



Senior Sentinel

A newsletter published by the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners:
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May is Older Americans Month
"Making Choices for a Healthier Future"

Since Older Americans Month was established by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, the month of May has been designated as a time to officially acknowledge the contributions of older persons to the strength and vitality of our county. Locally, the Hillsborough County Department of Aging Services has partnered with municipalities and organizations to host various events to celebrate with the seniors in our community. Please join us at the festivities!

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Senior Home Ownership Protection Program



The Senior Home Ownership Protection Program (SHOPP) is part of the Senior Advocacy Unit at Bay Area Legal Services, whose mission is to promote human dignity, self determination and quality of life for seniors aged 60 and over by empowering them through better access to the law.

SHOPP focuses on educating seniors and providing legal representation involving foreclosure

See **SHOPP** on page 3

Ruskin Senior Center Weaving Project

In January 2007, participants at the Ruskin Senior Center enjoyed a visit from the Sandy Creek Weavers of North Carolina and the installation of a 200-year-old loom. The Weavers were in residence to teach the seniors how to weave, as part of the Hillsborough County Art Council's unique project, "Weaving Words: Past and Present."

Using the 200-year-old antique floor loom, seniors learned how to weave and created two beautiful, nine-foot long tapestries. Their poetry, thoughts, words, phrases, and remembrances were written on fabric



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Florida BRITE Project Offers Hope & Help

The Florida BRITE project is a pilot program aimed at addressing Florida's need for substance abuse and mental health treatment for older adults. BRITE stands for **B**Rief **I**ntervention and **T**reatment for **E**lders. BRITE provides innovative outreach and intervention services designed to identify and serve people aged 60 and older who may be having problems related to alcohol, prescription drugs, over-the-counter medication, illicit drug use, depression, or suicide risk.

The program provides wellness education, screening, brief intervention, support, and referral. All services are private, confidential, and are offered at no cost to the person served or to their families. The program operates with Federal and State funds and is administered through



The Centre for Women in Tampa.

The BRITE specialist for Hillsborough County, Grace Terry, MSW, has more than 25 years of experience as a mental health professional and substance abuse counselor. She also has extensive experience in working with seniors. According to Terry, "The great thing about the BRITE program is that I can go to the senior's home, to senior centers, assisted living facilities, or any other setting where the senior is comfortable. I can go to them; they don't have to come to me."

Treatment for depression and substance abuse works. For more information about the BRITE program, contact **The Centre for Women at (813) 251-8437 ext. 272.**

Did you know...

- In Florida, an estimated 785,000 people aged 65 and older have an emotional or mental health problem that needs professional attention; the most common problems are depression or anxiety, yet very few older adults receive professional treatment to help cope with these issues.
- Depressed individuals use three times as much health care, their medical costs are twice as high, and their death rate

after a heart attack is three times higher than persons not suffering from depression.

- The suicide rate for older persons is 50 percent higher than for all other age groups.
- Depression, grief, loneliness, and boredom frequently trigger abuse of alcohol, the primary substance of abuse among older adults.

RSVP Volunteers Have Heart

"Flo" has been volunteering with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) since she moved to Florida, nearly 30 years ago. Every Wednesday, Flo and her friends volunteer their time to help with mass mailings and other tasks for the Hillsborough County Department of Aging Services.

Since 1972, RSVP has been helping citizens over 55 years of age to give back to the community. Volunteers can choose from more than 100 non-profit organizations, including MOSI, Lowry Park Zoo, St. Joseph's Hospital, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, Meals on Wheels, and Nativity Food Bank.



Flo (center) and her RSVP friends on Valentine's Day, the day after Flo celebrated her 103rd birthday.

RSVP is always looking for new volunteers. As a volunteer, you can select the position that is right for you, depending on your interests, skills, and geographical area. RSVP will then facilitate your volunteer placement.

In addition to feeling a sense of accomplishment, volunteering benefits include coverage while traveling to and from assignments under RSVP's Supplemental Accident and Liability Insurance. To eligible volunteers, RSVP may also provide a limited travel and meal allowance to help defray expenses.

Currently, 953 people volunteer with RSVP, contributing a combined 132,995 hours every year.

For more information about volunteering with RSVP, call (813) 272-5031.

SHOPP Serves As Advocate for Seniors

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defense and affirmative lawsuits in State and Federal Court. Along with Chapter 13 bankruptcies, SHOPP assists clients with litigation, negotiated settlements, forbearance and/or financial workouts, and reverse mortgages. Since the inception of the program, SHOPP has helped more than 100 seniors retain ownership of their homes and has saved millions of dollars in home equity.

One of the greatest threats to seniors in maintaining ownership of their homes comes from predatory lending and home repair/home solicitation scams. These scams target the most vulnerable seniors, including low-income

and physically and mentally frail seniors. By directly helping seniors save their homes, SHOPP also helps to preserve our neighborhoods.

Recently, SHOPP has seen a trend involving foreclosure rescue scams where private investors and/or finance companies “skim” the equity from seniors’ homes, under the pretence of saving the homeowner from foreclosure. In most cases, seniors think that they are refinancing and deed their homes to an individual or company, then lease the property back. The individual or company then tries to evict the senior. In some cases, seniors’ mortgages on the property are never even paid off.

For more information on SHOPP, contact Bay Area Legal Services at (813) 232-1222, or visit www.bals.org.

Tapestry Now On Display

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strips and then woven into the “Aspects of Aging” tapestry, along with eyeglasses, pill bottles, shells, handmade lace, and other mementos. Some seniors who had made textiles before, recalled their past experiences with crocheting, knitting or sewing. Many of the seniors reminisced about the objects that they brought in and lovingly wove into the fabric.

The “Aspects of Aging” tapestry is now on display at the Ruskin Senior Center. The second tapestry, which depicts Ruskin’s agricultural and fishing history, is now on display

at the South Shore Regional Library. Books containing the written words of the participants will be on display alongside both tapestries. This innovative project was videotaped and photographed for posterity.



Step Up, FL! For Healthy, Active Seniors

“Step Up, Florida - On Our Way to Healthy Living!” is a statewide initiative that promotes physical activity and healthy lifestyles for all Floridians. In February of 2007, the Hillsborough County Aging Services Department collaborated with the Florida Department of Health to motivate and educate Hillsborough County seniors on the importance of staying active.

Attendees enjoyed “Senior Friendly” group exercise classes that highlighted fitness programs available in the community from several fitness clubs, including Shapes, LA FITNESS, Curves and YMCA (Silver Sneakers). Seniors received lots of information, free T-shirts, and prizes for playing heart-healthy bingo. Seniors also enjoyed participating in a Tai Chi demonstration by Bob Elliott, who has studied Tai Chi for 20 years, and is the Director of the Office of Organizational Development for the Hillsborough County Health Department.



Aging Services also partnered with Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation & Conservation Department, WCFAAA, and United Healthcare/Wellquest to make the event dynamic, educational, and fun for seniors. The “Step Up, FL!” event was such a great success that it will be held again next year!



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Senior Sentinel

Bart Banks, Acting Director

We welcome your comments and letters to the editor.

Older Americans - Events During May Continued from Page 1

May 4

Seniors Day in the Park- Tampa Parks & Recreation is sponsoring a free festival celebrating Tampa's seniors. Takes place Friday, May 4, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., at McFarlane Park, 1700 N. MacDill Ave. in Tampa.

Approximately 2,000 seniors are expected to attend and enjoy free music, entertainment, dancing, arts and crafts, games, and a health fair with healthcare screenings.

Tampa Parks & Recreation at (813) 274-8615

May 11

Seniors' Prom- Hey, daddy-o, the Seniors' Prom will be held Friday, May 11, at the Brandon Recreation Center, 502 E. Sadie St., Brandon, FL 33510. Flash back to the 1950s and compete in the Twist, Hula-Hoop, and Costume Contests. Includes live music and hamburgers.

Approximately 2,000 seniors are expected to attend and enjoy free music, entertainment, dancing, arts and crafts, games, and a health fair with healthcare screenings.

County's Aging Services at (813) 272-6261

May 30

National Senior Health & Fitness Day- Hillsborough County Aging Services will host various fun exercise and nutrition education activities on May 30 at each of our seven Senior Centers.

County's Aging Services at (813) 272-6261

May 10

Annual Elderly Affairs Day- The Tampa Housing Authority is sponsoring a day of fun for seniors Thursday, May 10 at the J.L. Young Apartments, 8220 N. Florida Ave. in Tampa.

The event is kicked off by the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners through a proclamation officially recognizing Elderly Affairs Day. Activities include a health fair, live music, dancing, and prizes.

County's Aging Services at (813) 272-6261

May 24

Seniors' Painting Festival- Hillsborough County Aging Services and *The Senior Connection* are hosting the 30th Annual Seniors' Painting Festival at Lowry Park Zoo on Tuesday, May 24, starting at 9 a.m. The first 500 seniors will receive **free zoo admission**, and an additional 200 tickets will be available at a discounted rate. Artists 60 years of age and older can submit up to five original paintings, at \$4 per entry. Cash prizes up to \$100 will be awarded based on judging by Heather Spooner, Assistant Curator of Education at the Tampa Art Museum. Includes live entertainment and two animal encounters!

County's Aging Services at (813) 272-5160