

COMMISSION ON AGING

ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013

The Commission on Aging held regular monthly meetings, except in July and August 2012 and June 2013, and held an annual long-range planning meeting in May. Monthly reports were presented at most meetings by Weston's Director of Social Services Charlene Chiang-Hillman, the Director and Program Coordinator of the Weston Senior Activities Center Wendy Petty and Pamela Wilson, Weston's Dial-a-Ride driver Gordon Green, and the Commission's volunteer liaison to the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging (SWCAA) Meta Schroeter.

Over the summer 2012, thanks to the Commission's advocacy of its long-range planning goals, the special efforts of Gayle Weinstein and Center staff as well as the cooperation of the new Superintendent of Schools Colleen Palmer and others, the Center's facilities were expanded within Hurlbutt's South House. The invaluable new area included a generous hallway (which has allowed display of art works created in a popular art class with Keith Brooks), a substantial storage room, a large south-facing activities room (which looks out on a garden), and an all-purpose room/gymnasium. The new spaces were put to use as soon as they became available, including the classroom, which was repainted over the summer.

In late October, Hurricane Sandy caused damage and weeklong power outages in much of Weston, the third such extended outage in 15 months. The event led to what has become a periodic reevaluation of Weston's emergency preparedness procedures, including those especially focused on seniors and other potentially vulnerable residents. (Procedures, including CodeRed phone updates by the First Selectman, are typically coordinated by the Police and Emergency Management Team, which includes representatives of the schools, the Department of Social Services, the Westport Weston Health District, and the Weston Community Services Coalition with its Neighbor to Neighbor Emergency Care Network.)

As noted in the last few years, a number of seniors required social services and other support due to age-related isolation and general frailty. Also, as reported since the current economic downturn began, Social Services Director Charlene Chiang-Hillman said that as the year progressed she saw some seniors increasingly struggle with financial issues, particularly when their families moved in with them due to financial challenges of their own. To help alleviate some of their economic stress, nearly 100 senior households again took advantage of Weston's property tax relief programs designed for those on limited incomes.

As always throughout the year, Dial-a-Ride driver Gordon Green provided seniors with rides to and from medical appointments, the Senior Activities Center, senior lunches, and as time and scheduling allowed, to other venues in the local area. Gordon also served as driver for most of the Center's regional trips.

At the Weston Senior Activity Center, Wendy Petty and Pamela Wilson worked together closely to build on the warm responsive tone they had established at the Center during their first year. Their outreach to various community groups and individuals continued and led to another increase in senior participation and involvement of volunteers of all ages.

Ongoing Center activity and program offerings included current events discussions, strength and fitness training, two yoga classes, a walking club, Wii Bowling, Thursday film showings, craft activities, games, occasional health information and prevention clinics, the 'Lunch Bunch' program, and sessions, by appointment, with volunteer Meta Schroeter, a certified CHOICES (Connecticut's Health Insurance Outreach Program) counselor who provided assistance to Weston seniors needing help with their Medicare program options. Activity and program additions included beginner and intermediate Tai Chi classes, meditation, cooking classes, an art class (with an opportunity to display created works), bridge and backgammon lessons, Apple iPad training offered by Weston High School student volunteers, and summer trips, including one to a Broadway show.

Weekly Wednesday senior lunches were provided at the Norfield Church Parish Hall with each typically followed by musical entertainment or bingo (offered once per month). Weston's religious and community group volunteers, including members of the Norfield Congregational Church, The Emmanuel Episcopal Church, the St. Francis of Assisi Parish, and Newcomers and Neighbors all continued their long-standing tradition of donating time and resources in preparing and serving the meals. The tradition of a summer 'picnic' hosted by the Weston Historical Society also continued.

The "Re-Gifting" boutique, first organized during the holidays the previous year, was offered again; and Wendy and Pam celebrated the Center's volunteers by organizing the second Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in June.

The enhanced bi-monthly Center newsletter was mailed to Weston's seniors with extra copies made available at various in-town locations and on the Town's website. The email list of recipients of the newsletter grew exponentially and everyone on the list also received program reminders and other timely announcements by email throughout the year.

The Center continued to provide useful materials to the community, including a reference copy of the Commission's *Weston Senior Services and Resource Directory*, emergency preparedness information, agency brochures, and books, newspapers, and magazines.

The Friends of the Weston Senior Activities Center also had a productive year. Led by an executive committee (Nina Daniel, Woody Bliss, Bruce Missett, and Cynthia Williams), the organization's activities included hosting a party at the Center, organizing Weston's first Retirement Lifestyles Fair held at Norfield Parish Hall, and supporting the Alden Sherman Classic Car Show held at the Weston High School parking lot. This first major fundraising event, which took place in September, was conceived and spearheaded by Center Director Wendy Petty and her husband Jim and was made possible with the help of the Friends and

many individual volunteers from both inside and outside of Weston. The successful show netted a remarkable \$16,000 for the benefit of the Center. By the end of the calendar year, the Friends' had received total contributions of \$26,000.

During the year, as participation in Center activities grew, there was growing concern over the future of the Center facility within Hurlbutt's South House as well as with the inadequate number of designated parking spaces for Center use. As the fiscal year drew to a close, a new Global Facilities Committee had just been appointed and two professional studies of the needs of various town entities and the school system were getting underway. Much change is potentially at hand and the Commission will be closely monitoring emerging facility options with the hope of maximizing the opportunity for the Center's success as an ever-more-vital resource for senior residents.

Commission on Aging members included Helen R. de Keijzer, Chairman, Bruce Lorentzen, Vice Chairman, Laura Smits, Secretary, Peggy Anderson, Nina Daniel, and two new members, Don Gumaer and Margarita Garces-Shapiro, who filled vacancies created by the resignations of Terry Hulley and Nancy Hammerslough.

For their many contributions, the Commission thanks the staff of the Department of Social Services, Dial-a-Ride, Town Hall, the Weston Public Library, and the Weston schools, members of religious and community groups, including the Center's Friends, Meta Schoeter and many other individual volunteers, and most particularly Weston Senior Activities Center Director Wendy Petty and Program Coordinator Pamela Wilson.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen R. de Keijzer
Chairman, Commission on Aging