

Aging Agency Impacts Area Economy

The elderly population of Clearfield County continues to grow. It is not surprising then that services to older persons and their families is also seeing growth. Not often examined, however, is the benefit and impact those aging services have on the broader economy of the local area. That topic was shared at a recent presentation of the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging Four Year Plan.

According to CCAAA Executive Director, John Kordish, growth in aging services has had a remarkable and positive impact on the local economy and on Clearfield County as a whole. 'We are not often considered as a player in economic development,' Kordish stated. 'However, what we have seen in recent years, as well as the outlook for the future is highly encouraging.'

The Area Agency on Aging is a private, non-profit corporation and is governed by a board of directors of citizen-leaders from across Clearfield County. Likewise, it is classified as a charitable organization by the IRS. That allows donors to claim tax benefits when they support the mission and work of the CCAAA.

The agency has grown steadily since it was incorporated in 1977. However, in recent years, the growth has been remarkable. As an example, in the last four years alone, the full-time work force has grown by 50%, from 32 persons in 2000 to 48 full time employees currently. Most of those additional positions have been professionals or highly trained workers, including registered nurses, social workers, and a computer specialist among others. Those additions, coupled with new part-time and substitute staff, brings the total county-wide work force to 75 persons.

Thankfully, we do not know the term lay-off and from all indications, our workforce will continue to grow, Mr. Kordish commented. He cited several reasons for the recent and expected growth. First our elderly population is increasing, especially those 85 years of age and over. As they age their needs increase. Second, Pennsylvania is serious about expanding care and services for people in their homes to give them choices to avoid institutionalization. And third, we have been aggressive locally, working hard to expand current services while also trying to bring in new services and funding sources.

Steady and expanded employment at the CCAAA is one aspect of economic development the agency has demonstrated, but there are others as well. The AAAs Medical Assistance Waiver Program serves people at home who are determined to be medically eligible for nursing home care. Services are authorized by the Area Agency on Aging and provided by sub-contracted home care organizations. On average, the AAA authorizes state payments of about \$300,000 each month to the home care agencies and medical supply companies for the services and products provided. *That means, our sub-contractors are also employing additional local residents and adding to the workforce because of our Waiver Program, Kordish explained. That has a widespread effect on the area economy.*

The CCAAA has also encouraged current employees of the home care agencies to remain employed and has also assisted with their additional schooling and training. For the last three years, the agency has brought in funds to the county through the state Direct Care Worker

initiative, providing everything from vouchers to the home care workers to buy shoes and uniforms at local stores, to bonuses for home care workers who remain employed, to helping them get Certified Nurses Assistant training at the Clearfield County Career and Technology Center. *For the most part, Kordish said, our employees and the employees of our subcontractors spend their income locally, whether for gasoline to get to work, or on clothes, or for food, or for household needs. That certainly has a positive impact on the area which we typically do not stop to think about.*

Through the Family Caregiver Support Program, the CCAAA provides monetary support to eligible families who are endeavoring to care for their older loved ones at home. According to Mr. Kordish, *With the funds we supply, families can use local building contractors to remodel a down-stairs bathroom or build a ramp so they can provide care for their elderly parents more easily. And with a small monthly stipend, families can buy care and hygiene supplies locally or pay for support services to get a break or go to church.*

The Area Agency on Aging also assists older workers each year to find employment through a federal training program. Known as the Senior Community Employment Services Program, eligible older workers are placed in other non-profit organizations where they receive training to enhance their employability. Through the federal program, the CCAAA provides their wages during their training period.

Most recently, the last three years the CCAAA has been successful in bringing in funds from the PA Department of Agriculture to provide food vouchers to eligible older persons. Known as the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, the Area Agency on Aging provides the vouchers which are then used by seniors at local farmers' markets; the farmers participating must be enrolled in the Department of Agriculture program in order to receive the vouchers. *The Farmers Market Program is a good example of how everyone benefits, from the seniors, to the local farmers, to the local economy as a whole, Kordish emphasized. As we grow and expand, not only to older residents and their families benefit, but the area economy does as well.*

More information on these and other services provided by the CCAAA can be obtained by calling 765-2696 or toll free at 1-800-225-8571. Programs and services of the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging are funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, the Clearfield County Area Agency on Aging, Mature Resources Foundation, and local and client contributions.