



The Importance of Local News

By Joe Steckler, *President, Helping Seniors of Brevard County*

Dear Friends,

Most of us have grown up with some type of newspaper or magazine supporting our community. Sadly, many of these publications are now in a decline due to cost, lack of reader support, and expansion of the internet. Does that mean that we do not need a local news outlet? Far from it.

As the president of a small nonprofit advocating for the expansion of programs and information to seniors, I am very much aware of the need for community publications. When Helping Seniors was founded in 2011, we realized that the public needed to be better informed about the importance of senior services, especially in a community with so many seniors. We have come a long way in community awareness, but still have work to do to ensure all understand how a united community can support funding and information for services vital to the people of Brevard County.

With the decline of government financial aid, the non support of United Way, and the inability of many to donate to nonprofit operations, it will be inevitable that needed programs serving elders will be diminished. This reduction of services will impact many seniors living on fixed incomes. The State of Florida currently has 64,000 seniors on waiting lists for services to help them with activities of daily living such as meal preparation, bathing or toileting, household cleaning, and transportation, activities that most of us can do without assistance.

Recently I had a call from a lady who had fractured her leg, then fell and re-fractured it. Luckily she had a spouse who could help her, but what would happen if he fell (as he was also frail) and could not assist her? The woman could not walk, bathe, or go to the bathroom by herself. Fortunately the family had financial resources to pay for aid, so we helped them develop a plan to line up those services should they be needed. I can assure you that there are many living in our community who cannot make such plans, nor are there any financial services available to fund such emergencies.

While we do have some government programs that will provide the services described above, they are facing cuts in both state and federal budgets. Legislators have mainly been able to forestall them. But what if state and federal funds are cut off, as happened to local charities two years ago when our Commissioners eliminated county support

for nonprofits (saving only \$500,000 in a budget of \$1.2 billion)? Any loss of already minimal services when you are living on a fixed income of \$950 a month is horrendous.

I have talked to many seniors, trying to find them affordable housing, dental help, medical help...you name it. So many times I have asked myself what has caused all this, and I assure you it is not because these people do not want to work. When you are sick, hurting, and of a certain age, there are many things you can not do. This I know from my own medical problems.

A senior endowment managed correctly and used only when necessary can initially assist many in need. Will it help all? No, but it will be a good start in the right direction. Though it will take time to fund the endowment, we have many who will help and perhaps your visual inspection of its growth will cause your support. Together we can make a difference and cause others to read local newspapers and magazines. §

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