

generations

Spring 2011



(From left to right) Victor Mendez, David Moreno, James Browne, Alvin Rogers, Robert Cumby, Pedro Gotay, Luis Matos.



Opal Langley Shields

Older Americans: Connecting the Community

In 1963, May was designated as Older Americans Month to celebrate the enormous contributions of older Americans – born of wisdom, experience and the will to realize their dreams and speak their minds. Older Americans Month is our chance to show appreciation and support for seniors as they continue to enrich and strengthen our communities. Seniors First would like to pay homage to our clients, volunteers, staff and donors who have shared their histories, diverse experiences and wealth of knowledge – especially those who defended our country.

Nearly every weekday, more than a dozen veterans spend time with their friends in the Seniors First Neighborhood Lunch Program at Taft Community Center. The center's halls are lined with photographic tributes that echo accounts of service to America. Here are some of their stories.

Opal Langley Shields is a rare bird. At age 96, she still drives, knits elaborate, pearl-beaded sweaters and makes jewelry from stones she's collected over the years. Opal is also a U.S. Navy Veteran, one of 350,000 women who served in the armed forces during World War II.

In 1936, Opal graduated from Florida State College, certified to teach physics and math, but seven years later, a sense of adventure and duty inspired her to join the Navy. Opal trained as a weather forecaster and was working in the tower at Jacksonville Naval Air Station when she was asked to assist the world's most famous pilot. "One day, the officer in charge heard that Lindbergh was coming in, so he let me 'wait' on him, which means I gave him the weather report." Opal went on to become certified as a commercial pilot.

Nearly every day, Opal gathers with more than a dozen fellow veterans at the Taft Community Center for Seniors First Neighborhood Lunch Program.

Sergeant First Class Luis Matos was just 19 years old when he was sent to the front line in Korea, and even though he did 3 tours in Vietnam, for Luis, "Korea was the worst." He was part of Puerto Rico's 65th infantry that took heavy casualties on Kelly Hill.

Alvin Rogers was also 19 when he joined the army and was sent straight to Korea. His most poignant memory was that of Korean children in the harsh winter. "The little kids still get to me," Alvin recalls. "They were running around without parkas or

boots. Their feet were turning blue." In his own small way, Alvin tried to make things a little happier for them. "I always had candy in my pocket. If they knew I was coming, they'd follow me."

Bob Cumby started out in the Army National Guard at the age of 17. Bob says, "I wanted to join the Air Force but my parents wouldn't sign for me. They talked me into the National Guard so I could finish high school." Bob eventually made it to the Air Force and was proud of his role in the top secret "Operation Dune Moon," which tested movement sensors for placement along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

These veterans made service their legacy. Now it is time to serve them. Donations to Seniors First help fund the Neighborhood Lunch program that gives these American heroes not just a hot meal, but a place to find camaraderie with others who have marched in their boots.

**For more stories about
the Taft Vets, log onto:
www.seniorsfirstinc.org**

President's Message:

In Honor of Older Americans

Elders are especially at risk as the State of Florida responds to historic budget shortfalls caused by difficult economic times. In this climate of limited resources, budget discussions on the federal, state and local levels will be complex. To do nothing is simply not an option. Therefore, educating our elected officials on the importance of Seniors First programs and the essential role they play in maintaining elders in their own homes will be crucial.



Marsha L. Lorenz
President/CEO

In 2010, Seniors First served over 6,600 clients, and the scope and comprehensive array of services provided is significant. Program highlights include: 134,679 Neighborhood Lunch Meals provided at 19 different locations, 290,023 Home Delivered Meals, 46,087 hours of Homemaking, 35,400 hours of Personal Care, 29,096 hours of Companionship, 31,381 hours of Respite and 12,446 hours of Home Improvement and an impressive 30,345 hours of service provided by 1,050 volunteers. These services are often the only thing that keep vulnerable seniors from having to move to a more restrictive environment, sacrificing independence and freedom of choice.

May is Older Americans Month, designated as a time to celebrate and honor the legacies and contributions of those who have given so much. Seniors First is proud to participate in events and activities that promote healthy aging, and we salute and extend our sincere gratitude to those dedicated seniors and volunteers who give of their time, talents and resources to help those less fortunate.

We cannot survive without community involvement and we are grateful for the support we receive from local businesses, foundations and individual donors to help us accomplish our mission. For more information on volunteer opportunities or to make a donation, please call Seniors First at 407.292.0177.

Central Florida elders deserve our best efforts and support. Together, we will withstand these uncertain economic times and **Help Seniors Thrive!**

Corporate Spotlight:

HATS OFF TO THE PEABODY ORLANDO

(Left to right) Alan Villaverde, Christi Ashby, Harriett Lake, Judith Topper, and Sabrina Samuels at the 2011 High Tea & Hats fundraiser at The Peabody Orlando



The moment you arrive at this world-class hotel, you know that your experience at The Peabody Orlando is going to be unforgettable. What most people don't realize, however, is the philanthropic heart that lies within.

Under the leadership of Managing Director, Alan Villaverde, the Peabody has donated over \$100,000 of in-kind services to Seniors First in the last four years. Since 2007, the Peabody has annually hosted the Seniors First High Tea and has donated everything from the amazing ballroom, decadent food and beverage service and invaluable time of the delightful staff, to the audio/visual service, lavish linens and incredible auction items. These wonderful contributions have allowed all monies

raised from ticket sales, silent auction and chance auction (over \$104,000) to go directly to the seniors we serve.

The 2011 High Tea & Hats fundraiser, held on February 13, included a "stylish hat" contest, silent and chance auctions, and an amazing Peabody Get-Away raffle. Over \$43,000 was raised. The inaugural "Hats Off Award" was presented to Mr. Villaverde for his exemplary service to the senior population.

It is a privilege to collectively recognize the efforts of The Peabody Orlando staff and Mr. Villaverde for the impact their support has had on the seniors and community served by Seniors First. We are honored to work with this extraordinary team of customer service – focused champions for seniors.

Mr. Smith Leaves a Legacy

Seniors First is honored to receive a generous bequest from a dedicated, long-time Meals On Wheels volunteer, Robert M. "Bob" Smith. Mr. Smith lived his life in service to his country, his family, his church and our community. Born in Macon, Georgia in 1916, Bob graduated from the University of South Carolina before enlisting in the Navy. He was the supply officer on an attack transport fighting in the Pacific. Bob fought in the battles of Okinawa and Iwo Jima, where he saw the American flag raised. He remained in the Navy Reserve long after the war.

His Navy career brought him to Central Florida where he and his wife,



Robert M. "Bob" Smith

Martha, raised two sons. He built a successful business selling class rings and graduation supplies to Florida schools and colleges. Outside of work and family, his life was centered around the First Presbyterian Church where he served in many roles.

Mr. Smith's gift is a lasting legacy and will help us expand services that allow seniors to live independently in their homes with dignity and quality of life. It is our privilege to honor his life of service and his generous planned gift. If you would like to make a bequest to Seniors First, contact your tax advisor or Marsha Lorenz, Seniors First President/CEO at 407.615.8961.



VETERAN CONTINUES TO SERVE

“With a thousand people doing one small step, you get a lot accomplished.”

– Al Johnson, U.S. Army Veteran and Meals On Wheels Volunteer

Four decades after his tour of duty in Vietnam, Al Johnson is still in the service. Al is one of several veterans who deliver to Seniors First Meals On Wheels clients. Every Tuesday, Al drives from his home in Poinciana to fulfill this labor of love.

Al’s call to duty comes naturally. As a young man, he served America as an Army paratrooper with the 173rd Airborne Division. In 1968, he was wounded in the Tet Offensive and was sent to a hospital near his hometown of Boston to recover.

“The army matured me,” says Al, who after his military discharge went on to college and a 27-year career as a history teacher in the small town of Medina, New York, outside Buffalo. He retired a decade ago in Central Florida and

wanted to keep busy. A newspaper article helped him find his next calling.

“It was in 2002,” Al recalls an article he saw in the newspaper about Meals On Wheels. “It had a picture of a woman named Lulu Bell.” Lulu’s story and personality so inspired Al that he volunteered and has been driving a meal route ever since. It turns out that Lulu was on Al’s route. “She’s become a close family friend. When I deliver to Lulu, I stay for a half hour.”

Like so many volunteers, Al delivers more than meals. He brings a bright moment and friendship to the seniors he serves. “They really welcome you just to talk to them.” Al believes other people would help deliver Meals On Wheels, if they just knew what they could get out of it. As for the challenge of rising gas

prices, Al says it’s a small price to pay. “If you live close to here, you might drive 20-30 miles. What’s that, a gallon of gas? That’s \$4.00. You get a lot for that \$4.00.” He has issued a call to other retirees who are looking for a fulfilling way to spend their time.

“They don’t know what they’re missing! If you have the heart to serve, this is such a rewarding experience. You meet some great people.” Al truly believes, “I get more out of it than I give.”

To find out more about Seniors First volunteer opportunities to deliver Meals On Wheels, be a Friendly Visitor, help with special events and more, call 407.615.8982, or visit www.seniorsfirstinc.org.

Special Thanks to Our Event Sponsors

Each year, our generous sponsors help us create memorable events that bring new exposure to Seniors First. We thank them wholeheartedly, and encourage you to patronize these fine businesses whenever you can.

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EVENT *Wrap-Up*

Turkey Trot

A Thanksgiving tradition, the 21st Annual Seniors First Turkey Trot 5k drew more than 5,300 participants and raised almost \$160,000! Thank you to all the sponsors, volunteers, participants and sideline cheerleaders. Your support of Central Florida seniors is truly appreciated.

Mark your calendars for the next Turkey Trot 5k: Thursday, November 24, 2011. Start out your day of indulgence with some fun and exercise!



Shoebox Drive

Heartfelt thanks to a wonderful community for helping to collect and distribute Holiday Shoebox Gifts to over 2,500 seniors during the holidays! Local businesses, organizations and individuals filled shoeboxes with warm fleece throws and gift cards of \$10 and more to area grocery stores. Client, Ms. A. was eager to share her thoughts, "Blessed are the givers...and grateful are the receivers. Thank you for the gift. It put a smile on my face."

Mayors For Meals

On March 23rd, Seniors First held Mayors For Meals Day as part of the March For Meals national campaign. The campaign was initiated by Meals On Wheels Association of America, which seeks to raise awareness of senior hunger and to encourage action on part of the local community. Thanks to Winter Park Mayor Ken Bradley, Ocoee Mayor Scott Vandergrift, Eatonville Mayor Bruce Mount, Orlando City Commissioner Tony Ortiz, and Aide to Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs, Chase Smith for participating!



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