

‘Respite House’ Piloted by Columbia County to Aid Caregivers

The program is designed to help both seniors and their loved ones

By Roger Hannigan Gilson, Staff Writer
Feb 24, 2026



The Columbia County Office for the Aging opened a respite house, pictured, Friday at the Canaan Congregational Church in Canaan. The program is designed to provide seniors with mental stimulation, allowing their caregivers the time they need to address other responsibilities.

Jim Franco/Times Union

CANAAN — A “respite house” to help seniors and alleviate stressors faced by their caregivers opened Friday at the Canaan Congregational Church.

Respite houses are day programs where seniors can go for a few hours to socialize and be mentally stimulated, taking pressure off their caregivers and allowing them to take care of other parts of their lives.

The Canaan house, Recharge and Renew Respite, is being opened by the county Office for the Aging as a pilot program. People over the age of 60 who live in the county and who can independently ambulate, use the bathroom, and take medications can attend if they are accepted into the program after their caregivers complete an intake process, Office for the Aging Director Nina Benvenuto said. The program is free.

Recharge and Renew Respite is currently open on the third Friday of every month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Benvenuto said, offering socializing, Zumba and meals. The county office is fleshing out the opening of a second respite house at St. James Catholic Church in Chatham, with plans to open an additional respite house at the Roeliff Jansen Community Library in Hillsdale.

The program was mostly aimed at seniors facing cognitive decline, which can take an emotional toll on their caregivers, who often experience “anticipatory grief” as they see their loved ones start to drift away, Benvenuto said. The program is also necessary because of the struggles residents have with at-home care.

“Due to the rural nature of Columbia County, in-home respite services are often constrained by travel time, with aides spending up to 90 minutes commuting to and from remote locations,” the Office for the Aging’s pilot proposal states. “This significantly reduces the adequate respite time available to caregivers.”

Columbia County has a lot of seniors. Twenty-eight percent of the county’s population was over the age of 65 in 2024, the last available year of census, compared to 18% of the population of the U.S.

There is one other respite house in the county — The Social House in Valatie — which charges a fee. The county respite house is open on Fridays, a day the Social House doesn’t operate, so as not to bite into the latter’s model.

Caregivers interested in the program can call 518-828 4258 or email ofa@columbiacounty.org to begin the intake process.