

## FOCUS ON

### Senior Services goes above and beyond for Gwinnett's older Americans

- May 1, 2014

Former President Jimmy Carter established May as Senior Citizens Month in 1980. The name has since been changed to Older Americans Month, but the tradition continues. Even earlier, in 1963, former President John F. Kennedy called attention to the plight of older Americans, about a third of whom were living in poverty. There were very few services available to help these financially strapped and medically fragile people live out their lives with dignity and security.

Things have changed for the better since then. The theme of this month's national celebration – *Safe Today, Healthy Tomorrow* – seeks to raise awareness of critical safety issues to help older Americans live longer, healthier lives.

Every year, older Americans seek medical treatment for at least six million unintentional injuries, which causes more than 30,000 deaths, according to the federal Administration for Community Living. Gwinnett County Senior Services is helping reduce those numbers by matching seniors and/or their caregivers with available services and agencies.

*"Gwinnett County Senior Services is a complicated machine that works seamlessly with the help of our hard-working employees, more than 300 supportive community partners, and hundreds of passionate volunteers,"* said Senior Services Manager Jamie Cramer. *"Gwinnett's senior population will only increase over the next decade and we are dedicated to making sure they receive the help they deserve."*

Gwinnett County Senior Services' staff of care managers meets with individuals and families to evaluate, educate, and determine needs and potential resources. Their goal is to help seniors live at home independently and safely without overwhelming the caregiver. In 2013, care managers received more than 13,000 information and assistance calls from seniors and/or their caregivers and worked to match those requests with services such as light housekeeping, transportation needs, and in-home respite care.



*Information and Referral Specialist  
Lister Lestrade is a first point of contact  
when providing services for local seniors*

*"We're proud to serve Gwinnett's growing senior population,"* said Social Services Coordinator, Ava Camejo-Douglas. *"In 2013, we have provided seniors with more than 2,300 hours of homemaker services and more than 4,400 hours of in-home respite care, allowing these seniors to remain in the comfort of their own home rather than be confined in a strange senior-care facility."*

Care managers also work with many seniors to provide home-delivered meals, nearly 84,000 meals in 2013 alone. This effort will now have some much needed help with the opening of phase two of the Gwinnett Senior Services Center, which was originally opened in December 2010 and serves primarily as a one-stop shop for matching seniors and caregivers with available services. Phase two is a \$2.6-million, 12,000-square-foot kitchen addition that has already turned out many of the 130,000+ congregate and home-delivered meals it will prepare this year.

In addition to the many services Senior Services' employees provide, it also has a very successful volunteer program where its Volunteer Specialist matches willing people with needed services for the County's seniors. In 2013, Senior Services tracked more than 52,000 hours toward the County's overall volunteer initiative, Volunteer Gwinnett, which set a goal of reaching one million volunteer hours by 2015.

*"Our volunteers have amazing initiative," said Senior Services Volunteer Specialist Shawn Valadez. "Since the one million hour goal was set in 2012, our volunteers, along with the County's other volunteers, have not only met this goal, they have exceeded it."*



*Seniors at the Lawrenceville Senior Center participate in a drum therapy session, a class that is also offered at other Gwinnett senior center locations*

Gwinnett's seniors also enjoy their social time and with senior activity centers in Buford, Centerville, Lawrenceville, and Norcross, they can do this on a daily basis. These centers offer activities such as exercise and dance classes, arts and crafts, table games, billiards, and day trip excursions. Frequently, experts visit senior centers to entertain them or discuss the medical, financial, and consumer issues important to seniors.

The 2014 SPLOST program will provide some funds to enhance senior services centers, including renovations and possible expansions at the Buford Human Services Center and Norcross Human Services Center and a new free-standing facility at Centerville. The County expects to initiate design of these projects this year. Federal grant funds from H.U.D will help renovate the Lawrenceville Senior Services Center now that the administrative offices and kitchen have moved to the Gwinnett Senior Services Center on Swanson Drive in Lawrenceville.

Senior services are open to all Gwinnett citizens 60 and older, and there is a sliding-fee scale for some programs depending on income. For more information, please visit [www.gwinnettseniorservices.com](http://www.gwinnettseniorservices.com).

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