

Seniors express their power

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

About 600 senior citizens got plenty of advice and fellowship Tuesday when they converged on the Southfield Civic Center for the 9th Annual Oakland County Senior Power Day.

But some also received a gentle tongue-lashing from a county commissioner for not being organized enough to support their economic interests.

"Where were you," asked commissioner Dennis M. Aaron, D-Oak Park, "when we (the county board) discussed this issue and the county's contribution?"

Aaron's question came during a public hearing at which senior citizens — or those working with them — commented about issues they were concerned about.

Roselee Scoler of West Bloomfield asked about public transportation, wondering, among other things, about its future in Oakland County.

Aaron, flanked by other county commissioners who generally nodded in agreement, said Oakland is a major contributor to SMART, the area's mass transit system with

links to many communities in south-east Michigan.

Aaron said the county's contribution could have been more — and its demand for services more specific — if some of the senior citizens at the hearing also showed up at the county meetings at which SMART was discussed.

"MEETING LIKE THIS (at Senior Power Day) is fine," Aaron gently admonished. "But you've got to mobilize more often. You've got to tell public officials — like us — what you need."

During another part of the hearing, Aaron also advised senior citizens to "keep hounding your representatives in Washington."

He offered that advice after Henry Faigin of Southfield asked how senior citizens — living on insufficient fixed incomes — can protect themselves against catastrophic illnesses. "You can save all your life," said Faigin, "only to be wiped out by a major accident or illness."

Other senior citizens nodded, acknowledging that such a fear is all too real.

National health care, or some kind of protection against catastrophic illnesses, must be addressed by the federal government, Aaron said. And the feds, he said, won't move unless prodded.

While Aaron was gentle with his comments, Louis Kondur, leader of a senior citizens group in West Bloomfield, didn't hold back. "Seniors just aren't aware of issues that affect them," Kondur said.

His advice was for senior citizens to get more informed and organized so they can make public officials aware of their concerns — and their voting power.



Bernice Hacker, left, a volunteer from the Alzheimer's Association office in Southfield, confers with Kay Loveland, owner of Loveland's Foster Care Center in Bloomfield Hills.

gional director of the Deaf, Hearing & Speech Center in Detroit, she was able to express her concerns.

In other settings, however, it's more difficult, if not impossible.

"At the doctor's office, for example, it's difficult to get adequate answers to basic questions," Keuping said through Booth. "We want to know the effects of a medicine or why surgery is needed. But too often seniors can't get answers because nobody understands sign language."

Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, also advised senior citizens to mobilize and use their

life experiences to achieve goals.

That was after Alexander Georgoff of Commerce Township complained about the rent at his mobile home park going up 9 percent in a single year, and 16 percent over three years.

"Some seniors have to move out" because they can't afford the rent hike, he said.

Michigan doesn't have legislation that effectively imposes rent controls, said Pernick. But that shouldn't keep senior citizens, or others, from banding together to address their concerns as a group.

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