

When you're a senior citizen is a case of where you sit

By Diane Hofness
special writer

Being informed about senior citizen discounts and activities is no easy task. "I don't know a damn thing about senior citizen discounts or programs," said Farmington Hills resident Alen McLellan, 74.

Inconsistent age requirements about who is a senior citizen are perhaps part of the reason why people like McLellan are uninformed.

Whether or not someone is a senior citizen depends on where he or she is sitting. In Farmington's Burger Chef, a 55-year-old gets a discount. At Wendy's, it's 60. At Elias Brothers, it's 62. At McDonald's a person just has to be retired.

To get Social Security benefits, the age is 65.

An all-you-have-to-do-is-ask policy is

another reason why senior citizens may not know about discounts available to them. Golden Platter Restaurant owner Bob Sakellaris maintains that it's better to let senior citizens ask for their 10 percent discount, rather than asking people if they are senior citizens. "If you ask them, they get offended," he explained.

Asking can pay off, said Elva Erlich, 60. "People don't tell you (about discounts). I need every penny I've got to get by these days. I always ask for a discount."

Piecemeal availability of information rather than a comprehensive handbook for growing old in Farmington is another reason why seniors may be uninformed.

"If you don't read the newspapers or write to the government, you don't know what's happening. Policies are changing all the time," said Erlich's

sister, Sandra Gammann, 82.

"There's already too much daily traffic to keep track of," said McLellan.

An Oakland County senior citizen discount directory does exist. It lists area merchants who give discounts to senior citizens. But "so many of the merchants in the Farmington area don't participate," said Fanny Hill, site manager of nutrition for Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency. OLHSA is a non-profit, government-subsidized organization with programs for senior citizens.

"Possibly it's that (merchants) haven't been approached. It might be that they said no." It is the responsibility of

local senior citizens to solicit merchant participation in the directory, she said. "I haven't been approached," said Bill Stevens, Farmington Hills Auto Parts employee. "We give discounts anywhere from 10 to 40 percent for senior citizens."

Besides the discount directory, there is an activity center for senior citizens. Sometimes called The Gathering Place, the Mercy Center offers activities such as dancing, swimming and bingo. But "there is no comprehensive list of the Center's offerings because we find it important that we're about to explain some services to people," said Maggie Loras, senior adult specialist.

Farmington Observer

(USPS 187-840)
Published every Monday and Thursday by Observer & Excelsior Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Second-class postage paid at Livonia, MI 48151. Address all mail (subscription change of address, Form 3569) to P.O. Box 2426, Livonia, MI 48151. Telephone 591-0500.

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Newsstand per copy 25¢
Carrier monthly \$1.50

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