

## A Replacement for the Silver-Haired Legislature



What happened to the Silver-Haired Legislature? This body of activists age 60 and over was organized in Florida in 1979 to develop mock bills to help seniors, then

lobby for them in the real House and Senate. They enabled the passage of many new state laws and spurred an increase in senior advocacy efforts.

But where did they go? It might be a little like Greek mythology, a thing long ago in the past and certainly not germane today. But I do not think so. Might it be that the under pinning was not strong enough to ensure it would last into the future? These are all good questions which relate today to Helping Seniors of Brevard. Our mission – to educate, inform and connect seniors and their caregivers – echoes the advocacy theme of the Silver-Haired Legislature. We, too, get involved with local community needs through radio, TV, and newspapers.

When Helping Seniors was founded there were many unmet needs in Brevard, including the lack of a county aging plan. To address this unmet need, the Board of Directors formed a Senior Advocacy Council. Over the course of eight months, 41 volunteers conducted a countywide survey of seniors. The result of this effort was combined into a recommendation to the Brevard County Commissioner to catalyze development of an aging plan.

What now, will the future direction of the Senior Advocacy Council? Should it go the way of the Silver-Haired Legislature, or should it become a voice of the 245,000+ senior citizens of Brevard County? My vote would be for the unifying force of senior citizens. We talk of government waste but there is also the need for citizens to be educated, to be informed and to know what assets are available for their care. This is the mission of Helping Seniors.

Consider for a moment the effect of harnessing all of our elder care funding (government, nonprofit, and private) under better leadership to ensure that monies are directed to the problem and not to escalating overhead. Distribution of funds under the nonprofit mantle is often clouded with actual versus intended use;

the workings of local nonprofit organizations, in particular, are not always well advertised.

Enter here the role of a non-governmental organization such as Helping Seniors Advocacy Council. This group, working with other senior advocates, city and county government and related organization, could be a guiding force for an elder friendly county, one with an active Commission on Aging and a county-sponsored aging plan.

Seniors, and those who care for them, need in place services that are available. They at least need to know how necessary services can be accessed. Think for a moment about a senior who needs dental services, services requiring mouth surgery. You can nor receive such care at a hospital,

urgent care clinics or most dental offices. You can, however, call certain resources and be placed in contact with a dentist who will examine you to determine your best course of treatment. You might need surgery, just not to the extent you thought you might need. Dentists, good ones, will work out a payment plan so that you will get the needed help.

For many reasons we need and Aging Plan. Services for senior need to be better identified so that care can be accessed and that is why a Senior Advocacy Council is needed and should be a visible and viable part of the resources needed to age with dignity. Communications are essential, as is education on how we can access services. We need more than an inactive silver haired legislature. **SS**

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