

Photo by Bob Pearson

Jim Zietlow—"...want people to remain as independent as possible, as long as possible."

By Janet Lliteras
*Why worry about tomorrow, today?
 If I am here tomorrow
 I can worry about tomorrow, tomorrow.
 So why worry about tomorrow, today?*

Author Unknown
 Approximately 43,000 people are over 60 years old in Lancaster County and 90 percent of them live in Lincoln.

We'll all get there sooner or later. But what to do when you're forced to retire when you don't need to or don't want to? What if you have no family and your friends are either gone or moved away?

Some families no longer want to let grandma or grandpa move in with them. They say they don't have the time or money to see that gramps gets what he needs so they stick him in an old folks home.

Jim Zietlow, administrator of the Lincoln-Lancaster Commission on Aging, said that many older people are being placed in nursing homes whether they need medical care or not.

In essence this is what the Commission on Aging is trying to prevent, Zietlow said. When the commission was organized in 1971, he said, its main goal was to develop services and programs that would prevent or delay the need for putting people in nursing homes. They wanted people to remain as independent as possible, as long as possible.

'What do you do when you're forced to retire when you don't need to or don't want to? What if you have no family and your friends are either gone or moved away?'

Lincoln is one of six area-wide model projects authorized and funded by the Older Americans Act of 1965. The project received a \$200,000 grant in 1969, Zietlow said. Today the commission distributes approximately \$1 million yearly, he said, \$310,000 is federally funded.

The commission is a planning and advocacy agency, he said, not just a service delivery.

"Agencies come to us," he said. The commission helps set up the proposed program

Older Americans face day to day life

if it is approved, and helps round up funding for them.

One directly administered is Lincoln Information Service for the Elderly (LIFE) which is an information referral agency that helps senior citizens cut through the red tape and paperwork, Zietlow said. It's a free information, referral and counseling service for the elderly.

There also is a downtown Senior Center and a heritage craftshop. If senior citizens want to volunteer their time and knowledge to help others, they can join the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

However, Zietlow said, these programs just scratch the surface.

"We're taking baby steps," he said, "piecemeal approaches."

The programs are nice, he said, but they are here because they haven't dealt with the real major problems such as reduced income for the elderly.

Everything boils down to what one can afford, he said. The solution, he said, is to let people work longer. If they had the same income as other people they wouldn't have to be set apart from everybody else. They wouldn't need to have reduced bus fare, medical care and dinner and tuition fees.

Even so, what has been done so far has been great, Zietlow said.

"We're still in business," he said. "The programs are well received by the local officialdom," meaning the mayor and city council.

Over the last five or six years, Zietlow estimated, over 10,000 older Americans have participated in the programs. The commission hopes to reach approximately 6,000 people in this 1977-78 fiscal year, he said.

Older Americans can eat for less, ride for less, learn for less, and have fun for less, but only because they have less to spend. Old age is not a disease, old age is a way of life. The many programs for the elderly seem to testify to that.

Hard to believe, but it's true. Each day we are a day older than yesterday. Days add up to weeks, weeks to months, months to years. It won't be too long before we are 30, halfway to 60. What will we do when we reach 60?

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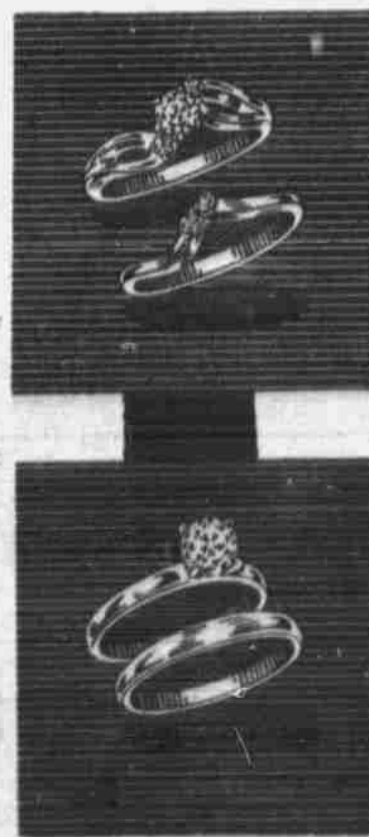
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