

# Senior Center continues to provide needed services despite economic times

How is the Senior Center doing?

Almost every place I go, someone asks me this question.

The past year has been very challenging for many individuals and organizations. The Sheridan Senior Center has not been immune to these tough economic times.

There has not been one major cut — rather there have been small changes in numerous areas. For example, 10 percent from this funding source, five percent from another. For an organization that works on very narrow margins, these add up and are significant.

Unlike our income, expenses to run the Center and the services it provides have not decreased, they have risen.

Another dynamic that comes into play and is reflective of the current economic climate, is an increased need for the basic services that we provide. Last year we provided 182,500 units of service to approximately 2,000 people.

By units of service, I mean meals served and meals delivered, Mini-Bus rides, hours in Day Break, showers, baths, loads of laundry, lawns mowed, sidewalks shoveled and more. Each of these units of service has an associated cost.

So we have less funding but are seeing a greater need for service. I guess we need to do more with less.

I'm sure you've heard this before. This might be an exciting challenge for a reality show contestant, but for hardworking person? Yikes!

Something has to give ... to do more with less, something needs to change. Our challenge is to decrease the cost of providing these services without decreasing the quantity or quality of these services. This is our goal.

We have and will continue to look for ways to be economical with our supplies and prudent in costs associated with doing business. Since our work involves people helping people, most of our cost-containment measures have involved decreasing payroll expenses.

We need to be operating within a balanced budget. So what measures have we taken to date?

The most significant changes have occurred in the restructuring of our Nutrition Program over the past year. Unfortunately the elimination of a number of key positions has occurred.



## Center Stage

Carmen Rideout



The meals we serve at Heritage Towers are no longer prepared there but are delivered from the kitchen at the center a couple of blocks away. We are no longer serving the Wednesday evening meal at Heritage Towers but serving at noontime instead.

Other cost-containment measures that have taken place in other areas of the organization include not filling some vacated positions, furlough days for salaried staff members, and a decrease in some administrative employees' hours.

No one is happy about these changes, but most I have talked to understand the situation. We are not alone — individuals, families and other organizations have had to make tough decisions.

Aside from the sadness that comes with eliminating existing positions, we are looking at this time with anticipation — anticipation that there may be opportunities as we look at how we can do things differently.

I believe that the services and supports that our employees provide are vital and necessary for a healthy community. They address basic needs like food, shelter, friendship and love.

They support health, home and independence. They are cost-effective because they prevent and delay expensive nursing home care.

We can use your help. Have patience with us as we process these changes. More than ever we need our customers, friends and community partners, those who see the great value in what the Center does.

We sincerely thank and appreciate those of you who support us through donations of time and or money. For 36 years, we have been a community resource for many, and we plan on this continuing for many years to come.

*Carmen Rideout is executive director for the Sheridan Senior Center.*

*Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.*