed stand-alone homes with assistance for six frail elderly or disabled persons, is yet another innovative housing concept pioneered by Thomas.

“Bill’s ventures are on the cutting-edge of older adult housing,” said Kris Orluck, VAN Leadership Group chair. “We are honored that he will be presenting at our monthly forum. The principles that guide Bill’s ventures are consistent with those of the Vital Aging Network. We both want to promote self-determination, community involvement and personal enrichment for and with older adults.”

To share his innovative ideas with a wider audience, Thomas has written the highly-regarded book “What Are Old People For?: How Elders Will Save the World.” He has also appeared in several PBS specials and will be featured in the soon-to-be-released cinema verite film “Almost Home,” which was developed by tpt. The film tells the stories of residents, families, and workers in a Midwestern nursing home as they take on the personal challenges of aging, while at the same time try to transform their hospital-like institution into a true home.

VAN promotes self-determination, community involvement, and personal enrichment for and with older adults through education and advocacy. VAN was founded by Dr. Janet Hively in 2001 and is an affiliated program of the College of Continuing Education at the University of Minnesota.

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