



City of Cambridge

O-10.

IN CITY COUNCIL

April 24, 2000

COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
COUNCILLOR BORN
COUNCILLOR BRAUDE
COUNCILLOR DAVIS
COUNCILLOR DECKER
MAYOR GALLUCCIO
VICE MAYOR MAHER
COUNCILLOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to fund the position in the Historical Commission Budget for the Oral History Project in the FY 2001 Budget.

In City Council April 24, 2000.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

Sullivan

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FY2001 Budget

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Find room for seniors to volunteer

BY BEVERLY BENNER CASSARA, ED.D.

Guest Columnist

Recently, an older gentleman told me that as far as he was concerned, he was "just putting in time." True, the exigencies of his life have left him without family or close friends in the area, and his health is not the greatest, but he is very far from being homebound.

How many times have we heard older persons express similar sentiments? A news story I read several years ago burns in my memory. With a picture of an older woman sitting at the kitchen table with her middle-aged daughter, she is reported as saying, "My life should be over; there is no reason for me to be here anymore."

It is precisely these kinds of stories that moved a group of senior citizens to establish the Cambridge Senior Volunteer Clearinghouse to help create a new opportunity for seniors to find a niche to give purpose to their lives. For example, one woman said she volunteers at two jobs to keep her busy all the time, "otherwise, life would be too grim."

Another case, a retired woman of some means, who was living on the Cape with her husband, enjoying a social life, drinking socially, started to take a drink in the afternoon. Why not, there was nothing she had to do. Then, the old story of one drink becoming two, but she controlled herself somehow and no one thought of her as an alcoholic.

Fortunately, she caught herself when driving her daughter and granddaughter to the airport. She suddenly realized that she did not have control of the car and asked her daughter to take over the wheel. She said she was alarmed that she could be in the position of smashing up these two precious people. Her husband started driving her for regular drug rehab counseling where she was confronted for the first time with the fact that she had not developed any sufficient purpose for living in later life.

Of course, we cannot generalize to the whole population of older people from these anecdotes. We all know older people with a lot of guts doing great things with their lives. What we don't know is how many persons there are who are just "putting in time," or, at least, passing the days with their greatest connection to society coming from the television soaps.

The moral of this story is that the number of those of us over 60 is growing so fast that in a couple of decades, 20 percent of the national population will join it. That amounts to around 60 million persons. It will be very demoralizing to society in general if many of them feel they are just putting in time.

Society has not adjusted to the change of longevity in our time. People spend 30 years growing up and getting settled in life, 30 years developing careers and caring for family, and then there are 30 years

or so more. Giving older people Social Security and Medicare is great, but then many are left to dwell on the margins of society.

Volunteering in nonprofit and government agencies is one answer, if these agencies understand seniors and are clever about putting their skills and expertise to work. Seniors who help little children to read, or help adults to learn to use the computer, or work for the homeless do have a purpose, a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

Nevertheless, the idea of senior volunteering has not yet been well enough developed. For instance, what if the 15,000 persons over 60 in Cambridge wanted to volunteer, there would be no place for them. Well, that will never happen, but really, agencies could do more.

What if every agency could develop at least one new slot to carry out some service beyond their current means, instead of thinking of little odd things a body could pick up now and then. This would give the senior self-esteem and creative purpose to carry out a project set aside for seniors. If every agency in the city could do this, suddenly the whole stereotype of helpless seniors would start to dissolve.

Volunteering is only one answer to the social challenge to engage seniors in vital and productive life, but it is a present answer for some.

Beverly B. Cassara is co-chair of the Cambridge Senior Volunteer Clearinghouse.



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**Councillor Sullivan and entire
membership**

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ORDER ADOPTED