

Summit addresses needs of elderly

By Jonathan Edwards

June 15th, 2010

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Abuse, dying government services and ballooning medical costs are threatening Yolo County's elderly, and a group of politicians, caretakers and nonprofit representatives will meet Friday to see what they can do about it.

They'll try to find gaps where seniors aren't getting what they need, whether it be transportation or enough food, and start figuring out a way to meet those needs.

"There are some serious gaps," said Yolo County Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis, who chairs the Yolo County Commission on Aging and Adult Services.

Summit organizers expect some 70 people to show up between 10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at the Davis Odd Fellows Hall, 415 Second St. The public is welcome to attend.

Speakers will include representatives from Yolo County's social services corps; Elena Siegel, a UC Davis School of Nursing gerontologist; psychiatrist Captane Thomson, who directed the county's mental health department; and Herbert Bauer, former county health officer and a centenarian.

A panel discussion will center around the topics of mental and physical health, transportation, elder abuse and fraud as well as housing.

Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, plans to speak at the summit, which she started in 2007 when she sat on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors. Solving some of the problems may require something like the Davis Schools Foundation, with a call to a large group of people to each donate small amounts of money.

"We are better than this in our community, our state, our nation," Yamada said. "We need to make sure all the voices that should be speaking up on this issue are heard, and say, 'No more.' "

Cuts to social services for the poor and elderly have hit hard, Yamada said, and there's more on the way if the governor gets his way. If he does, money that pays caregivers to help keep the frail elderly in their homes would disappear. That would force many to seek refuge in nursing homes.

Moreover, help for the mentally ill is going to the most extreme cases, but leaving many, including dementia patients, out in the cold, she said. And state lawmakers slashed Social Security benefits to the federally allowed minimum.

Yamada was leaving a drug store in West Sacramento last weekend when she happened upon "an elderly African-American gentleman." He was well-groomed and well-dressed — different from the normal beggars.

Still, he was out panhandling. His Social Security money had run out. He gets his check on the 3rd of each month. It was June 12.

"He said, 'I don't know what to do. I just don't know what to do ... I never thought I'd be in this situation. I've worked many years in this country, and I never thought I'd be in this situation. Please, is there something you can do?' " Yamada related.

The assemblywoman didn't give him money but instead returned to the store and bought him some groceries. "He cried; he was so grateful," she said.

The summit will try to find a way to devise solutions for immediate crises, but it also will look ahead to what Yamada calls "the silver tsunami." More and more baby boomers are retiring every day. As they age and ail, boomers need more medicine, more help, more money.

"It's a perfect storm and something we need to address," Provenza said. "The need to begin working on this is immediate."

Maybe they'll be able to figure out a way to stop the kind of thing that happened to Marilyn Rice, 73. Her husband had Parkinson's disease for 13 years before he died in 2003 at the age of 84.

She tried to keep him at home by spending \$80,000 to remodel their house. She got special furniture, raised the pool so he'd be able to stand anywhere and not go under water and got an alarm system that would sound if he tried to get out any one of their houses's 14 windows and doors.

"We tried to keep him at home, but he had so many falls," Rice said.

So for the last 4 1/2 years of his live, Salem Rice lived at Palm Gardens in Woodland. Marilyn visited him 10 times a week, hanging out and taking him to various appointments.

She spent more money. A bed at Palm Gardens runs \$2,250 per month, said Wanda, Marilyn's friend who didn't want to give her last name. Staying in a shared room at University Retirement Community costs \$6,000 a month, and a private room is \$7,000.

"Now, how many people can do that?" Wanda asked rhetorically "The cost can be exorbitant.

"It's pretty bleak, the situation in the U.S. for people in this situation. You're really not getting any help until you're destitute."

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