

The News Connection

News you can use from The Senior Connection

Winter 2011

Articles In This Issue

- Message from The Executive Director — Page 1
An Expression Of Gratitude, and Accomplishments — Page 2
Goals And Challenges — Page 3
Don't Let The Weather Prevent You From Getting Groceries — Pages 4 and 5
A Message From The Co-Presidents — Page 5
An Interview With Harriett Platt & Florence Golden — Page 6 and 7
Our Mission, Contact Information and a list of Staff and Board of Directors – Page 8

A Message From The Executive Director



Sue Dolins
Executive
Director

This is proving to be an extraordinary year in the life of The Senior Connection. As the Founding Executive Director of one of the two parent agencies that merged in 2003 to become The Senior Connection, I cannot be more proud of our reputation as a viable and vital component of senior services in Montgomery County. I began with recruiting my first volunteer over 16 years ago, and I cannot remember a year with more to talk about than this year.

I believe that much of our success is based on the relationships cultivated over many years of being in the field of Aging Services. These highly valued relationships are the hallmark of how we continue to grow and forge new initiatives. We have been busy with a number of new projects and we had many accomplishments in spite of the uncertainty of the economic reality that surrounded us. I am the proud team leader of a devoted and capable group of staff members; and our services are provided by a fabulous cadre of volunteers, who generously give of their time and talent and who (short of a little gas reimbursement) do this out of the goodness of their hearts. The Senior Connection is blessed to have a Board of Directors which ensures that this program not only continues to do great work, but is preparing the organization to continue beyond my time as its director. The good work of the volunteers continues only as a result of the generosity of the people and organizations that believe and help fund its efforts. Lastly, in spite of challenges we face each day, we look forward to the next steps in this incredible journey of serving seniors in Montgomery County.

Following this letter, I want to outline my expressions of gratitude for the support that this organization receives, the major accomplishments for this year, the goals for the remainder of 2011 and the challenges that we face going forward.

An Expression of Gratitude

It takes a lot of individuals and organizations to sustain and succeed in any nonprofit endeavor. The Senior Connection is certainly no exception to that rule and while I want to thank them all, there are far too many individuals, agencies and donors to list each one. I do wish to send my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following:

A big **THANK YOU** To:

- My beloved staff people
- The wonderful volunteers
- The Board of Directors
- Our friends and referral sources
- Donors, Foundations and Montgomery County Government



Accomplishments

Major Accomplishments:

- Recruited 80 new volunteers, who were trained and recognized for their work
- Increased volunteer efforts for this year by over 13% percent over last year
- Launched new website
- Implemented social networking activities on Facebook and Twitter
- Contacted 64 congregations and increased the number of congregations involved in our efforts from 53 to 65
- Explored the option of expanding services to Gaithersburg and Germantown, which resulted in a partnership with Gaithersburg HELP and Germantown HELP to carry out the expansion efforts
- Featured on three TV program interviews, one article in the Washington Post, a featured article in the November issue of *The Beacon Newspaper* and an article regarding the Gaithersburg/Germantown expansion in the January 26th issue of the *Gazette Newspaper*
- Updated marketing materials and display board as a result of Pro Bono volunteer program
- Released two issues of the newsletter after a three-year break in publishing
- Involved Board of Directors in training and social engagement opportunities which resulted in a significantly more enthusiastic level of commitment from board members
- Applied for and received the Montgomery County contract for managing the Shoppers Program, previously managed by the American Red Cross
- Planned fundraising activities for the year
- Implemented employee health benefits for the first time in the history of the organization
- Received very positive results from the annual evaluation survey. You may see the results by visiting our website at www.seniorconnectionmc.org and clicking on the Evaluation link on the Volunteer/Become a Volunteer tab or by calling the office. We will be happy to mail you a copy

Goals and Challenges

Goals for FY 2011:

- Continue to recruit, train and recognize volunteers
- Fully support the new staff person hired to manage the Shoppers Program
- Establish an event that will provide opportunities for fundraising, volunteer recruitment, education and building community
- Look at new ways to recognize the volunteers for the wonderful work they do
- Continue our outreach efforts and work closely with neighborhood associations with the possibility of creating more “Village” type approaches to “Aging in Community”
- Identify funding opportunities to help sustain the ongoing efforts of providing free services to Montgomery County seniors


Challenges going forward:

- Recruiting enough volunteers to keep pace with the increasing demand for services
- Integrating the newly acquired Shoppers Program into the culture of The Senior Connection, without losing sight of its origins and the contributions that program has made throughout its history
- With increased demand we will have an increased work load, so the current staff is dangerously close to being overburdened. One approach we might pursue is to ask for funding of additional staff through applications to Foundations; however, an even bigger challenge we face is outgrowing the office space available to us
- We are very blessed to have modest offices at very little cost to the bottom line. Every staff member now has a desk, phone, computer and the means to do their assigned tasks, but we are at capacity. We have volunteers willing to come in and help with the coordination efforts, but we do not have a vacant desk and computer to allow that to happen. While we have volunteers working from home on certain projects, we really need additional help in the office managing the phones and database. We stagger volunteer office help whenever possible, but the workload is enough for another full-time team member at least, which brings us to the next challenge
- Developing fundraising goals and plans adequate to fund the current structure with an eye towards creating new initiatives should the opportunity become available. For instance we have a partnership with Burning Tree Village as part of the Aging in Place Village approach to care giving. We would welcome more neighborhoods to follow that model (it really works) and we are poised to help, but the ability to coordinate services from our office as we do now with Burning Tree Village is not likely with the current structure
- Lastly, as founding director, I am looking forward to retiring in four - five years. I have drafted a succession plan and the board now has the challenge to look at that plan and have the benefit package in place that will make this position attractive to someone willing and able to carry The Senior Connection forward

With joy and gratitude,

Sue Dollins
Executive Director





Don't Let The Weather Prevent You From Getting Groceries

Most people take for granted their ability to go to the local grocery store when they need food and supplies. When snow, ice or power outages threaten, we somehow get to the store, stand in line and upon returning home, we prepare to settle in for the duration. For some individuals...due to illness, surgery, an injury or a chronic health problem...grocery shopping is difficult regardless of the weather. These and other circumstances can make walking up and down the supermarket aisles feel like a marathon. Even with a motorized cart, lifting and toting the bags of groceries can be overwhelming. Luckily, a variety of community resources are available.

First, check your local supermarket. Some stores deliver to homes in the surrounding community. Residents, in most parts of Montgomery County, can also do their grocery shopping online (with home delivery) through local internet services and through companies like Schwann's and other online specialty stores (food only). Home health agencies and homemaker/chore services provide aides to help with almost any aspect of shopping and cooking – preparing the order, going to the store or just providing an escort, putting the groceries away and meal preparation. Also, a growing number of personal shoppers will go to the grocery store and do other errands.

Montgomery County also has a handful of not-for-profit organizations that help seniors shop for the food and other items they need to stay healthy and independent. Each has its own eligibility criteria. Some have fees while others are free.

The Senior Connection is one of the nonprofits providing volunteers to shop for seniors living in lower Montgomery County. The volunteer match is based on finding a volunteer living near your home; therefore, you may be matched right away, or you may be added to a waiting list. In addition to its regular volunteer services, The Senior Connection has the Montgomery County "Shoppers Program". To be eligible for this program you must be 60 + years of age, disabled, must meet the low income requirement, and have no one in the home available to do the shopping. For Shoppers Program information call 301 942-1049 or e-mail greg.muncill@seniorconnectionmc.org.

Top Banana Home Delivered Groceries, is an organization established 29 years ago. It operates from its own storehouse and carries the full variety of name brand products, frozen goods, fresh meats, produce, dairy as well as home, personal and pet supplies. The program's main focus is serving seniors but anyone, regardless of age or income, can get assistance. Orders are placed by telephone and are delivered to the customer's kitchen. Drivers will even unpack the bags and loosen stubborn jar lids when needed. Groceries are competitively priced and a low service fee is based on ability to pay (\$15 down to \$5 per delivery). For a Storehouse Product Guide or information call 301-372-3663 or visit www.topbananagroceries.org.

Food and Friends provide meals, groceries and nutrition counseling to people who have a qualifying primary illness, compromised nutritional status and a limited ability to prepare meals. There are no requirements for income or insurance coverage. Food and service is entirely free. Groceries are delivered weekly or every-other-week to people who live outside the freshly-prepared meals delivery area, as long as they are healthy enough to prepare their own meals. Recipients get two bags of non-perishable groceries, frozen soups, entrees and liquid nutritional supplements. Meals, including 11 special diets, are delivered to clients' homes and include food for breakfast, lunch and dinner along with liquid nutritional supplements. Call 202 269-2277 or visit www.foodandfriends.org.



Jewish Social Service Agency’s (JSSA) Shoppers Program is another volunteer shopping service. On a regular basis, usually weekly, volunteers shop for groceries and other household items for frail elders. Some shoppers take their older friends to the store; others pick up a list and money and return with groceries and change. To receive service, call the JSSA intake line at 301 816-2633 to set up a social work assessment. The service is free, but there is a sliding scale fee for the assessment.

For people who want prepared meals, most parts of Montgomery County are also served by a local home-delivered meals program (Meals-on-Wheels). Monday through Friday, program volunteers bring at least two cooked meals, one hot and one cold, to each recipient. Fees and eligibility vary from program to program. For a complete list and contact information for the meals-on-wheels programs call Montgomery County’s Senior Nutrition Program at 240-777-3810 or email melanie.polk@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Phyllis Courlander,
Top Banana Home Delivered Groceries



A Message From The Co-Presidents

We wish to express our many, many thanks to the community, staff and volunteers from the entire Board of Directors. Without your dedication and support we could not provide the high quality escorted transportation, shopping assistance and friendly visitor services to Montgomery County seniors.

In addition to the ongoing oversight of The Senior Connection, the Board has been quite active this year; creating several successful fundraising activities, implementing a new website, and offering employee health benefits to the staff for the first time in its history.

Board members have participated in training and social engagement opportunities, which have re-energized Board members’ commitment, and have attracted several new talented and dedicated members.

Our challenge for the future is to ensure the financial and organizational health of the Senior Connection. To that end we will seek to establish annual fundraising goals, work to create new community partnerships and ensure that our organizational structure is strong and effective.

To help us achieve our goals, we are seeking talented individuals to work with the Board members on various committees. If you are interested in any of the following committees, please contact the office at 301 962-0820 or e-mail: seniorconnectionmc@gmail.com

- o Fundraising and Event Planning
- o Volunteer Recognition and Training
- o Public Relations

With our sincere appreciation,

Joanne Balkovich
Steve Hage



Spotlight on a Special Care Receiver and Volunteer Team: Harriett Platt, and Florence Golden (November 22, 2010)

By: Marcia Custer

We began the interview with Florence Golden



Why did you first seek help from The Senior Connection (TSC)?

two years ago, after my husband died, I got sick and was told not to drive any longer. A neighbor, who is a Senior Connection volunteer, suggested I call this organization for help to get me to doctor appointments, the store and other places.

Tell me about your volunteer, Harriett Platt.

She is always there when I need her; never questioning anything, never challenging, and she is a good listener. She is my pal and confidant.

How has TSC made your life easier?

With Harriett's help, I always know there is someone who can get me to the grocery store, to medical appointments, to social events. She is my special companion. When my paper is lying outside my door for awhile, friends call Harriett to check up on me. It's a good feeling.

What is the best thing about TSC for you? They are there for me when I need help.

Will you tell me about yourself? I am 85 years old and was married for 59 years. I have two daughters and six granddaughters. I am a survivor of Auschwitz where I lived with my two sisters for 8 months. What helped me remain sane was keeping my sense of humor. I was liberated in May 1945 and went first to Denmark where they cleaned me up and gave me a nightgown, coat and wooden clogs. Then I was sent to Sweden where I lived in a movie theater with other survivors. I was quarantined there for 15 days. I was given a new coat, food, medical care. I got a job and worked in a factory. Everyone was so kind. I have the fondest memories from those days in Sweden. I moved in with a group of other survivors in an apartment. I came to the US in 1947 instead of going back to my native country, Czechoslovakia. I knew that my family was killed the day I arrived at Auschwitz so I had nothing to go home for. I was helped by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to locate my mother's sister, Aunt Honey, and her husband in New York City. They adopted me and my two sisters. She was a very giving person.

I met my husband, Harold, a few months after arriving in the US. He was in the Air Force. We married in 1949. My sister moved to Washington, DC and we followed her here. We opened a pizza restaurant with my brother-in-law. We did very well until the 1968 race riots forced us to close our business. Then I worked with my husband in an insurance business, at the Hebrew Home, and at a beauty shop. I had a variety of other jobs to support my family especially after we went out of business.

I speak to students in middle school about what we went through during the war. I tell them to be tolerant of our differences. The world will be a better place if we all care for each other. I tell them what the Germans did to us. It took me a long time to begin to talk about the war years.



Interview with Florence (continued)

What made it possible for you to survive?

I care about helping others, and I am upbeat. Even in the cattle cars, we learned how to survive, where to sit in the cars, how to protect ourselves and to care for each other.

I am a determined person which is another reason for my survival. When I feel low, I force myself to get up and do something for others such as bake a cake or make a pot of soup, and then give it away. It lifts my spirits.

Harriett said, “She uses her hands to share her heart”.

The interview continued with Harriett Platt.

Harriett, when and why did you begin volunteering with TSC?

My husband started volunteering with them first and when I retired, I began volunteering. That was eight years ago. One of my first care receivers was my daughter’s third grade teacher.

At the beginning I helped different people. I tried to volunteer each week. I was “on call” which meant I would go anywhere, if I was available. I helped an Indian lady for four years. For about five years, I had four care receivers at the same time. When they died, I was down to two and now I volunteer exclusively with Florence. I want to be available to her whenever I can.

Florence is amazing. Every day I learn from her about life, family, giving to others. We are “soul mates”. When Florence wants to shop, we browse through the stores. We move slowly. Florence said, “Harriet is patient and that keeps me calm.”

What has been the most satisfying part of volunteering?

I am carrying on my parents’ legacy of contributing to my community. When I retired I found that serving older adults was the most satisfying way to be able to share my abilities. I take them places they need to go. By volunteering, I am setting an example for my children and grandchildren. My grandson has been on volunteer assignments with my husband.

What have you learned about yourself?

I’ve learned more about who I am as a person in a difference capacity than my former professional life.

What do you want to tell those who are considering volunteering?

This is an easy way to spend time with those who have more experience than you do and who have stories to share. You will learn a lot about people. I’m grateful that TSC is here for the seniors of our community and as long as I can keep going I will volunteer. We must increase the number of volunteers to assure that the help will be there when we are no longer driving. There are many places in the Jewish and secular community where I volunteer now that I have retired but the Senior Connection is a particularly good place to have an impact on someone who needs help. I learn so much from them as they share their life history and experiences, and they are so grateful for a good, listening ear, and for the comfort we provide as they age.



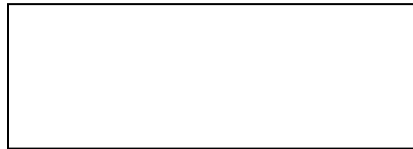


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www.seniorconnectionmc.org

Follow us on **Twitter** at:
Marcia4Seniors

Visit us on **Facebook** at:
The Senior Connection of
Montgomery County, Inc.

Our Mission:

The Senior Connection provides mobility by linking older adults to services and resources so they can live as independently as possible and remain integral members of the community.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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