



Are We an Elder Friendly Community?

Joe Steckler, President
Helping Seniors of Brevard

When our Information Specialist was off for Christmas, the task of answering the Helping Seniors phone fell to me. We were able to get help for callers, but it took my experience of 27 years and knowing where to go for help to solve the problems. Thinking about two special calls made me doubt how elder friendly we truly are in Brevard. We collect thousands of dollars for toys to give children at Christmas, yet we can't help a senior citizen keep their water turned on. Yes, I know about calling churches for help, but even these sources have their limits.

Resolving these two problems gave me yet another reason to call attention to situations that, unbeknownst to the average citizen, occur daily in Brevard, a county that voted to defund the Community Based Organizations program for nonprofits to add to its road paving fund while simultaneously planting palm trees and building concrete medians on the highways and streets. Now the County Commissioners are willing to borrow and spend millions to bring a company to Brevard on the premise that it will increase infrastructure and salaries.

Consider for a moment the case involving a delinquent water bill. Turning off the water on an elderly couple with a combined income of \$1,425 a month seems cruel, when the wife had lost her job and was trying to find work. Lack of fresh water can cause a multitude of health and sanitation problems, particularly among seniors with weakened immune systems. Luckily we were able to find an understanding city employee who deferred the bill another month, but still the couple must pay it or face a similar situation next month.

The second case involved Hurricane Irma damage to two floors and a hot water heater in a manufactured home. FEMA assessed the damage at \$327, a sum that did not come close to the actual repair cost. As a result, a 69-year-old woman has been heating water in a tea kettle for bathing since Irma. Her floors are unsafe and the hot water heater a danger due to sagging floors. She could find no one to help her. After numerous calls we were able to get her connected to a person who would help her with the FEMA problem, but it will take time.

Can we do better? Yes, and I think we should. Both sources I reached for help were logical: it took me time to find them but I knew where to start and would pursue the problem to resolution. But does the average caller even know where to start or have the determination to succeed? Being continually rebuffed is not easy to

accept and often results in early defeat. Information and education are important, but so is the knowledge on the part of the caller that there is someone out there willing to help them. As I write this article, I have three calls waiting for me to answer to see if I can help them.

My column today points out the need for an elder endowment that can assist those temporarily down and out. If we want to be an elder friendly community, we have to work at it, and development of a county Aging Plan is a good place to start. Maybe direct some of that unexpected \$24.5 million received from the school tax to the care of elderly – just a thought. Or the \$100,000 from Florida Today for toys. Or open United Way funding to new applications. I can think of many others but the point is made. We need to do a better job of reaching out to others so all can share.

These are excellent reasons why we need nonprofits like Helping Seniors and others who will continually remind us of these needs and enable all to be functioning parts of an elder friendly community. Asking others for financial support is not easy, but it is necessary for nonprofits like Helping Seniors and others to exist in order to help those in need.

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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UPCOMING EVENTS

Strawberry Festival - Thur, Mar 1st - \$79- I have 50 reserved seats in section 3A for the Oak Ridge Boys. Included in cost are your gate admission, reserved seats for Oak Ridge Boys & Strawberry Shortcake. Sign up by January 15th, when tickets are sold out they are gone, so send in your check today! 2nd bus now available

St John Rivership with Lunch - Wed, Mar 14 - \$86 - sail on the St Johns River & see the wildlife while you enjoy fabulous lunch. Deadline to sign up February 14, minimum of 35 needed for trip

A Taste of Cuba - April 11th - \$98 - spend the day in Ybor City as we have a private walking tour includes the Ybor City Museum & you can stand on Cuban ground in the U.S.A! There will be a cigar rolling demonstration then we are off for dinner & Flamenco Show. Sign up by March 3rd

Orchestra seating at Dr Phillips for **Waitress on March 24th** and **Something Rotten on April 28th**

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