

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Various entitlement programs assist seniors

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

When Marlene Golden of Mt. Oliver got behind on paying her gas and property tax bill a few years ago, she knew she had to get some help. So Marlene, 68, contacted Elder-Ado, a private, social service agency that serves adults ages 60 and older in the communities of Beltzhoover, Bon-Air, Carrick, Knoxville and Mt. Oliver.

Rose Trautvetter, program director of Elder-Ado, hears stories similar to Marlene's all too often. "There are a few seniors who have fallen on hard times or are on a fixed income," she said. "With the cost of living and property taxes escalating every year, it becomes difficult for some of them."

Rose steered Marlene in the direction of some entitlement programs that could assist her, such as Columbia Cap and the state property tax and rent rebate program. She helped her fill out the application and also made sure she was eligible. "They were extremely helpful," Marlene said. "It was heaven sent when I learned of the help I was able to receive."

Entitlement programs like the two just mentioned are programs that you have the right to receive, assuming you meet certain eligibility criteria. "These entitlement programs offer seniors assistance in meeting basic, human needs," said Ethel Novogradac, aging care manager supervisor of Information and Referral for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA). "If a senior has any questions, we recommend that they call our Senior-Line so we can provide assistance with applications to entitlement programs." Ethel explained that ACAA makes sure that all of their other basic needs are being met, as well.

According to a report published in *USA Today* this past winter,



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Marlene Golden and Rose Trautvetter at Elder-Ado.

enrollment in federal entitlement programs increased by 17 percent during the past five years. The largest of all increases occurred under Medicaid, and experts believe that Medicare and Social Security will increase significantly as well in the next five to 10 years as baby boomers become eligible for some of these programs.

Other local and state entitlement programs are also available to many of the county's seniors. They include:

PACE (Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly) and PACENET (PACE Needs Enhancement Tier)

PACE and PACENET offer comprehensive prescription coverage to seniors; they cover most medications that require prescriptions—including insulin, syringes and insulin needles. These programs are administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and funded by the Pennsylvania Lottery. No premiums or monthly fees are charged to enrollees. They do not cover over-the-counter medicines, medical equipment, or doctor, hospital, dental and vision services.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The Low Income Home Energy

Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low-income seniors pay their heating bills through energy assistance grants. Seniors do not have to have an unpaid bill to receive energy assistance; they can receive this money without being on welfare. No lien is placed on your property if you receive this help.

Additional money is available to seniors in emergency situations and in jeopardy of losing their heat. Emergency situations include:

- broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced;
- lack of fuel;
- termination of utility service; and
- danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SSI helps seniors ages 65 and older, blind, or disabled people with low incomes obtain cash assistance for housing, clothing and food. The Social Security Administration manages the SSI program. To qualify, you must have little or no income and few resources; the value of the things you own must be less than \$2,000

if you are single and less than \$3,000 if you are married. The value of your home does not count. Usually, the value of your car does not count.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program

TANF is a block grant program that helps recipients move from welfare to work. It provides temporary funding and services to needy individuals and families.

Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program

Seniors may qualify for a rebate payment of up to \$500. The amount of rebate payments varies according to a senior's income and amount of rent or property taxes paid. The program is funded by the state lottery. Applications for rebates must be filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue between January 1 and June 30 every year. The deadline to apply for Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate program this year has been extended from June 30 to December 31. Application forms and instructions may be obtained from the Department of Revenue website, www.revenue.state.pa.us.

You may qualify if:

- you are a Pennsylvania resident;
- your annual income does not exceed \$15,000 (count only 50 percent of your income from Social Security and/or railroad retirement benefits);
- you are age 65 or older, or a widow or widower age 50 or older;
- you are age 18 to 65, and are permanently disabled according to Social Security disability guidelines; and
- you paid rent or property taxes (even seniors who live in facilities or subsidized housing can qualify for rebates).

For more information about any of these entitlement programs or to request assistance in filling out an application, contact Senior-Line at (412) 350-5460. *PSN*