

An Elder Friendly Community



Dr. Jema Hernandez, former secretary of the Department of Elder Affairs, coined the term elder friendly community fifteen years ago as a way to improve senior

life in Florida. The Brevard County Board of County Commissioners designated Brevard as an elder friendly community in 2000, then tasked the Brevard County Commission on Aging with making that happen. Although elder friendly community promptly became a household word, like many government programs, it "died" due to lack of funding. Development of elder friendly communities was not a revamping of small local cities, widening of sidewalks, putting in new lights so seniors could walk at night, or doing any other costly modifications. The answer was already there for us to see, we just had to recognize what was really meant by elder friendly communities—that is, informing, educating, and connecting seniors to available services.

Brevard has a wide range of services that assist seniors and their caregivers, but many people are unaware of these programs. In a 2015 Helping Seniors survey, seniors stated that the most needed service was information. Seniors want to know what is available that they can afford or at least access. In addition to information, seniors need education to understand the terminology of the care system and the types of assistance offered. Finally, seniors need help getting connected to the care vehicle.

In 2011, Helping Seniors was formed to take advantage of a communication system that was already in place. We now broadcast a weekly radio show on WMEL 1060 AM, produce and air television shows 18 times a week on Bright House Networks and Space Coast Government TV, and write columns for Hometown News, Senior Scene and Spotlight Magazines, Al Dia Today, and Ebony News Today. Next, we needed to connect seniors. In August 2014, Helping Seniors hired an information specialist to link callers to the help they need. Since then, we have helped more than 1000 people access care. So, how do we pay for all of this? We developed a nonprofit business plan comprised of United Way and Brevard County funding, private foundation and corporate support,

an annual drive, and fundraisers. In December 2016, we will raffle a ruby red 1992 Jaguar with 38,000 miles. The sponsor is Gatto's Tire & Auto Service (www.gattos.com), and tickets will be available at all six of their locations. Thus, it becomes clear that community businesses will be part of the funding resources.

Once we determined the funding parameters, we needed to develop the education part of the plan. This involved researching community resources that actually make our community elder friendly. A good starting point is a long-term care manager such as Cathy Rowlands of Total Long-Term Care Consultants, who helps families get smarter in the care business. To understand the various elements of care, we can visit in-home care providers such as Seniors Helping Seniors, Levin Home Care, and Kindred At Home. Should you need an assisted living facility, there is Hibiscus Court on the main-

land or Zon Beachside, a new facility in Indian Harbour Beach. This is just the beginning of understanding the various parts of an elder friendly community. Stay tuned next month for a second part of a three-part series on creating an aging plan. For information on the services available to assist you and your loved ones age in place, call (321) 473-7770 or visit us at www.helpingseniorsofbrevard.org to see the television shows, radio shows, and articles that will help you develop your own aging plan. Information is power, and it's free at Helping Seniors of Brevard.

Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a non profit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at: info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org or calling: 321-473-7770

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