

five questions with... Pam Holocher



article by Lauren Caggiano

photo by Steve Vorderman

For City Planner Pam Holocher, aging-related issues hit close to home. Her elderly mother, once known for a high level of independence, became blind almost overnight and was forced to stop driving. Consequently, this meant Holocher had to drive her mother around town for routine errands.

"I realized everywhere she needed to go depended on me," Holocher says.

Naturally, this became a frustration and challenge for both women. However, her mother, who Holocher describes as a resourceful woman, called various local agencies to connect with a transportation service. After a few attempts, she was relieved to find that the Allen County Council on Aging could help meet her needs.

As the City of Fort Wayne's Community Development Deputy Director, Holocher has always been interested in transportation issues, and her mother's positive experience with the Allen County Council on Aging served as an inspiration to take on a leadership role within the organization. She served on the agency's board and was later asked to take on a more involved role. Today, she is board chair of the Allen County Council on Aging, which serves adults age 60 and above to foster their independence and improve their quality of life.

Q³

What are the biggest challenges the agency faces?

It is estimated that one in four families are caring for an aging parent right now. And a lot of times, those caregivers are aging themselves. It's the sandwich generation phenomenon; as people live longer, their children want to help.

Like anyone, seniors do not want to give up their cars. This is a challenge because Fort Wayne is not as compact as other communities. Allen County is the largest county in Indiana and services are spread out. So the need for transportation is huge, and there aren't enough resources to meet all of the needs. That will only get worse as the boomer population ages.

Q⁴

What are the plans for the future?

The City of Fort Wayne has an initiative to make the community more pedestrian and bike friendly by providing sidewalks and bike infrastructure, so people can have easier access to transportation. This overlaps with the Council's mission to ensure that seniors have access to transportation.

I'd like to find new and diversified sources of funding for the agency. Also, we hope to extend the hours of service to cater to people who might have early or late appointments.

Q⁵

How can people help the cause?

Donate time, energy and/or money. There are many volunteer opportunities. And, if you know someone who needs help, encourage them to call the agency, especially since we are now the rural public transportation provider in Allen County for all ages. You can help by fostering awareness and letting people know that about the agency, as well. **BP**

Q¹

How did the Allen County Council on Aging get its start?

The agency was founded in 1972 as an information and referral source for seniors searching for services that were necessary to maintain independent living. Before long, the Council on Aging blossomed into an agency that provides seniors with transportation, in-home services, HandyChore, TeleCare and Medical Equipment Loans.

Q²

Tell us about a few of those services.

The Homemaker program helps seniors stay in their homes and lead independent lives by offering direct and practical assistance with household chores and related activities. It fills a void, because someone will come into the home to do things that you and I do everyday and take for granted.

The HandyChore program provides light maintenance work in the home like fixing a broken window, for instance. Both services are free to seniors who have been referred by Aging and In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana.

Our Transportation Department provides rides for seniors to doctor appointments, the grocery store, and other well-being trips. Through the TeleCare program, volunteers make calls to individuals who are homebound to establish a relationship with them and to make sure they are healthy and safe.