Seniors: A Wake Up Call

Joe Steckler, President

Greetings to all. The title of today's column does not refer to an alarm clock, rather it is a plea for seniors to become more aware of the happenings around us that will affect our quality of life. In my next several articles, I will suggest actions we can take as a united front to ensure that local decision makers pay attention to the 250,000 seniors who help elect or un-elect them. This is necessary if we are to ensure a continuum of senior services in the future.

We cannot take current programs for granted. Even though seniors are the second largest generator of county and state revenue from which most seniors services are derived, funding for seniors has decreased while I have lived here. Look at the Brevard County Commissioner act to defund local nonprofits through the General Fund (a fund supported by all seniors) AND their move to increase funding for youth through tax revenues and you will see we have taken a major hit in our ability to improve or even maintain senior services.

About 50% of Brevard's population is senior. Why have we let a few dictate what seniors can have when seniors pay half the bills? Does it concern you that five elected officials can determine the fate of nonprofits that assist seniors? It does me, which is why I am embarking on a path to level the playing field when it comes to equal support for children and seniors.

For instance, how many of us know that donations to United Way of Brevard are being diverted from senior needs to youth services? Major contributors to United Way include Harris Corporation, whose employees retire in Brevard, and Publix, where seniors comprise a major purchasing force. Yet their donations are having less of an impact on senior services because of United Way's changing focus. These are things seniors need to know.

Or again, how many of us know how much money is raised through the recent tax to support the school system and where those dollars are spent? We should hold the school superintendent more accountable to those who pay this tax – about 250,000 seniors. These are also things that seniors need to know.

We are an aging community but we do not have a county plan addressing the needs of seniors. Making seniors aware of the decline in funded services, especially those services that assist the frail elderly and elders in general, is a task undertaken by few in Brevard. There was a senior column in Florida Today but the paper decided this was no longer necessary, replacing it with a column addressing the growth of a child.

To my knowledge, the only local effort to address senior needs through the media is managed by Helping Seniors of Brevard, a nonprofit dedicated to informing and educating seniors and those who care for them. Helping Seniors will hold a meeting of their Senior Advocacy Group in early April. We all need to be involved in ensuring the continuance of senior programs provided by the many wonderful nonprofits in Brevard. If you want to be a senior advocate, please contact Kay at 321-473-7770.

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 **SS**