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Joe Steckler



Looking into 2019

During my 38-year military career, I learned from my own experiences and those of others with whom I served. Most of us thought it was dumb to ignore good advice or discount the possible effects of our actions. Good commanders tend to think that way, and I hope that describes my work as a senior advocate in Brevard.

The question is, are we ignoring something we should be paying closer attention to? As president and often phone answerer for Helping Seniors, I believe so. It is my opinion that our County Commissioners have charted the wrong course for future support of the many nonprofit organizations that provide a valuable service to our community.

Let's consider a call I had recently from a senior needing dental work. Breaking a tooth can happen at any age, and it hurts. After some research, I learned that a crown replacement without insurance costs between \$600 and \$1,235. If you are living on \$1,100 a month Social Security, how do you afford it? Put it on a credit card and pay 28% interest? Just ignore the pain?

These are real situations I am addressing. They happen daily in our community, and places that can help are few in number. How many of you have experienced a broken tooth, or can't pay your water or electric costs? Yes, we have short term answers for one-time help, but it is the long term solutions that we need to consider.

As seniors deplete their savings faster than they had planned, they increasingly must pay utility, food, and medical costs on credit. Interest charges add up and they fall into debt. Is there an answer to this problem? Yes, but our elected officials are reluctant to discuss it. They believe that General Revenue funds must not fund organizations that help some of

the less fortunate in our community.

In 1996, United Way of Brevard conducted a study of general needs in our county. To my knowledge, no other study was conducted until a group of concerned citizens called the Helping Seniors Advocacy Council did so in 2014. The needs they identified mirrored the results obtained in 1996, so little progress was made in nearly 20 years. This reflects poorly on a county as rich in traditions and achievements as Brevard.

As a result of the 2014 study, the Helping Seniors Advocacy Council made recommendations to the County Commissioners about a County Aging Plan. Not one Commissioner replied. They argued that since there were no funds to pay for an Aging Plan, there was no need to develop one. How does a county improve the life of its citizens unless it knows their needs, develops a plan to meet those needs, and identifies funds to pay for the plan?

A committee of private and government individuals could be charged with developing a workable Aging Plan to provide long term solutions to the many problems nonprofit organizations have identified. They could manage an endowment created in part through General Revenue funds that would help identify and pay for ongoing needs. Most importantly, this committee must not be solely government controlled.

As we embark on a new year, let us take action to refund our nonprofits. Quite honestly, Commissioners who should be aware of the needs of their constituents should be the first to correct their error in defunding our local nonprofits. At the same time, we must develop a better way to distribute these highly public funds, free from cronyism or poor judgment, and identify organizations that truly serve the entire county. We can and should do better.

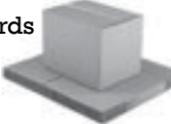
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