

Volunteers Rack Up Nearly 100,000 Hours Serving Others

by PAT SEAMAN

Who says people in today's modern and busy world don't care about the older folks anymore?

Well, according to local statistics and proven results, that statement certainly does not hold true for the 320 volunteers for The Lebanon County Area Agency On Aging who recently devoted approximately 94,500 hours to helping senior citizens in various aspects of their lives.

The duties they performed include delivering warm meals to hundreds of seniors through the Meals On Wheels Program, assisting a large number of people over age 65 in choosing a Medicare insurance plan that meets their specific needs through the APPRISE Program, which is a health-insurance counseling program; and, aiding many others with everything from helping to file their income taxes to filling out their property tax or rent rebate forms.

According to Michelle Long, volunteer coordinator at the Agency, the majority of these tasks are ac-



Carol, a volunteer with APPRISE, enters clients' data into a computer so that she can assist them in selecting the proper Medicare or prescription plan at a future session.

complished by trained volunteers. "There is no way we could do all of this without the volunteers," she said, adding that all the volunteers are trained to fulfill these specific duties.

every Wednesday," said Long. "Even during the winter months, he came every week."

Will said he feels that he benefits as much as those receiving the meals. "I was fortunate enough to retire early and felt that I should give back to the community," he said, adding that he also delivers meals for the Harrisburg Meals On Wheels Program.

He said he enjoys meeting the people and knows that they are often looking for him and waiting for his arrival, not just for the food, but to be able to talk to someone. "Sometimes they're just happy to just give a 'hey' to someone," he noted.

"You really get to know these people and form a bond with them," added Long. "They (the volunteers) often hate to give it up."

Carol, a volunteer with the APPRISE Program, is a perfect example of that. A retired registered nurse with 43 years of service, she assists people with a variety of issues that include choosing the proper Medicare insurance plan, prescription plan and other medical-related and financial assistance programs that are available to them. Recently, while entering medical information into the computer system, she said, "I usually volunteer a minimum of anywhere from three hours a week up to 20 hours."

While Carol was busy in one office area, Kem was assisting a Lebanon County couple narrow down all the prescription-plan options available to them in another room. "I can't make the decision for them" explained Kem, "But I can provide the information that is available so they can make a decision that is best for their needs."

There are other volunteer opportunities available at the Center as well. For instance, the agency often needs people to set up chairs, serve food, and assist with crafts or various duties.

Although they have a large group of volunteers, they can always use more, according to Long. She said they do occasionally use volunteers to drive folks to doctors' appointments located outside of Lebanon County. The Lebanon County Transit System transports within Lebanon County, but sometimes people have to go to Hershey, Lancaster or other areas to see specialists, so "we do have volunteers who can drive them," she mentioned.

Glowacki emphasized that, "The volunteers are the heartbeat of APPRISE, we couldn't continue without them." She noted that sessions are by appointment only and they usually serve about 1100 annually.

Besides the Lebanon Senior Center, there are five other centers in the county, including Annville, Palmyra, Northern Lebanon, and Myerstown. Although each center has its own director, according to Long, each has many volunteers who assist with various programs and functions at those locations.

"We have many volunteers doing many things," Long said adding, however, that they are always looking for more. "We need a driver for one route in Palmyra right now," she said.

"We're definitely going to need more volunteers to keep up with the growth," she said. "The baby boomers are turning 65 in droves," she added, "And its important that we're able to continue these functions."

Along with qualified representatives from the state, Lee Glowacki, Aging Care Manager II and APPRISE Coordinator, handles most of the training duties for volunteers who will be assisting folks with their Medicare-related issues; while trainers from AARP, offer the training for completing tax forms and other tax-related issues. Long performs the training duties for the Meals On Wheels Program, which began in 1972. She said she usually goes with them the first time to familiarize them with the routes and the people.

Long explained that the amount of time volunteers spend there varies from one person to another. "Some volunteers come every day while others may work once a week or once a month," she said and added "It's whatever their schedules will allow."

For instance, Will, a volunteer from Harrisburg, has been delivering meals to Lebanon-area residents for about a year. "He drives down from Harrisburg

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One program on the horizon that is still in the "idea" stage would be to have volunteers that go into homes of senior citizens just to visit or socialize. However, there are many liability issues regarding that notion, so it is on hold at the moment. Long mentioned, though, that they do have people who call older people who live alone just as a safety measure to check on their well being. She said, "We just want to make sure they are okay."

Anyone wishing to serve as a volunteer or wanting more information on the APPRISE program may call Michelle Long at 717- 273-9262 or email her at mlong@lebcnty.org.