Charity Night at the Craig’s Raises Money for Alzheimer’s Society

Villages Proposed Membership of The Forviva Group Structure

Everything You Need To Know About Universal Credit
One team that plays an important role in helping the residents of our multi-storey blocks in Stockbridge Village is the Caretaking and Cleaning Team. The team includes three on site caretakers and five cleaning staff who work closely together to make sure everything is up to the standard that residents of the five multi-storey buildings expect. The Cleaning Team ensures that the blocks are kept spotless and hold weekly meetings to discuss how any improvements can be made. The Caretaking team maintain the upkeep of the heating systems in the blocks, including the water pump systems, and also ensure that the lift systems are always functioning. Team leader Paul Jefferies, deals with administration duties including assisting Villages’ Compliance Manager with all Health and Safety checks of the buildings and the site. Paul said “Being a part of the Caretaking and Cleaning Team involves a wide variety of responsibilities, and I thoroughly enjoy my role here as our team has the opportunity to speak to residents daily and work with them to ensure that any concerns they may have are resolved. The team really do go out of their way to keep the quality of the blocks to a high standard. The Caretaking and Cleaning team are always here to help”.

Meet the Caretaking and Cleaning Team

Welcome
to our Winter edition of Our Times...

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and are enjoying the New Year. I have been fortunate to chat to many of you recently about the proposed plans to join the ‘ForViva’ Group Structure. You can read more on the opposite page but I would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have visited our consultation events over the past few weeks and put forward your comments regarding the proposal. We will keep you all updated about the proposal in your next issue.

This time of year is always a busy time for New Years resolutions and we have already seen an increase in the number of people visiting our work and job clubs ready for a new challenge this year. The clubs are a fantastic way of finding work and you can read more on page 3 about how the club has been helping people in both Fitton Hill and Stockbridge Village find work, and how they could help you too.

If you are finding it difficult to pay your rent at the moment please don’t ignore the issue, we have information on page 10 about ways our Income Management Team can help you.

I hope you all have a fantastic 2015!
Vernon Jackson, Chief Executive, Villages Housing Association

Staff News

We have welcomed several new members of staff since our last edition. Khudeza Begum has joined the Customer Services team in Fitton Hill and Laura Hemnell has joined the Customer Services team in Stockbridge Village. Paul Mills and Ron Cash have joined the Stockbridge Village Landscape team as Estate and Cleansing Workers and over at the Multi-stories Christine Costello has joined the Cleaning team.

We bid a fond farewell to two of our staff in December 2014. Cathy Casson and Barbara Jones both retired after 12 years service at Villages. Cathy joined our Stockbridge Village Office in 2002 as a receptionist and has since worked within the Customer Services Team and most recently the Income Management Team. Cathy would like to say a big thank you to all of the residents for their kind wishes upon her retirement – she will miss you all.

Barbara also joined Villages in 2002 and has been part of the cleaning team at the multis in Stockbridge Village. We are certainly going to miss them both and from everyone at Villages, enjoy your retirement and don’t miss us all too much!

Finally, we would like to congratulate Fitton Hill Customer Services Officer Rebecca Hester on the arrival of her beautiful baby son who was born in November last year.

Are you following Villages on Facebook and twitter? You can keep up to date with everything going on in Stockbridge Village and Fitton Hill from job opportunities to events... Don't delay follow us today!

/villageshousing
@villageshousing
Earlier this month Villages’ Chief Executive Vernon Jackson wrote to you to inform you of some exciting plans for the New Year and to seek your views on the proposal to join the ForViva Group Limited (ForViva) which currently includes City West Housing Trust Limited (City West).

The proposal is to expand the existing ForViva group structure with ForViva the parent and City West and Villages subsidiary groups. Villages Community would remain a subsidiary of Villages.

The Boards of Villages and Villages Community believe that joining the ForViva Group will help Villages and Villages Community not only to continue but also improve the services they offer to their residents by, for example, improving development opportunities within Stockbridge Village and Fitton Hill. However, the Board of Villages wants to know your views before it reaches a final decision.

You can still send your views to us by completing the form sent to you by post and returning it in the prepaid envelope enclosed, by visiting the Villages’ office or by completing the online form at www.villages.org.uk/proposed-membership-of-the-forviva-group.

We look forward to hearing your views on this exciting proposal, and will provide an update about the proposal in the Spring edition of Our Times.

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases

Stop germs spreading

North West In Bloom Coming Soon

It might still be cold outside but Spring is on its way and when it arrives we will once again start our preparations for this year’s estate entries into North West in Bloom. If you have an idea for any spaces you think we should use for the competition or if you would like to volunteer and help with the competition please let us know by Friday 27th February.

Fitton Hill residents please contact Lisa Fowles on 0161 633 4060 or email lisa.fowles@villages.org.uk

Stockbridge Village residents please contact Barbara Murray on 0151 949 5021 or email Barbara.murray@villages.org.uk
It’s a New Year and what better time to start looking for a new job. If you don’t know where to start then don’t panic or give up, we hold weekly job and work clubs in both Fitton Hill and Stockbridge Village to help you with your search. The clubs are open to anyone who would like to improve their career prospects and offers help and advice for people who are looking for work by offering help and support with writing and improving their CV, preparing for an interview along with how to search for jobs and general advice on careers and opportunities.

**Fitton Hill**
Mondays 1 - 3pm Villages Community Shop
Thursdays 10am - 12noon Villages Community Shop

For more information contact Lisa Fowles on 0161 633 4060 or like the Fitton Hill Work Club Facebook Page www.facebook.com/fittonhillworkclub

**Stockbridge Village**
Mondays 2 - 4pm The Village HUB

You can also access Job Search at the Village HUB Mondays and Wednesdays 10am - 4pm.

For more information contact Barbara Murray on 0151 949 5021 or like the Stockbridge Village Job Club Facebook Page www.facebook.com/stockbridgevillagejobclub

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**Job Club a Life Line for Margie**

Stockbridge Village resident Margie attended the Job Club and is now celebrating after being offered a new job.

“Joining the Job Club for me was a life line. I have always been frustrated trying to understand computers and having no experience with them I panicked on my first day at the club. I really shouldn’t have, as my tutor, was very calm and understanding, as were the rest of the team, Barbara, John, Lorraine and Liz. By the end of my first day my confidence had really improved and I’d even set up an email. It wasn’t long before I began to understand a computer. I really felt very comfortable at the club, there’s no pressure and I now have IT skills, allowing me to use email and search for jobs online by myself.

The team have helped me so much; they are so friendly and supportive towards people like me who need help. It’s reassuring to have people who care and are so helpful. The Stockbridge Village Job club really does help build your confidence, and being able to use their equipment to learn, especially when you don’t own a computer and have no skills is great.

It really has been a life line and I’m now looking forward to starting my new job – I couldn’t thank the team enough for all of their help.”

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Fed up of searching for a job? Need some help with your CV and application forms? Would you like some help with interview skills but don’t have time to visit the work or job club?

Then register now for ‘My Work Search’, the website that brings thousands of jobs to you.

Register with Villages for free by visiting www.villages.org.uk/myworksearch

Or call your local office directly: Stockbridge Village 0151 480 1313 • Fitton Hill 0161 633 4060

After you have been registered you will receive an email from My Work Search with a link to create your username and password. You can then use the site and find your dream job.

If you need an email address to register for myworksearch drop into the Stockbridge Village HUB Mondays and Wednesdays or the Fitton Hill Community shop Mondays and Thursdays and we will be happy to get you started.
Craig’s Community Centre Committee Raise £306 for Alzheimer’s Society

The Craig’s Community Centre Committee held a Charity event in November to raise money for Villages annual charity the Alzheimer’s Society. The event was a resounding success with tickets selling out immediately.

Chair of The Craig’s Community Centre Committee Peggy McGlory said “We had a fantastic night, the entertainment was great and we all thoroughly enjoyed it. It’s great to be supporting such a wonderful charity and on behalf of the Committee I am delighted to say that we raised £306 on the night.”

Well done to everyone who organised and attended the event.

Funds raised by Villages throughout the year will be presented to the charity in May. If you would like to join the committee please contact Bernie Wileman on 0151 480 7994.

Dementia Friends

As The Alzheimer’s Society is the annual supported charity of Villages this year, we not only want to raise money for the cause but are working hard to promote awareness about the illness whenever we can.

People who suffer from the illness are often happier if they can live independently in their own homes for longer. Dementia friendly communities are villages, towns and cities where more people understand dementia, there is less fear and avoidance, and people living with dementia are included and supported to live independently for longer.

The Dementia Friends initiative is helping to turn communities across England into dementia friendly communities and we want to make our communities dementia friendly. One way we are doing this in Fitton Hill is by holding Dementia Friends Sessions. Dementia Friends Sessions will be taking place at Hilltop Surgery on the following dates:

Thursday 19th February 2015 @ 2.00pm (children session)
Thursday 5th March 2015 @ 2.00pm

To book your place please contact Dana Murphy on 0161 633 4060.

Colour up North

We have fantastic news for both Merseyside and Greater Manchester. Colour Up North - A Tale of Two Cities has won £120,000 worth of wildflower seeds. The campaign has been supported by both the Stockbridge Village and Fitton Hill North West in Bloom initiatives. Richard Scott, Landlife Senior Project Manager, said: “Our vision is to deliver a unique cultural landmark project in the North West, turning people’s heads and hearts. Linked to our creative conservation action through the National Wildflower Centre, A Tale of Two Cities: Liverpool and Manchester, will explore the vivid stories of these historically divided cities, their distinctiveness and shared culture.”

Supported by the Big Lottery Fund and led by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Grow Wild inspires communities, friends, neighbours and individuals across the UK to come together to transform local spaces, by sowing, growing and enjoying native wild flowers.
Cook Safely

More fires and fire injuries are caused in the kitchen than anywhere else in the home. Around 60% of accidental fires in the home start in the kitchen. Taking a few simple measures can make all the difference.

- Do not leave children in the kitchen alone when food is cooking on the hob. Keep matches and saucepan handles out of their reach to keep them safe.
- Make sure saucepan handles don’t stick out – so they don’t get knocked off the stove.
- Take care if you’re wearing loose clothing – this can easily catch fire.
- Keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob.
- Double check the cooker is off when you’ve finished cooking.
- Take care if you need to leave the kitchen whilst cooking, take pans off the heat or turn them down to avoid risk.
- People are also urged not to cook when tired or after consuming alcohol.
- Take care when cooking with hot oil – it sets alight easily.
- Make sure food is dry before putting it in hot oil so it doesn’t splash.
- If the oil starts to smoke – it’s too hot. Turn off the heat and leave it to cool.
- Use a thermostat controlled electric deep fat fryer rather than a chip pan as they won’t overheat.
- Keep the oven, hob and grill clean and in good working order. A build-up of fat and grease can cause a fire.
- Check toasters are clean and placed away from curtains, blinds and kitchen rolls.

Smoke alarms

A working smoke alarm can save a life. It can buy someone valuable seconds to escape from a property in the event of a fire. Have a smoke alarm fitted on each floor of the home and remember to test your smoke alarm every week.
Are You Worried About Debt?

After the expense of Christmas, this time of year can be a struggle for many people. Worrying about paying bills and debt problems keeps many of us awake at night and in some cases people wait up to a year or more before getting help. StepChange Debt Charity can help. Their expert advice is FREE confidential, impartial and tailored to everyone’s individual circumstances.

StepChange Debt Remedy online advice tool takes just 20 minutes to complete and will give you a debt solution tailored to your circumstances. **It’s anonymous and free of charge.**

Alternatively, you can call their debt helpline and speak to one of their advisors. They will ask for information and advise you on the best way to deal with your debts. If necessary, they will also arrange a follow-up phone appointment at a time that suits you.

**What do I need to have ready?**

It’s useful to have the following details to hand:

- Details of all your debts.
- Your income including any benefits or pensions.
- Your household bills for items such as food and utilities, with details of any missed payments.
- Approximate values of assets like your car.

**Freephone: 0800 138 1111 Web: www.stepchange.org**

Remember you’re not alone; there are people who are there to help you. You will feel a lot better after you deal with the problem. There are other charities including the Citizens Advice Bureau and National Debtline that also offer free debt advice and can help you to set up free debt management plans, and come up with other ways out of debt. **There is no reason to pay a company for this service.**

**Citizens Advice Bureau**

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Knowsley Citizens Advice Bureau holds drop in sessions on Tuesday 10am - 12pm and Thursdays 1pm - 3pm at the Villages Office.

Oldham Citizens Advice Bureau holds a drop in session on Fridays at Medlock Vale Children’s Centre 9.30am - 12.30pm.

**National Debtline**

[www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org)

0808 808 4000

(Monday - Friday, 9am - 9pm; Saturday 9.30am - 1pm).

If you are a Knowsley resident and would like advice about any of this please contact the Tenants Extra Support Scheme (TESS) on 0151 480 1313. Oldham residents please contact your local Village’s office and speak to a member of the Income Management Team.
It’s a New Year so let’s get saving with the Credit Union

In November we attended the launch of the Fitton Hill Credit Union which is now open at the Villages Office. The new location provides a local collection point for Fitton Hill residents to be able to open a new credit union account which offers you access to all of the services including saving facilities and low cost loans.

The first customer to open a Credit Union account at the Fitton Hill branch was Andrew Jordan who had heard about the launch in the last edition of Our Times, he said “I’m really happy to be able to open a Credit Union account here in Fitton Hill. I visit the Villages office regularly and thought it was a great idea to be able to open a savings account here as it will encourage me to come and pay into it regularly. When I had an account at the Oldham town Centre branch I would always get sidetracked with other things to do when in town, but being here is fantastic.”

You can pick up a Credit Union application form from the Fitton Hill office.

Stockbridge Village residents can still access all of the Credit Unions offerings at the Huyton and Page Moss branch. There is also a drop in session each Monday 9.30am - 11.30am at Stockbridge Village Library.

Save Now for CHRISTMAS 2015, open a credit union account and make regular weekly payments of £2 per week and you will have over £100 towards your Christmas Fund. You can also use these savings to borrow up to two times the amount you have saved, and pay it back in 2016 at a lower interest rate than all the doors step lenders.

A New Lease of Life for Our Homes

Residents of Roughsedge House and Brandearth House in Stockbridge Village are enjoying warmer homes thanks to the recent refurbishment project.

Work began on the extensive project in the Autumn to nearly 50 homes as part of Stockbridge Village’s £500,000 refurbishment project which has included the replacement of windows and external doors, replacement of warm air units with ‘A Efficiency’ gas heating systems, re-wiring along with some kitchen and bathroom suite replacements. External and internal painting of communal areas also took place and the old timber cladding was replaced with new PVC cladding, making the buildings warmer and visually appealing.

Residents Marie Hammond, 75, and her mother Emily Jones, 97, went along to the end of project Christmas Party organised by one of the contractors FT Finley and said the work had made a big difference. Marie said: “They’ve re-wired the place and put new windows in too, so it’s great now.” Emily added: “I’m made up with what they’ve done. It’s nice and warm now and they kept it spotless while they worked. I couldn’t say a bad word about the workers.”

Lyn Kelly, Supporting People Manager said: “Despite the disruption during the works, the residents have been really supportive of everything the contractors have carried out, and we would like to thank them for that. Each home now has an improved heating system along with new windows and doors, and they look fantastic.”
We Need You!

Are you interested in properties? Fancy learning some new skills? Then becoming a Tenant Inspector may be the role for you.

What are Tenant Inspectors?
Before we re-let a property we carry out a list of requirements to ensure the property is safe and in an acceptable standard for the next tenant. Tenant Inspectors inspect the property with a checklist to ensure that it meets the void re-let standard.

What do I need to do?
We will provide training for the role and ensure that you are supported throughout. The work you carry out will help us ensure that future tenants move into a property with excellent standards.

What’s in it for me?
You’ll get a range of free optional training, which will boost your CV and give you transferable job skills. Training we offer includes:

• How to carry out an inspection
• Basic I.T. skills
• Presentation skills
• Report writing skills
• Data protection training
• Value for money training

We believe that you as a resident will bring a homely eye to ensuring that new homes are ready for their next occupant. If you would like more information about becoming a Tenant Inspector please contact

**Fitton Hill Residents:**
Lisa Fowles Community Development Officer
0161 622 6894

**Stockbridge Village Residents:**
Barbara Murray Community Development Officer
0151 949 5093

Do You Have a Suggestion?

We would love to hear from you if you have an idea or suggestion about how Villages can improve any of its services.

Simply pick up a suggestion form from your local villages office, complete the form and return it to us using the post box there. Alternatively, you can make a suggestion by visiting: [www.villages.org.uk](http://www.villages.org.uk).

We will review your suggestions each week, and if your suggestion helps us to save money or improve a service that we deliver you will be entered into a prize draw to win £100.

Stockbridge Village Estate Management Committee

Your opinion matters to us and this is your chance to have a real say on how Villages day-to-day services are provided; discuss local issues and make decisions about local community grants. You do not need any experience as training will be provided. Your estate and Villages needs YOU for your local knowledge, your enthusiasm and commitment to the community.

We currently have two tenant member vacancies on the Stockbridge Village Estate Management Committee and applications are open now for tenants to apply. If you would like to have an informal chat about the role you can contact Bernie McConnell, Villages Head of Housing Services on 0151 480 1313 or 07834 126 660 if you would prefer to have a friendly chat to an existing member of the Committee we can arrange this for you. Please contact us by Friday 20th February.
Universal Credit – What You Need To Know

Universal Credit is a new benefit for people of working age. It will replace the following six benefits/tax credits:

- Housing Benefit
- Income based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit

If you are currently in receipt of these benefits you will be informed as to when you will move onto Universal Credit but new applicants will be in receipt of Universal Credit immediately. If you are now receiving Universal Credit or if you are about to make a claim, come and see us and we can assist you in making your claim and give you any advice or support you may need.

Stockbridge Village: 0151 949 5093 • Fitton Hill 0161 633 4060

How Do We Expect You To Manage Your Rent Account?

The best way to ease your worry about paying your rent is to pay weekly or monthly in advance. If you aren’t already paying your rent in advance why not pay £1 or £2 or whatever you can afford more each time you pay, and before you realise it, your account will be in credit. Remember you can also contact us to set up an affordable arrangement to build up a credit or to reduce arrears.

Ways to pay your rent:
- By Direct Debit on any chosen date
- In Person at your local Villages Office
- Online at www.allpay.net
- Via All Pay 24 Hour payment Line 0844 557 8321
- By text. You do need to register first at www.allpayments.net/textpay
- Through the All Pay App: allpay.net/allpay-payment-app
- At any Pay Point Centre using your tenancy card

In order to improve our service delivery, from February; when you contact the Villages Offices you will notice that before we deal with your enquiry we will review your details to ensure that there is a valid gas safety check and we will arrange an appointment if a service is required on your property. If necessary, we will also discuss your rent account with you to ensure that your payments are up to date. If you are having any difficulties paying your rent, we can help you - please contact the Income Management Team Stockbridge Village 0151 949 5093 / Fitton Hill 0161 633 4060 or visit us at the office to discuss your rent account further.

Fitton Hill residents please note that if you have to claim housing benefit or have a change in circumstances you will need to complete this request online at www.oldham.gov.uk/benefits or call into the Villages office and we can assist you.
Are You Finding it Difficult to Make Your Rent Payments? We can help...

If you are finding it hard to pay your rent, it can be distressing, but don’t ignore the situation. If you don’t take action to deal with the arrears quickly, you could end up in court incurring extra costs and ultimately losing your home.

If you are struggling to pay your rent don’t ignore it, come and speak to the Income Management Team about your options. We can set up an affordable repayment plan to clear your account balance which will avoid you incurring extra legal costs. It will cost you £250 if we have to take you to court and ultimately it could result in you losing your home. Legal action can be avoided if you make an arrangement and stick to it.

The team can also offer advice and support with benefit claims, Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. If you are experiencing any problems paying your rent you can contact the Income Management team in Stockbridge Village on 0151 949 5093 or Fitton Hill on 0161 633 4060. Remember we are here to help.

We are also holding weekly drop in sessions in Stockbridge Village for people who would like to discuss their rent account with our Income Management Team:

- **11th February 2015**, 10am - 12noon at Whincraig Glass Office
- **18th February 2015**, 2 - 3pm at Denecliff Glass Office
- **25th February 2015**, 10am - 12noon at Whincraig Glass Office
- **4th March 2015**, 2 - 3pm at Denecliff Glass Office
- **11th March 2015**, 10am - 12noon at Whincraig Glass Office
- **18th March 2015**, 2 - 3pm at Denecliff Glass Office
- **25th March 2015**, 10am - 12noon at Whincraig Glass Office

**Former Tenant Arrears**

Former tenant arrears are monies owed in unpaid rent when you have moved from one property to another. Arrears can be caused by:

- late payments
- missed payments
- part payments

You are responsible for your rent, even if it is for a previous property or if you are, or were on housing benefit. It’s up to you to ensure that the debt is cleared. If you leave us owing money we will still contact you to recover the debt. If you leave us and don’t give us a forwarding address we will contact your next of kin or friends and relatives to try to find you. Please remember that you are required to give us 4 weeks notice when you end your tenancy, you will be charged for this period even if you leave earlier.

If we can’t find you we will instruct a debt collection agency to assist us.

Leaving us whilst you have rent arrears may prevent you in the future from applying for another property with Villages or another landlord, and you will have to clear previous debts before we or any other landlord consider your application.

It is important that we collect rent arrears owed to us because if we don’t collect former tenant debts it gives Villages less money to spend on improving your homes and communities.

If you know a tenant has left us without a forwarding address you can make us aware of this anonymously.
The Green Flag Award for Little Wood, Boodecroft Doorstep Green and Fluker’s Brook Wood represents over 15 years of community effort and partnership working to improve the quality of life of Stockbridge Village residents through improvement of this historic natural green space. Little Woods of Stockbridge Association and the Stockbridge Junior Rangers have been cornerstones to transforming this exceptional woodland into a community resource since they started in 2000 and the Friends of Stockbridge Village responded to community calls for angling facilities to make an active fishing pond out of something that was nothing more than a rubbish dump in years gone by. In November the group welcomed the arrival of fish to the pond, the transformation of what was an overgrown fly-tipping haven into an active angling pond for the community is an amazing achievement of the Friends of Stockbridge Village. The group are already utilising this fantastic resource for local residents, especially young people, and will be a key support in helping to keep it well maintained and tidy to sustain benefits to the community for years to come. It is wonderful to see the level of community ownership that this pond is now benefiting from. Phil Hurst Green Space Development Officer at Knowsley Council said “We are indebted to these volunteers for the contribution that they have made to their community. We wish to thank Cory Environmental Trust in Britain and the Forestry Commission for their funding to support this project.”

Roughsedge Remembers

The Brandearth, Roughesedge and Spruce Grove Committee organised a wonderful afternoon on Remembrance Day to commemorate the World War One centenary. The event was a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by so many, along with remembering the spirit of the nation during the two World Wars. With sing-a-longs and a wonderful performance from the children from St. Alberts RC Primary School. The residents really enjoyed the event, and the children were able to chat to them and hear all about their own experiences of the second world war. The event allowed one generation to link to the next.
The Stockbridge Village Ramblers first walk of 2015 was a 9 mile walk at Billinge Hill and although cold was a gloriously sunny day with the group enjoying the spectacular views from the top. The group have also been enjoying walks through Delamere Forrest and now that the light nights are starting to creep back in are planning their next walk in the Lake District. If you would like to join the club you can attend their regular meeting every second Thursday at 8pm at St. Alberts Club. For more information about the club please contact Gwen Osborne on 0151 220 5837.

Pick up a Bargain at The R&R Store

Stockbridge Village’s Re-use and Recycle is going from strength to strength. Launched in October the new shopping experience is good for the environment and great for your pocket.

The trial supported by Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority (MRWA) with the projects operator Villages working with local volunteers, aims to engage with residents and permanently change our waste habits along with discovering how items can be recycled or re-used instead sent to landfill.

The Stockbridge Village ‘Re-use and Recycling Shop’ can take most good quality items that can be re-used, including textiles, books, toys and games, sports equipment, crockery, cutlery, CDs and DVDs, but not electrical or gas appliances. They are then resold to the public at the Shop with funds reinvested back into the project.

Liz Sharpe, volunteers each week at the store and is delighted with how things are going “It’s a fantastic project that is already making a massive difference. People are picking up cheaper ‘pre-loved’ items and this is diverting items from being sent to landfill. Volunteering at the shop is a great experience too, we are a friendly team and I’m really enjoying seeing the shop so busy. The hub is growing into a vital centre of the community.”

So if you find yourself with something which could be re-used, please drop it off at the HUB, Stockbridge Village on Friday mornings from 10am - 2pm. The shop is also looking for volunteers, so if you have some spare time and would like to get involved please contact Jane Roberts on 0151 949 5074 or email jane.roberts@villages.org.uk.

Nexchess

Local resident Mr Birmingham has been celebrating after the game he designed caught the eye of games manufacturer Hasbro. The manufacturer has already started work on the new board game ‘Nexchess’ based around the game of Chess which will be available to buy in the shops next year.

Mr Birmingham has kindly donated five of the games to the R& R store for sale for £20. The prototypes are currently on sale for £39.99 www.nexchess.co.uk

Grotto Fun at St. Alberts

St. Alberts Grotto proved extremely popular at Christmas with more than 80 children enjoying the specially designed Grotto and enjoying entertainment, food and a special gift from Santa.
Healthy Homes

Healthy Homes in Knowsley aims to tackle common issues that residents may be experiencing, such as living in damp conditions, having difficulty managing household bills or disabled residents struggling to get around without adaptations to their home. These can all have a significant impact on health, wellbeing and general happiness.

The scheme, which is completely free of charge, has now been extended to cover all homes in the Borough. If you would like to take part, a trained advocate will visit your property and talk to you about your health, home and wellbeing. This will help them to identify any health or support services you might need or want, as well as any aspect of your property that could be improved to benefit your health and wellbeing.

If you want like to take part in Healthy Homes in Knowsley, call 0800 694 0370 or email healthyhomes@knowsley.gov.uk.

Healthy Homes is a free service, provided by Knowsley Council in partnership with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

Scary Fun at Little Wood

A firm Stockbridge Village family favourite the annual Halloween spooktacular event took place at Littlewood organised by Little Wood of Stockbridge Association following the presentation of the Green Flag Award (Read more on page 11). Children enjoyed spooky horse and coach rides, craft tents and a costume competition. The day ended with the spooky walk and ghost story. With the help of St. Alberts Club, the woodland walk was transformed into a an unnerving walk of frights with tomb stones and coffins emerging along the way. The Littlewoods of Stockbridge Association would like to thank Liam and Callum along with the Stockbridge Village Ramblers for their help in setting up the event and also by helping throughout the day. Maria Regan from LWSA said “It was wonderful to see the community working together to help one another, the true definition of community spirit and cohesion.”
Have you visited the Village HUB yet?

From IT courses to the Re-use and Recycling store, the HUB has an abundance of things for Stockbridge Village residents to enjoy there. The HUB is open to the community every day from Monday to Friday offering a wide range of courses and opportunities for residents and it’s the perfect place to start if you want to begin the New Year with a new interest or hobby.

All Things IT

Every Monday and Wednesday from 10am to 4.30pm
Supported sessions for:
• Absolute beginners
• A refresher course
• My Work Search/Universal Job Search
• Internet surfing
• Budgeting in an excel document

Open Access Mondays
12noon - 2pm and Wednesdays 12noon - 4pm
Drop in sessions for anyone who needs:
• Internet access
• Access to an email account
• Correspondence by letter/email
• Internet surfing

IT Drop In Wednesdays
10am - 12noon
Supported sessions from FACE suitable for:
• Absolute beginners
• A refresher course
• My Work Search
• Universal Job Search
• Internet surfing
• Budgeting in an excel document
Access to laptops and Wi-Fi, courses and support for beginners, Children’s Digital Homework Club.
For more information Contact Barbara Murray on 0151 949 5021

Job Club

Mondays 2 - 4pm
The club is open to anyone who would like to improve their career prospects and offers help and advice for people who are looking for work by offering help and support with writing and improving their CV, preparing for an interview along with how to search for jobs and general advice on careers and opportunities.

Homework Club

Mondays 3.30pm - 4.30pm
The Homework Club is an ideal place for children to do their homework in a quiet location, with the opportunity to use computers and access the internet. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

All Things Environmental

Every Tuesday and Thursday
New training courses include:
• Greenwood – working with traditional handtools to make cooking utensils, brooms, stools
• Basketweaving - using willow to make beautiful baskets of all shapes and sizes
• Horticulture – propagation, grafting, planting and pruning
• Cooking and Nutrition – simple healthy and delicious cooking skills
• Beauty and the Bee - using beeswax, honey and other natural products to make nourishing products for the body
For more information and to sign up to current courses please contact Becky - becky@squashnutrition.org or 0151 707 7897

The R&R Store and Energy Advice

If you want to pick up a bargain head to the Re-use and Recycle (R&R) store each Friday (10am - 2pm) for a whole new shopping experience.
If you would like some help and advice about getting the best energy deals, switching supplier, saving money or applying for the Warm Home Discount Rebate, then Villages Energy Champions are your first port of call at the HUB every Friday from 10am to 2pm.
Did you know that Collective Switching has saved Merseyside residents a total of £424,416 a year on their energy bills so far!

Collective Switching is when a large group of people get together and use their collective buying power to negotiate a better deal from energy suppliers. The more people who are involved in a switch, the bigger the buying power and the better the deal is likely to be. Lots of people are paying too much for their energy and rising fuel bills can be a real concern. The aim of the Merseyside Collective Switch is to reduce our energy bills by joining together.

Some people have been reluctant to switch suppliers because they’re not sure how to, or they don’t have time to compare the different tariffs. Collective Switching makes it safe and easy to switch and ensures that we all get a better deal.

The benefits of Collective Switching

• **Save money** - You’ll be told exactly how much you could save before you agree to switch your tariff. In the last Merseyside Collective Switch, local residents saved an average of £212 per year on their energy bills!

• **Save time** - It only takes a few minutes to register to join the switch. Once you’ve registered, energyhelpline will work with the energy suppliers to get a good deal, basically they’ll do all the hard work for you. They’ll then contact you to let you know what the best offers are.

• **Safe and easy** - You’ll know exactly what the new offer is and who the new supplier will be before you agree to accept the offer. You’re not under any obligation to agree to the switch unless you’re happy to do so. Whatever you decide, there will be no disruption to your gas and electricity supply.

Energy Projects Plus’ impartial advisors will be on hand to offer advice if you need it on freephone 0800 043 0151.

It’s true what they say about safety in numbers. By joining together we can collectively get a better deal on our energy bills.

To find out more speak to Villages Energy Champion Jane Roberts on 0151 949 5074 or visit [www.lcenergyswitch.co.uk](http://www.lcenergyswitch.co.uk).

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**Congratulations...**

to the 8 community groups who successfully scooped funding for projects that will help the local community. The Stockbridge Village Estate Management Committee announced the Community Budget funding in December which will help support the following community groups in the area:

- Boccia Babes to help with venue costs for their exercise sessions
- Platform Theatre for the pantomime held at Stockbridge Village Neighbourhood Centre
- Brandearth Roughsedge Spruce Residents Association
- St Alberts Social Club for IT equipment
- SCIP to support their Christmas fayre
- St Gabriels FC to assist with kit and league fees
- Heatwaves Parents and Tots to fund a trip to Gulliver’s World
- On the ball soccer school venue costs for football practice

Applications for the March Community Budget need to be returned to the Villages office by 13th Feb 2015.

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**Calling All Community Groups!**

**The Big Energy Race Needs You**

The Big Energy Race is a national challenge for community groups and individuals, designed to help those taking part to reduce their household energy bills. Community groups register as teams to help people in their community reduce their bills by completing fun and practical energy reduction challenges. By taking action to help people in their communities save energy.

If you are part of a community group and would like to take part in the challenge please contact Jane Roberts on 0151 949 5074.

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**Fancy Earning £100?**

Do you know someone who is looking for a new home?

If so, let them know about Villages available apartments in the Craig’s and Cliffs and if they sign up and stay in their new home for more than 6 months you will receive £100 as a thank you from Villages.

So start spreading the word today it will be the easiest £100 you’ve ever earned.

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Congratulations to Stockbridge Village resident Maria Reynolds who picked up a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Taekwondo Championships in November.
It’s time to stop hibernating and get out and take part in something new. There are lots of fun activities going on in Stockbridge Village over the next few months that are waiting for you to enjoy.

Stockbridge Community Engagement Forum (S.K.E.F)
Craig’s Community Centre
Every 3rd Monday of each month 4pm - 6pm
An opportunity for community groups to network and discuss opportunities for partnerships and further external prospects.

The Association of Stockbridge Village Meetings
St. Albert’s Social Club
The Association meets to give residents an opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them.

Scouts
The Craig’s Community Centre
Tuesdays 6pm – 7.30pm
Call Christine Costello for more information on 07983 581 504

The Safari Club
Stockbridge Village Neighbourhood Centre
Saturdays 12noon – 3pm
Activities and fun for children up to 12yrs. Giant Bouncy Castle, Multi Sports, Arts and Crafts, Community Café, Monthly Movie Club, Cookery and so much more. Don’t forget to bring your leisure pass!

Clothes4U
St Judes Church
Wednesdays 12noon to 2pm

Fitness Classes
The Stockbridge Village Neighborhood Centre offer a range of fitness classes why not join in?

Abs and Core – Fridays 10.30am
After Burn – Friday 10am
Aqua size – Tuesdays and Wednesdays 12noon and Thursdays 7pm
Circuit – Mondays 7pm
Legs Bums and Tums – Tuesdays 7pm
Metafit – Mondays 9am and Wednesday 7pm
Spin – Tuesdays and Wednesdays 6pm and Thursdays 6.15pm
For further information, visit www.activeknowsley.com/Home/FitnessClass or call 0151 443 2200

Villages Open Day
Tuesday 17th February, 4pm - 7pm
Saturday 21st February 9am - 1.30pm
Craig’s Community Centre
Come and join us for this exclusive opportunity to view our fantastic properties available now. Villages’ staff will also be available to discuss your requirements with you.
For more information contact 0151 949 5080

Do you have an event planned for this year that you would like included in ‘Our Times’? If so please contact Alexandra Kinsella on 0151 949 5032 or email alexandra.kinsella@villages.org.uk.

Things to do in Stockbridge Village

Book Chat
Stockbridge Village Library
Every other Tuesday
2pm – 3pm
Read a book you would love to share with others or perhaps you need ideas on what to read?
For more information contact Stockbridge Village Library on 0151 443 2501

Ace Youth Club
Stockbridge Village Neighbourhood Centre
Mondays, 6.15pm – 8.45pm
For young people aged 13 -19 years, the club offers awards, issue based projects and trips out through the school holidays. Plus the opportunity to design your own programmes e.g. residential, arts, crafts, sports, computer suite, accreditations plus much more.
50p entrance
Contact Rose Spellacy 07810 054 134 or email: rose.spellacy@knowsley.gov.uk

Free Literacy & Numeracy course
Craig’s Community Centre
Wednesdays 9.30am – 11.30am
Supported sessions with Lesley Makarel a tutor from FACE.

The Sewing Cafe
Stockbridge Village Neighbourhood Centre
Thursdays 10am – 12noon
The course is open to all Knowsley residents. All materials are supplied {residents can bring along any old bits of fabric, old duvet covers, curtains, wool etc. if they wish to!} It’s a great opportunity to meet other people and have a chat over a cuppa.

The Safari Club
Stockbridge Village Neighbourhood Centre
Saturdays 12noon – 3pm
Activities and fun for children up to 12yrs. Giant Bouncy Castle, Multi Sports, Arts and Crafts, Community Café, Monthly Movie Club, Cookery and so much more. Don’t forget to bring your leisure pass!

Milkshake! Live Saturday 20th February 2015 1.30pm and 4pm shows
The popular Channel 5 children’s show Milkshake! is coming to Knowsley as part of a live tour. The show’s stellar lineup includes Little Princess, Bananas in Pyjamas, Noddy and Tessie Bear, Pip from Pip Ahoy! Bello from Jelly Jamm, Chloe from Chloe’s Closet, Tommy and Tallulah from Tickey Toc, Toby and Doreen from Toby’s Travelling Circus and Milkshake’s very own Milkshake Monkey! Tickets are £12 for adults, £10 for children and a family tickets for two children and two adults is £40. For more information visit www.knowsley.gov.uk/tickets or call 0151 443 2575.

Do you have an event planned for this year that you would like included in ‘Our Times’? If so please contact Alexandra Kinsella on 0151 949 5032 or email alexandra.kinsella@villages.org.uk.
Fitton Hills Karate Kid Scoops Gold

In the last issue of Our Times we told you about seven year old Karate Kid Richard Reygan who was jetting off to Italy to compete in the Karate World Championships in Tuscany.

We are delighted to announce that Richard swept the board with medals at the competition and came home with 4 gold medals, 2 silver medals and 2 bronze medals.

Richard has been training at the Dojo.net centre in Rochdale in martial arts since he was three and already holds the Yorkshire and Northern championship titles. In Italy he took on competitors five years older than him but that didn’t faze him in the slightest!

From everyone in Fitton Hill and at Villages we would like to say WELL DONE RICHARD!
Keeping our estates clean is always an important priority for Villages, and in November we held a large community clear up encouraging residents to come and help us clean up Dowry Street and Lichens Crescent. Despite the cold weather the team, including residents, staff from Villages and Oldham Council along with our local PCSO’s worked tirelessly to clean the area and left it looking sparkling clean. Thank you to everyone that helped. Our next community clear up will be on Wednesday 25th March, 10.30am–2pm on The Spur. Skips will be on site for residents to get rid of unwanted items and there will also be an opportunity for you to discuss any neighbourhood issues you may have with us.

Community Clear Up

Gardening Glory

It was once again an evening of gardening glamour for Fitton Hill’s green fingered enthusiasts at the Annual Oldham Gardening Presentation evening in November. Residents from the estate were invited to attend the event at Smokies and receive their prizes.

Winners on the evening included:
• Best Garden - Diane Emsley
• Best Container - Joyce Hooton
• Best Pensioner - Fred Edwards

In memory of one of Fitton Hills most successful garden competition winners, Joyce Fairbrother, who passed away last year, there was also a Special Recognition Award presented on the night. ‘The Joyce Fairbrother Memorial Trophy’ recognises Outstanding Contribution to Gardening in Fitton Hill and was presented by Joyce’s family along with the Mayor of Oldham Cllr Fida Hussain and Gardeners World presenter Joe Swift to Carol Johnson. Carol received the award thanks to her commitment and support of the Fitton Hill Gardening Competition over the past 10 years.
If you are over 50, why not join in the fun at the 2’oclock club held each Tuesday in the community room at Hilltop Surgery from 2pm - 4pm. With different activities taking place each week, from craft sessions to exercise there is something for everyone to enjoy. All who attend have an input into what the club does and it’s a great way to meet people and have a cuppa and a chat. There are lots of fun activities planned for the next few weeks including quizzes, card making and sit and get fit. The club is open to anyone over 50 and is free to attend. For more information contact Dana Murphy or Lesley Cutter on 0161 633 4060.

Oldham’s ‘Respect Our Community Awards’ Celebrates its Seven Year Anniversary With News That it Has Created Over One Million Pounds Of Benefits To Oldham Communities

Respect Our Community Awards (ROCA) has recently celebrated its seven year anniversary of helping to strengthen and build communities in Oldham. Villages are proud to support the awards both financially and by representation on the funding panel and since 2010, £23,232.00 has been invested in the Fitton Hill community. During this time we have contributed £12,000, therefore nearly doubling our investment. One of the key aims of Villages involvement with the awards is for them to support local community groups here in Fitton Hill and since 2010 some of the projects have included the following:

In 2010, ‘The Schools out’ for Summer project was awarded £5000.00 to provide school holiday activities aimed at reducing Anti-Social Behaviour and giving the young people fun activities to take part in.

‘ANEW project’ was awarded £5000 in 2011, which was used towards the costs to fund an expedition to Ecuador. The project linked young people from Fitton Hill and students from Hulme Grammar and included activities such as joint volunteering in the community of Fitton Hill and holding joint fundraising activities, culminating in a three week trip to Ecuador.

In 2013 ‘Prison Me, No Way’ received £2500.00, to fund a full day session to highlight to young people how criminal activities can impact on life. The session was held at a local secondary school (Hathershaw) and allowed the young people the opportunity to meet ex-offenders and spend time in a reconstruction of an actual prison cell.

The ‘Alex Carter Memorial Garden’ received £500.00 from ROCA in 2013 towards cost of creating the garden in Alex’s memory at the Fitton Hill Neighbourhood Centre.

Tim Royales, from The Brew Café in Fitton Hill which received £2632 from ROCA in 2014 said: “The help and support we got from ROCA was invaluable. Through the highs and lows of setting up the coffee shop, the knowledge of the ROCA funding to cover some of our major costs that could not be given in kind was a constant source of comfort.”
Family Day Out

After the success of our last family trip to Blackpool in August, we have arranged another one for the Easter school holidays. So pack your bucket and spade and prepare to eat lots of rock in Britain’s beloved seaside resort.

The trip will take place on Friday 10th April and will cost £4 per adult and £3 per child (children must be accompanied by an adult). We can also arrange for a delicious packed lunch be prepared for you on the day for an additional £1 per person.

To book your place call into Fitton Hill reception to pay.

Places are limited as there will only be one coach so act fast and book early.

Fitton Hill Work Club

The Fitton Hill Work Club has moved to a new home at the Villages Community Shop. The club is going from strength to strength with 99 new members joining in 2014. The change of venue has led to new IT facilities with internet and access to MyWorkSearch.

The Club is already proving to be a popular choice for people looking for a new job particularly with those hoping to return to work, 25% of members found a job thanks to the support of the club last year with a further 274 number of people accessing training courses and 112 using MyWorkSearch. Lisa Fowles Community Development Officer said “Searching for jobs is changing. The days of looking through the paper or hearing about work through friends and family has gone and instead more and more opportunities are being advertised online which has left many people who do not know how to use the internet or a computer left behind. The Work Club helps with this. We will offer help and support creating an email account and putting your CV or application forms together and will continue to support you preparing for interviews.”

The Fitton Hill Work Club is open Mondays 1pm - 3pm and Thursday 10am - 12noon at Villages Community Shop.

To keep up to date with all the latest jobs in the area daily ‘like’ The Fitton Hill Work Club Facebook page today www.facebook.com/fittonhillworkclub.

Bye Bye Bernie

After working in housing in Oldham for 35 years, we are very sad to announce that Villages Head of Housing Services, Bernie McConnell will be retiring on 31st March. We will be wishing Bernie the best of luck and taking a trip down the Fitton Hill memory lane with her in the Spring edition of Our Times.
On Ya Bike Tim

Fitton Hill’s new café The Brew Community Coffee Shop is now a firm Fitton Hill favourite and a great place to meet friends for a coffee and a cake. The café is managed by Tim Royal from the Salvation Army Eden Project in Fitton Hill, and in order to raise money for the café and other projects supported by the charity such as The Homeless Project (The Lighthouse) and several other youth clubs and toddler groups, Tim will be cycling from London to Paris. The bike ride is 500km which will be a gruelling task with 9 hours of cycling per day over 5 days.

We would like to wish Tim the best of luck in his challenge to raise money for community projects in Fitton Hill we are sure he will complete the challenge and raise lots of money for this fantastic cause!

If you would like to sponsor Tim, you can do so by texting the amount you want to donate to 70070 adding TIMR77.

Brighter Beginning’s Nursery

In March a new nursery will be opening at the Fitton Hill Neighbourhood Centre called Brighter Beginning’s Nursery. The company already run several Educational Day Nurseries in Manchester and are looking forward to opening in Fitton Hill soon. For more information visit www.brighterbeginnings.co.uk
It’s a new year and time to start trying something new. Why not take part in the many fantastic events and activities right here on your doorstep.

**Community Choir**
Community room of the Hilltop Surgery.
Mondays 7pm to 9pm
Do you enjoy singing? Then why not join the choir?
Contact Keith Neilson on 07557 910 125

**Over 50’s Movie Matinee**
Fortnightly Club
Fitton Hill Library
2.30pm - 4.30pm
Thursday 5th February
Do you have a madness for movies and enjoy a social get-together? Come along to our free fortnightly movie matinee club for the over-50s. The club watches a different movie on each get-together. New members are always welcome. Ask the library staff for more details. To book a place at this event, contact the library on 0161 770 8000.

**Teen Room**
Fitton Hill Library
Wednesdays 5pm - 7pm

**Youth Club**
Fitton Hill youth club
Thursdays 3pm - 4.45pm
For young peoples aged between 10 and 13 years.

**Young at Heart**
Villages Community shop
Bi weekly Thursdays 1pm - 3pm
Enjoy an afternoon of bingo, quizzes and fun. No need to book just turn up. 50p per session

**Stories and Rhymes**
Fitton Hill Library
Fridays, 10.15am - 11am
Come and share rhymes and songs at these fun activities for the under 5’s.
Sessions include stories and music to develop language and communication and promote a love of books in babies and young children.

**Technology & Us With Age UK**
Chadderton Over 60’s Centre
Wednesday’s & Friday’s
Each session is two hours long and will help you get to grips with your laptop, PC or tablet. The sessions deal with any computer issues, upgrades, software installation, internet & mobile phone problems you have. Help is also on hand for using digital cameras, skype, social media or email set ups.

Sessions cost £6 and must be booked in advance by calling Age UK Oldham on 0161 633 0213

**Black Sheep**
Gallery Oldham
14th February 2015 - 9th May 2015
The exhibition is a touring show from the National Centre for Craft and Design. Felt is the most ancient constructed textile in the world and has been used for everything from cosy winter garments to conceptual art. This exhibition is an exploration of the edgier side of this extraordinary and versatile material, looking at artists who create sometimes disturbing and bizarre oddities and technically brilliant objects.

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**Beat the Monday Blues and join us for a Brew**
Villages Community Shop
Bi Weekly on Mondays
10am – 12noon
Meet people for the community for a cuppa and a chat.
50p for a cup of tea or coffee and biscuit.

**Baby Boogies**
The Community Room at Hilltop Surgery
Mondays 9:30am - 11:30am

**English Course**
Medlock Vale Children's Centre
Tuesdays 9:30am - 11:30am
(Crèche provided)
Booking required call 0161 770 2153

**Drama Workshops with Oldham Coliseum**
Fitton Hill Library
Tuesday 17th February
2.30pm - 3.30pm
Join the award winning young rep company as they bring the story to life on stage. This production is devised to appeal to audiences aged 8 plus although younger children are welcome to attend.
For more information contact 0161 770 8000

**Skill Swap Shop**
Villages Community Shop
Wednesdays, 1pm – 3pm
The skills swap shop meet weekly for an afternoon of learning and share new and existing craft.
£1 entry

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Do you have an event planned for this year that you would like included in ‘Our Times’? If so please contact Alexandra Kinsella on 0151 949 5032 or email alexandra.kinsella@villages.org.uk.
Do you need to get rid of unwanted rubbish?

Skips will be available to residents from early morning until 12noon...or whenever they are full. The skip service cannot be used for fridges, freezers, gas bottles or tyres and cannot be used for commercial waste. To remove these items, please contact Knowsley Council on 0151 443 2400 or Oldham Council on 0161 770 6644, however there may be a charge for this service.

We have recently had reports of people leaving rubbish at the sites after the skip has been removed. This is illegal fly tipping and we will not tolerate this in our community. We would like your help in identifying the fly tippers. Please call your local Villages Office with any information.

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Contact us

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Our Times has been approved by a Tenant Readers Group. We would like to thank them for kindly giving up their time to offer their input into the look and content of this newsletter.

If you would like to get involved in future publications then please get in touch with Alexandra Kinsella, our Marketing and Communications Officer on 0151 949 5032 or email Alexandra.kinsella@villages.org.uk.

Visit our website www.villages.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook /villageshousing
Follow us on Twitter @villages

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