

Hello from Senior Services of Van Buren County!

I hope you have all stayed healthy over the past year! I wanted to touch base and share some of what SSVBC has been doing during the COVID pandemic.

As most of you are aware, Senior Service is much more than an activity center. We have a full range of services that we provide during normal times including: In Home Care, Carewatch Management for homebound seniors, Commodities, Food Trucks, Medical Equipment, Medical Transportation, Ramps, Volunteer Services, Minor Home Repair, Trips and free Tax Preparation to name a few.

When we made the decision to close the activity centers in March of 2020, we didn't stop serving the seniors in your area. We listened to them, to their needs and fears and developed new ways to help them during a very scary time.

Food Subsidies:

One of the things they told us was that they were afraid to go to the store. Most of these seniors were also getting Meals on Wheels, which is a wonderful program, however they only deliver one meal a day. We decided that if we were to supplement that with an additional 4 meals a week it would reduce their need to go into grocery stores. The homebound seniors have LOVED this program! Since we started our **Home Delivered Meal Program**, we have supplied over **10,000 meals** to senior homes at no cost to them. Along with the weekly meals, we delivered a large basket for Thanksgiving and Christmas to these homebound seniors with enough food to prepare a meal for 4-8.

Another way we addressed the food subside issue was with our **Drive-Thru Food Trucks**. Over the past year we provided **10 Drive-Thru Food Trucks** (which provide food for 100 families per truck) throughout the county and are scheduling **an additional 12 for this year**.

Senior Services has also continued the **Commodities Distribution** in Paw Paw and South Haven and has given out over 100 food boxes each month. Along with our regular commodities distribution we delivered **120 Dairy Boxes, 75 Quarantine Boxes and 125 additional boxes of food provided by Area Agency on Aging**. All these combined **provided over 50,000 lb of food to the seniors in Van Buren County!**

Senior Services also created a **Drive-Thru Meal** program for seniors who were more active. They were able to call in reservations for their meals and then drive-up to our doors and get them while never leaving their cars! We produced **over 500 meals** for this program. We stopped the program over the winter months, but it will resume in April of 2021.

Senior Services also provided a few seniors with **Grocery Pickup and Delivery** for some of the more rural areas in Grand Junction and Bloomingdale. We did not do many of these but there were a regular 2-3 that were helped.

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Carewatch Services:

One of the programs we are most proud of at Senior Services is our Carewatch program. This was developed with the homebound senior in mind. Our Carewatch professionals are similar to a social worker. They are trained in MMAP (Medical and Medicaid Assistance Program), help with Emergencies such as Utility and housing assistance, In-Home Care and Meals on Wheels referrals. Our Carewatch professionals will come to their home and help assess the seniors needs and then help them to obtain what is needed to keep them living in their home longer. They also maintain an ongoing relationship with the senior to help as their needs change. We have continued these services over the past year. Our Carewatch professionals have also been assisting with the medical transportation program. Because our volunteers' safety is so important to us and because they are in the high-risk group, we felt we needed to find a new way to accommodate the medical transportation problem. Senior Services worked together with VBEMS and other medical transportation professionals to continue providing rides at a reduced rate.

Covid Attack:

I think during this time what our SSVBC team is most proud of is our direct response to the COVID virus itself. Our mission states in part that "We will provide caring support for seniors to enhance their quality of Life". Since the vaccine was approved, we have been working with the Department of Health and Human Services behind the scenes to help in the vaccination of VB Co seniors. DHHS reached out to us early on to register seniors over the phone for their vaccine. Both agencies understood the difficulty many seniors would have to sign up "on-line" so we began manually calling seniors and helping them with the process. In the first 3 months of our partnership, we have helped to vaccinate over 1000 of our seniors. In the next couple of weeks, we will go public with this program by messaging over 11,000 seniors in our data base by robo call with two designated phone numbers to sign up with SSVBC. DHHS will also be using our numbers in their campaign going forward. We anticipate this will keep us remarkably busy! We also met to discuss our homebound seniors. The second line will be for those who are unable to get to a vaccination clinic. DHHS and SSVBC will be sending out trained medical staff to seniors' homes to help vaccinate seniors without them having to leave their homes.

Activity Center Opening:

We are not quite there yet! Our board has agreed through this entire process that our seniors' health is our number one priority. We feel by addressing the above needs and by attacking the COVID virus directly we will have better success at reopening while keeping everyone safe. Once we have pushed through this next phase of these clinics we will be assessing how and when we reopen the centers.

Our New Building:

The last thing I would like to report on is our new Activity Center and Offices in South Haven. Many of you are aware of the large donation that was given to Senior Services by the Murk Family. The building was almost completely donated and valued at 2.5 million dollars. SSVBC paid \$400,000 for the building making the donation over two million. We have one renter currently in the building and one more coming which will give us the income we need to cover utilities and maintenance. The renovation that just began will be approximately 2.5 million dollars which we hope to fundraise. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity that we felt was too good to pass up and the board supported it unanimously. When the project is complete, we will have central offices, pickleball courts, a central kitchen, café, workshop, auditorium, craft room, dance / exercise area, additional leasing space, 5 classrooms, a walking trail and an expansive lending closet for medical equipment and dry food storage. As excited as we are about this project, please keep in mind that this will not take away from any other activity centers or services in the county, it is just a wonderful addition that can be used by anyone over 60 in a tax paying jurisdiction.

It has been an honor to work with Senior Services of Van Buren Counties Board of Directors and our amazing staff during this crazy period in history. They have risen to the challenges and changes we have made to our programming while never losing sight of the importance of our senior's health and safety. As always if you have any questions you can call me at 269-214-1317.

Thank you for your continued support as we get through this together!

Diane Rigozzi
Executive Director
Senior Services of Van Buren County

If you have any seniors who need the COVID Vaccine, below are the numbers to call. They will be placed on the list in the order received and when a clinic becomes available, we will sign them up over the phone.

Covid Vaccine Clinics:

269-468-9487

Homebound:

269-222-1264