

# Variety is the key in keeping seniors busy

Like many other groups, senior citizens have a variety of interests and needs to be fulfilled. And the senior citizen facility at Mercy Center has developed a list of activities to meet those diverse needs. Most of what the senior adult program offers is either free or at a minimal charge.

The senior center nutrition program probably reaches more people on a daily basis than any other aspect of the program. The Oakland Livingstone Human Service Agency (OLHSA) ad-

ministrates the federally funded program which serves approximately 100 hot, nutritionally balanced lunches at the center every weekday.

According to nutrition manager Fanny Hill, the seniors really appreciate the opportunity to get a hot meal at minimum cost. In addition, "it's very precious to the people — the companionship," she says.

The nutrition program also delivers 65 daily hot lunches to seniors who are isolated, low-income and unable to get to the center. "Some people are afraid to turn on a burner for fear they'll forget to turn it off," says Hill. This service helps such people continue to take care of themselves instead of having to move into a nursing home.

The "home chore program" also aims to help older adults continue to live independently, according to one of its coordinators, Donna Spenseller. Chore workers mow lawns, shovel snow, paint and wash windows. Low-income individuals receive priority for this free service, although people may make a contribution. A staff handyman can also make minor repairs such as fixing leaky faucets.

The "outreach program" is Mary DiManno's area of responsibility. She and the center staff seek to "provide information . . . about the community human service agencies . . . capable of resolving the other person's needs."

"ADVOCACY is a big part of our role," says DiManno, whose outreach workers try especially to locate isolated and hard-to-reach seniors and help them take advantage of the opportuni-

ties and services available to them. These include senior adult cab service, home-delivered meals, heating/energy assistance, home chores, food baskets, legal aid, telephone reassurance and grocery shopping. Getting these people "back into the mainstream of independent living" is the goal.

The home chore and outreach programs are partially funded through Area Agency on Aging I-B.

DiManno is also in charge of a senior food co-op which operates twice a month. Each senior pays a dollar membership and agrees to help occasionally with bagging and distribution. In return, he or she receives a bag of fresh fruit and vegetables at about half price.

Stella Murphy, 70, serves as volunteer trip coordinator. Murphy has arranged excursions to Grand Rapids and Frankenmuth, as well as longer trips to the Canary Islands and Spain. Destinations for 1983 include Florida and Alaska, as well as a steamboat cruise on the "Mississippi Queen."

For about a dozen seniors, the "Stroke Club" has probably been the most valuable aspect of their involvement in the senior adult program. Membership is open to anyone who has had a stroke, regardless of age. Several members are in their 40's.

The group's unofficial president, Ken Schwartz, 63, says he enjoys the chance to "meet people who are much in the same boat I am." He feels however, that it's important for people who've had strokes to "get to the point of not feeling sorry for themselves." He recommends, "Quit asking someone else to do it if you can learn to do it yourself." After his own stroke, he had to teach himself to write left-handed.

CATHY Carrier, club coordinator, calls its members "positive people" who provide one another with a "good support system which makes them determined to do better."

The big thing, Carrier says, is gradually regaining use of body parts affected by the stroke. Water therapy in the pool plays a major role in this rehabilitation. Being underwater lessens the effect of gravity, according to registered physical therapist Lily Strakys, whose time and expertise are donated by the West Bloomfield satellite of Henry Ford Hospital.

"Once they get in the water, they start moving and smiling again," senior adult lifeguard Dorothy Gatchell said.

Through acceptance and encouragement by the group, club members learn to accept themselves and their own special situation. The group is so enthusiastic about its members' progress, that it has been visiting nursing homes to encourage others to start their own stroke clubs.

The senior adult program at Mercy Center offers other services, such as monthly blood pressure tests, speakers from various health organizations, a social worker for psychological counseling, a monthly visit by a lawyer offering free legal advice, tax help at "tax time" from members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and a monthly movie.

## Seniors help others

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pecially in bad economic times when fewer volunteers seem to be coming out.

Whether they're involved in the Senior Olympics, the food co-op, or a choir, exercise or dance group, Lou Nissle, 87, and his wife Florence, 75, are always busy and on the go.

Lou says that the exercise program has been a life-saver for his wife, who has had medical problems for years.

"Our grandchildren are proud of us (for being so active)," says Florence, "because we have (elderly) relatives who just sit."

The Nissles lost everything they owned in a fire in December, 1981, but they picked up the pieces and started again.

"Our children want us to be happy and have friends around us," says Lou Nissle, 84, and the senior center has helped in both areas, she says. Since retiring and starting to come to the center, as well as being very active

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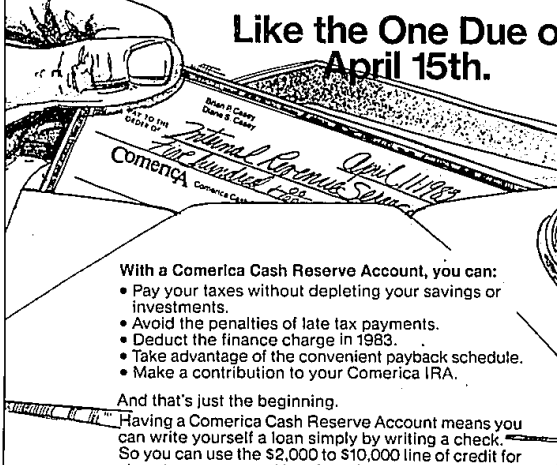
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