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**Joe Steckler**

*Helping SENIORS of Brevard*

## What it Means to be a Senior!

Recent phone calls to our helpline have reminded me of Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet, "The Great Colossus," which is inscribed on a plaque inside the Statue of Liberty. These words welcome immigrants to our country: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore." While they were intended to greet newcomers to America, might they not apply to seniors today?

When I was 20 I did not think about what it would be like to live when I was 60, 70, or 80. Like many of you, I had other thoughts on my mind that did not include saving thousands for retirement, 401K's, pensions, etc. As I acquired a family I thought more about saving, but house interest payments of 16% and other demands mitigated against putting aside much for retirement.

As I got older I realized I had to get serious about retirement, and I did. I knew I would have my military pension and planned to work in my civilian life. I developed and maintained an investment plan that would enable me to have the retirement I wanted, stuck to the plan, and am there today.

Not everyone does that. Some maintained a lifestyle that allowed only minimal saving for retirement and now experience difficulties. Some could not set aside the amounts needed because of medical issues, low earnings, or high cost of living. Some did not expect to live into their 80s and 90s but life expectancy has increased, and we now can hearken back to those words of Ms. Lazarus.

We have a large number of seniors in Brevard County who have lived to be 80 and must continue working. As they aged

many lost their source of employment. Jobs became harder to find for those who had a disability or who could not walk or stand for long periods. Some found themselves competing with younger people for the same \$10 to \$14 an hour job. This scenario has become more common and impacts seniors who need a job to make ends meet.

Several years ago the Florida Secretary of Elder Affairs started a program entitled "Elder Friendly Communities". She envisioned senior communities where there were wide, lighted sidewalks for seniors to walk on at night, stores that offered goods seniors wanted, and entertainment that was senior friendly. It never happened. Rather, we now see seniors who must work to live. The seniors I talk with are willing to take part time jobs at wages that stretch their social security so they can pay bills and live a frugal life, not golf or go on cruises.

There is a very successful local care giving company, Seniors Helping Seniors, that hires those 65 and older. The fact that more seniors are finding it necessary to continue working to support themselves is indicative that local governments need to plan for ways to accommodate an aging community. Why can't our Brevard County Housing and Human Services Department, which already is responsible for the Commission on Aging, develop a plan to employ seniors? This is an emerging need that without positive action will burden an already frail element of our population. We can, and should do better.

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## 10 Reasons to Shop Local

1. Shopping local creates jobs. Shops in our communities create local employment and self employment. These people in turn spend in the local economy!

2. Local independent shops invest more in our communities. Local businesses are proportionally more generous in their support of local charities, schools, and community events.

3. Local shops sell a wide range of great products at affordable prices. Many people get out of the habit of shopping locally and are then surprised by the range of products and gifts available.

4. Shopping local saves you money. Out of town shops have done a good job of convincing us all that local businesses = expensive. If you add travel, and your time, the overall cost is often much higher.

5. Shopping local retains our communities. People don't like losing shops and services in small towns, but don't equate this to how they spend their money.

6. Shop Local retains our distinctiveness. Independent shops create distinctive shopping experiences and stock different products. Local businesses respond more to the needs of local customers, stocking products to meet the changing population needs.

7. Shopping local saves the environment. Local shops stock a high percentage of local sourced goods which do not require long car journeys, helping the global footprint.

8. Local shops are for everyone. Most people can get to their local shops easily and this especially important for the elderly and young people with transportation issues.

9. Local shops value you more. Evidence from numerous surveys show people receive better customer care and service locally. These businesses reputation and repeat business which means you get a higher standard of service.

10. Shopping local saves services. Private and public sector services cluster around shops. As shops disappear so do hairdressers, banks and restaurants.

So...shop smart, shop local!