



Memo To:

North Little Rock Senior Citizens Commission

From: Bernadette Gunn Rhodes

Memo Date: March 19, 2020

I never would have guessed that I would be writing you under such extraordinary circumstances. As you know, the Hays Center has been closed to members since March 13th as part of the City's effort to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. I will discuss what this means for the Center and our members first, then give you my regular report.

Coronavirus Update

Mayor Smith has directed department heads to cancel commission meetings without essential business on the agenda. Since we do not have any agenda items that require urgent action, I am following the mayor's advice to cancel our Senior Citizens Commission meetings until further notice. I will continue to provide you with a monthly meeting packet to keep you informed.

The Hays Center will remain closed until at least March 30. Members were notified via email, a limited number by phone (focusing on those with the least access to transportation), an automated voice message when individuals call the Center, and via signage on the Center's doors.

I expect a decision will be made on whether or not to extend the closure by mid-next week (around March 25). I believe we will start to get a much better understanding of the scope of infections in the coming week as more test kits become available state-wide.

Staff members are continuing to work on-site every day. We are focusing on deep-cleaning the building and disinfecting all surfaces.

As of today, we have one part-time staff member home with fever and a runny nose. She stayed home as soon as she developed the symptoms and is going to contact her doctor. We are monitoring her situation, but do not yet know if she will be tested for COVID-19. She will not be allowed to return to work until her symptoms have cleared and she has been fever-free for 24 hours.

We worked with CareLink to identify the most at-risk individuals relying on CareLink's daily breakfast program at the Hays Center. CareLink contacted those individuals and arranged to bring each of them food boxes, using the Hays Center as a meeting point. Members arrived yesterday and boxes were loaded directly into their vehicles. The boxes are meant to supplement their food supply for up to two weeks. Connie delivered the boxes to a blind member who relies on public transportation.

Our next step is to determine how we can best serve the seniors in our community while maintaining social distancing. We have the ability to make a robo-call to members with phone numbers on file in SchedulesPlus, our membership management software. We can even ask them yes or no questions in the call that they can answer by pressing a button on their phone. We plan to use this to find out if any members are in dire need of groceries, medications, etc. We are developing a script and the questions this week.

During this time, we see ourselves as a vital connector between services and seniors in need. There are many good Samaritans out there who want to help seniors in their community who either cannot or do not want to leave their house because of the virus. But these helpers do not know how to reach those seniors. We have thousands of phone numbers and email addresses. We can reach out to our contacts and allow them to opt-in to getting help.

Please contact me if you have any other ideas for helping seniors and the elderly during this time. The best way to reach me is by email or cell phone: (501) 553-7295.

Membership and Attendance Update

72 new members joined the Hays Center in February for a total of 3,591 active members, which is a net loss of 76 members over Jan. '20 and 126 more than in Feb. '19.

Average attendance in the four weeks before the closure was down 4% compared to the previous four weeks, but up 1% compared to the same period the previous year. 487 members visited the Center on an average weekday in 2019. So far this year, average weekday attendance prior to the closure was 431.

Financial Update

Our expenses are tracking as budgeted and our income is tracking ahead of schedule. As of February 29th, the year was 16.4% over, we had spent 12.7% of our budget expenditures and deposited 16.1% of our budgeted revenue.

The closure will significantly reduce our rental and membership income. We have issued refunds for several rentals and rescheduled others. We are not expecting any rentals to take place in the Center through April.

I expect our expenditures will continue to track as budgeted. We may realize small savings on electricity and water, for example, but our main expenditure – personnel – constitutes almost half of our budget and will remain unchanged.

The \$395.00 CD for Heritage House with Simmons Bank has been deposited into Heritage House's Simmons checking account.

Program Update

We are awaiting our client's signature the contracts with BGC Advantage to provide resident services to the senior housing tenants at Hickory View, Cedar Gardens, Maple Place, and Oak View. We ended services under the old (2014) contract as of February 21, 2020, which was also the last day of employment for our three Activity Directors. After Feb. 21, we continued to provide medical and grocery transportation to residents, but provided no on-site services.

Our search for a new Activity Coordinator is going slowly. Unfortunately, the individual we had hired resigned for personal reasons before ever actually starting the job. The Activity Coordinator position has since been posted on our city job page to broaden the search. It is viewable at www.nlr.ar.gov/jobs with an April 1 closing date.

Our Black History Month luncheon and program went very well. We had three wonderful speakers, including a young Major in the US Air Force who shared his original poetry! Thank you to everyone who attended.

As I mentioned in my last memo, we have signed a contract with LPi, which prints newsletters for senior centers, to publish a free quarterly newsletter for the Hays Center. Each newsletter will be 8 pages long and give us an opportunity to feature the Center in a more in-depth fashion. We will receive 2,500 copies for distribution to our members and around the community. The newsletter is funded through ad sales and a sales rep from LPi was at the Hays Center for three days up until our closure to contact potential advertisers. She is currently working remotely to sell ads for us.

Unfortunately, we had to postpone our 2020 NLR Senior Citizens Hall of Fame luncheon for Juanita Henderson and Ann-Marie LeBlanc. I will let you know as soon as it is rescheduled.

Transportation Update

All our February statistics are in the mayor's staff report in your packet. We are still waiting to hear about the ARDOT grant for the wheelchair-accessible van.

Our transportation program is currently on hold (as of March 13) because of both contract reasons and COVID-19 concerns. I do not think it is wise for our drivers to share their germs with others, especially high-risk populations. However, we will look at a different model during the quarantine if residents are in need of groceries or medication, such as grocery/pharmacy pre-orders, no-contact drop offs, etc.

Facility Update

Our AV vendor was here the first day of our closure to fix remaining issues with the new Exercise Room AV equipment. Once we finish cleaning we will thoroughly test all the equipment to ensure it is functioning properly.

National HVAC won the bid for the new HVAC system in the aerobics pool. The contract has been sent to the mayor for signature, upon which National can order the HVAC unit.

Our IT department is working with its Wi-Fi vendor, Aruba, to schedule a walk-through of the Hays Center. The walk-through will likely take place in April due to COVID-19 delays.

I am still awaiting a quote from Taggart's interior designer to help us plan a 2020 ballroom renovation and explore options for relocating our front desk to improve the ambience and security of the entryway.

Be careful, stay healthy, and I hope to see all of you again soon.