

SENIOR ADVOCACY 2015

The title of my column – Senior Advocacy 2015 – is meant to start a dialogue among seniors to reassess what we really want for our “Golden Years.” There is little doubt that we seniors must have a louder voice in controlling our own destiny. Otherwise, the fruits of our labor will not be there to sustain us as we had planned. Social Security cannot pay all aging bills (a fact of life that will not change anytime soon), so we must search elsewhere for answers.

I recently received my ad valorem tax bill. As a senior I do not object to paying taxes, but think we should look more closely at the distribution of those monies collected in all of our names. In my tax bill, 44.6% is programmed for children. Now, just like you, I like children. In fact, some of my best friends are children. The point is that there is no line item on my tax bill for seniors, as there is for



children. On top of that, we just passed a new tax for the schools – where was the advocacy group voicing senior needs?

Our total county budget is about one billion dollars. Of this amount, less than one-tenth of one percent funds community organizations, including those that serve seniors. The Federal government grants \$700,000 to Brevard County for social service programs, money which the county doles out to the same organizations year after year without any input from seniors. A senior who calls the Brevard County Housing and Human

Services Department for help is directed to 211. If the senior is indigent, the county will pay \$464 for cremation services.

Considering that nearly thirty percent of our county's residents are over age 60, this is woefully inadequate. Several years ago the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners tasked me, a county commissioner, and the county manager with developing a plan for aging with dignity. At that time there was no funding to pay the way for a plan so it was determined unnecessary. Today there still is no plan. However, if Brevard is to be an elder friendly county, we need that plan and we need it funded.

We do have a Commission on Aging, but it does not even have a printed plan for us to read. There are also several non-profit organizations that assist seniors and others in need; however, a large amount of that assistance

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comes from various church and private networks. Why do such conditions exist? A partial answer is that we have minimal representation of seniors determining what is needed.

Helping Seniors is working to change the status quo. We believe it is time for our senior population (150,000 people) to assemble together, be heard, and become involved in developing a plan that will maximize the benefits for seniors from all tax and Federal dollars received in Brevard County. These tax dollars should be allocated to causes needed to assist seniors as needs change.

Today in our community there are grandmothers raising grandchildren in cars and senior single women living in trailers with mold and leaky roofs. These heartbreaking stories are seldom brought to our attention, yet they are all too common. If you want to be involved in building and advocacy program for seniors, please call Kay Keyser, our Information Specialist, at 321-473-7770 or email her at Kay@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org. We cannot wait to start work on addressing these problems. With your participation, we will succeed together. Joe Steckler, President Helping Seniors of Brevard www.helpingseniorsofbrevard.org 321-473-7770.

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