It wasn’t Carlisle’s cranberry bog, state park or its 1,000 acres of conservation land that attracted long-time resident Thomas Dunkers to the small suburb 35 years ago.

It was what he saw during the Strawberry Festival in the courtyard of the Unitarian Church. That day, watching residents of all generations laughing together as they waited on their strawberry shortcake ice creams, Dunkers said the sight was picturesque.

“It reminded me of a Norman Rockwell painting,” the 81-year-old said. “I fell in love with Carlisle.”

That community spirit goes back to the first Old Home Day in 1912. Today, the annual event brings together its 5,400-plus neighbors for intergenerational road races, parade and awards ceremony for its young scholars, older conservationists and outstanding citizens.

“Once people in town experienced the beauty and power of such formal intergenerational interactions, they wanted more. …That's when we thought of creating new programs and modifying existing ones to make them intergenerational.”

Patti Russo
Carlisle Council on Aging

Patti Russo, a Board member with the Carlisle Council on Aging, recalls the free pancake breakfast at the Congregational Church – the lines of children, teens, parents and grandparents waiting in the church parking lot as they take in the sweet aromas of pancakes.

“Between the pancake breakfast and the awards ceremony,” Russo explained, “residents can deliver baked goods for the pie and cake contest.” All cakes are given out as prizes at the legendary cake walk.

The memories are enough to make Charlotte Copp, a college student living in Portland, Oregon, homesick for Carlisle.

“Carlisle constantly has events where generations mix, and that is what makes it great,” she recalled. She misses “the connectedness of Carlisle and the at-home feeling.”

The community’s connectedness is ensured by several organizations including the Council on Aging and the Intergenerational Task Force.

The Council on Aging programs budget line item helps to support intergenerational activities. Other sources of support include Carlisle and State Cultural Council Grants, the Friends of the Carlisle Council on Aging, the Gleason Public Library and the Concord-Carlisle Community Chest.

Another factor that makes Carlisle an age-advantaged community is the fact that the town’s older adult housing facility is sandwiched between the elementary school and the Gleason Public Library.

“We think of ourselves as somewhat of a throwback to an earlier, agrarian time,” explains Kerry Kissinger, a Board member with the Friends of Carlisle Council.

The “agrarian time” Kissinger conjures up is one of a town without stoplights and neighbors passing the time at the general store.

“The library is the community center and senior citizens are the crossing guards after school,” he recalled. “We love our little town and try very hard to keep it safe and inclusive while still welcoming new and diverse residents.”

While Carlisle has always had what they call “informal” intergenerational programs – Strawberry Festival or Old
Home Day – such events don’t always promote direct engagement between older adults and young people. “Once people in town experienced the beauty and power of such formal intergenerational interactions, they wanted more,” recalled Patti Russo, with the Carlisle Council on Aging. “That’s when we thought of creating new programs and modifying existing ones to make them intergenerational.”

Over the past 10 years, Carlisle established more programs – such as the Community Chorus and Intergenerational Poetry Group – designed specifically to get generations together.

Even still, when Carlisle heard about the Best Communities Awards in 2013, they considered applying, but decided they needed more time. “The extra year gave us time to assemble an intergenerational task force and thoroughly research what was happening on the intergenerational front in Carlisle,” explained Russo, a member of the Carlisle Intergenerational Task Force. “We have a significant number of successful intergenerational programs already, but I believe there is room for more.”

On the morning of Dec. 20, she was on her way out the door when she got the news that Carlisle is a 2015 Best Intergenerational Communities Award winner. Russo shared the news with her family, the intergenerational task force and other town officials. The Jan. 9 issue of the Carlisle Mosquito ran a front-page story on the award.

“I was thrilled,” Russo recalled, “the extra adrenaline… made it difficult to sleep for a couple of nights!”

She hopes the 2015 Best Intergenerational Communities Award will get town partners fired up about intergenerational work and build off that momentum for more intergenerational programs like the Carlisle Community Chorus, which put 17-year-old resident Reilly in touch with older adults.

“Each week,” Reilly explained, “I would look forward to the conversations I would have with my fellow choir members and what I would learn from them, both in life and in singing.”

Those interactions make Thomas Dunkers, the 81-year-old resident, happy he made Carlisle his home 35 years ago.

“I have strong feelings about the importance of having an intergenerational community,” he said. “Having intergenerational activities generates understanding and enriches everyone.”

**Description of Community:**
Carlisle is a town northwest of Boston located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts.

**Demographics** (Source: U.S. Census Bureau Estimated 2012 QuickFacts):
- Total population: 5,438
- No. under 24: 1,740
- No. over 55: 1,686

**Websites:** www.carlislema.gov

**Current Program Examples:**
- Intergenerational Poetry Program
- COA Summer Intergenerational Activities
- Carlisle Intergenerational Community Chorus
- Intergenerational Valentine Tea
- Intergenerational TAP Dancing
- Seniors and Small Fries

**Intergenerational Fact:**
Carlisle has an Intergenerational Task Force that evaluates the effectiveness of existing intergenerational activities, while also exploring ideas for new collaborative opportunities