

City of Satellite Beach, FL

Supporting an Elder-Friendly Environment

Satellite Beach, on an island situated in front of the mainland on Florida's Central Atlantic Coast, is sometimes referred to as a "Barrier City". But when it comes to creating an elder-friendly environment, the city has excelled in removing barriers to enable seniors to enjoy active and healthy lifestyles. By following a philosophy of smart growth, the city has transformed itself to meet the needs of its aging population.

In recognition of its exceptional efforts, the Environmental Protection Agency awarded the city its 2008 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging. The award honors communities that are planning for, and beginning to use, smart growth and active aging principles. Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through structured and unstructured opportunities for physical activity.

Satellite Beach has focused on creating a thriving senior program that addresses opportunities for physical fitness, independent home living, quality of life, and citizen-based decision making. Mayor Mark Brimer commented, "Working with smart growth in mind, the city has been able to build an infrastructure that allows us to focus on senior activity, preservation of environment, redevelopment, and citizen participation."

The city is one of Florida's *Communities for a Lifetime*, a statewide initiative that assists communities in planning and implementing improvements that benefit residents of all ages. One of the city's programs to prevent falls among seniors has been used as a model by communities throughout the state. Falls prevention assessments are done through the fire department. The home assessments provide seniors with information on falls hazards and help with things such as moving poorly placed furniture or eliminating throw rugs to prevent falls.

The city has also been successful in increasing the number of sidewalks, creating new parks, and rezoning commercial strips into walkable town centers. These efforts have provided the foundation for creating places where residents can choose to walk or bike as part of their daily activities.

The *Citizens on Patrol* and *Neighbor Helping Neighbor* programs encourage senior volunteers to remain active and engaged while enriching the sense of place and purpose for all residents of Satellite Beach. Barbara Montanaro, city clerk notes, "We are fortunate to have a network of volunteers who understand the problems of the elderly and have a vested interest in helping."

Montanaro explains that the *Citizens on Patrol* is coordinated through the police department and is designed so that police officers, fire department representatives, or volunteers will stop by and check on seniors with limited mobility. "Generally they just stop by to say 'Hi'," explains Montanaro. However, she recalls the instance of one elderly resident who was able to remain in her home because of the efforts of the program. "The lady is now deceased, but the program helped her remain independent and in her own home for the last three years of her life. Neighbors would stop by to check on her and take her places like doctors' appointments and grocery shopping. Volunteers even took her to have her hair done when she wanted," explained Montanaro, adding with a knowing wisdom, "You know, every once in a while a gal just needs to get her hair done to keep her spirits up."

Another story Montanaro shares is about a lady who was unable to manage her medications. But with the assistance of neighbors and fire department representatives it was quickly determined once the lady had some basic assistance, she was able to remain in her own home – and out of the hospital.

Other innovative efforts in Satellite Beach include the redevelopment of a dilapidated shopping center into a civic center and gymnasium that provides physical activities such as yoga, dance, and aerobics for citizens of all ages. Montanaro highlights one of the groups that meet monthly at the civic center to hear presentations on health and care giving. “The monthly luncheons initially began with 12 people. Today the gatherings regularly attract 40 to 50 individuals.”

When asked about advice to other communities that might want to replicate some of Satellite Beach’s success, Brimer said, “One thing we have done is share everything. This has allowed us to develop partnerships throughout the community and make our efforts collaborative. We have shared information with other cities in our area as well.”

When it comes to addressing the needs of seniors, Satellite Beach leaders embrace all aspects of their community, from grocery stores, to health care delivery professionals and institutions such as pharmacies and hospitals, to the community’s emergency medical systems. “You have to take a step back and see what the issues of the community are, see where you can be creative and innovative, and then build your program around that,” explains Brimer.

Montanaro added, “It takes at least a year get momentum and move programs forward. Sometimes we were running the program and sometimes the program was running us. We held on and followed the road it was taking. It took stability and also flexibility to make things happen.”

For more information, please contact:

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About the Award

2008 Commitment Award for Excellence in Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

The award honors the communities that are planning for, and beginning to use, smart growth and active aging. Active aging strives to promote strategies that engage older adults through structured and unstructured opportunities for physical activity. Active aging is supported by safe, walkable environments. Smart growth strives to minimize the impact of the built environment on both human health and the natural environment by integrating environmental considerations into development patterns. Using smart growth, communities create attractive, walkable neighborhoods that give people of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities a range of safe, affordable and convenient choices in where to live and how to get around.

For additional information, please visit the EPA’s Aging Initiative Web site at <http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards/index.htm>.