



OCS Kicks Off The Summer With Two Major Events

Office of Citizens Services offers MEMORIES TO GO and FARMERS MARKET



The first Director of the OCS (Virginia Wrobel) and the current Director (Mary Ann Diehl) are excited about their current projects.

VIRGINIA WROBEL

So tell us about the history of the Office of Citizens Services.

I started in 1974; the Village had done a survey to see how many seniors were residing in Evergreen Park. Based on this, they decided to start a department devoted solely to this high contingent of seniors. And they interviewed several people for the position of Director; I had lived here for four years and had a background in working with senior groups.

Where were you located originally?

I was based in the old Village Hall in a small room that was the Trustees' Room. Keep in mind that the trustees didn't have office hours at the Village Hall, so I had the room to myself during the day. There were three desks in the room, each with three drawers. Each trustee had one drawer, which meant that I had the middle drawers in all three desks for my work. I also got the first electric typewriter in the Village Hall! But that room was a little hidden, and (laughs) twice I got locked in the building after closing time because everybody forgot I was there. After that, they gave me a key! There was no other staff at first; but the government started funding a program for seniors so that they could work twenty hours a week. I was able to get a secretary through this program at no cost to the Village.

What kinds of programs did you have? Obviously, the Department has grown through the years.

Originally, we had some craft programs and events. We had more room on the second floor of the Village Hall for these things. We eventually had quite a few informational programs. In those days, most of the churches had very strong senior groups. So our Senior Council was made up largely of representatives from these churches. One of the early programs we had was the State Senior I.D. program, where people could come in and get the IDs, right there at the front counter where the village resident business is conducted. Well, we had so many seniors come in that they were filling the place. So the Mayor [Vacco] decided they had to start looking for a separate office space for us. Well, the Christian School at 97th and Homan was downsizing, so we were able to rent a couple of rooms from them for our Department; one room as an office and the other as an activity room. After school hours, we were able to use the auditorium. Eventually the Village was able to buy the building for use as a community center. We were able to start a chorus, which is still running [the Double Nickel Chorus]; we actually were able to put on one or two plays a year. We were also able to start a transportation service for seniors; the Fire Department gave us a bus that they had. You know, kind of like a school bus, just a little shorter. The whole senior "population" was different then because you were considered a senior when you hit 65 or 70. Now, you're considered a senior at 50.

Did it take a little fundraising to get the building into shape?

Oh yes, because the building had to be rehabbed a little bit. We had to get all new windows, so we sold Window Sponsorships. We were able to raise thousands of dollars. The names of the people and the business sponsors went right on the window sills.

And you've always had a very strong volunteer group, haven't you?

Yes, and what is interesting is that the women were used to volunteering in churches and schools, but they weren't too involved in the communities so much in the beginning. Many of them were housewives and mothers, so it was really new when they started getting involved with us and organizations like us. We had a good number of men volunteers, who were used to being involved in organizations like the Rotary, etc. Our senior council had representatives from all those kinds of organizations. . . many of which have fallen apart these days.

How long did you serve as OCS Director?

Fifteen years. From 1974 until 1989, when I retired. One of the bigger projects that we did right before I retired was the "Melting Pot of Memories" book in the mid 1980s. At that time, so many of our seniors had wonderful memories of Evergreen Park in the early days. And we needed to get their stories down. So, for quite a few years, our committee interviewed people and transcribed those interviews and got that nice little history book done. Then, during the Evergreen Park Centennial in 1993, OCS Director Ann Dykstra started a committee to get a "sequel" book out, "Cherishing Our Past". It was fun to work on both of those. And now, as a member of the Evergreen Park Historical Commission, we're planning a new history book.

So how new is the "Memories To Go" Village Garage Sale?

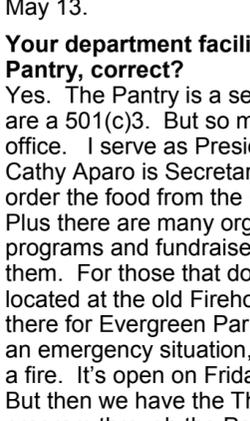
This is our eighth year. It's really the one and only fundraiser for the Senior Council. We were looking for some way to raise some funds to keep our activities going. We had done some searching around the other communities, who were doing very good Community Rummage Sales. So we said "why don't we try this?" The Village had opened up the Ice Rink and gave it to us for this one day a year. It works very well because you have the spacious interior. But many of our vendors prefer being outside, and this year, we've expanded that area. And it has never rained once on our event days! The number of our vendors has grown to seven hundred. We started out our first year with fifty vendors, and we're up to about eighty and most of them are repeat vendors., so they must do very well. The proceeds will subsidize our programs; for example, it pays for the entertainment at these Senior Council Luncheons, since the ticket price that we charge. . . \$7. . . really only pays for the lunch itself. We run a concessions area during the **Memories To Go**, and those proceeds go to the Village Pantry. It's a long day. I get there at seven o'clock and we have our volunteers there, we have members from the Street Department there. And it's a good time.

So, technically, the Office of Citizens Services and the Senior Council are two separate organizations.

Yes, though we work very closely with each other. The Council is a 501(c)3 organization; we have our own Treasury, our own board. Here in 2016, Former OCS Director Ann Dykstra is our President; Jean Casanto is our Vice President; Mary Ann Lieder is our Secretary; and I am our current Treasurer. We originally acted as an advisory group to the Office of Citizens Services, but we really work hand-in-hand. In fact, we couldn't do these events without them.

You are still as involved in Evergreen Park as you ever were.

After I retired, my husband and I thought about moving. We looked at condos in some other villages; some of them he liked, but I didn't; some of them I liked, but he didn't. Then we sat down and said to ourselves, "What's the problem here?" And the answer was evident. Neither of us wanted to move out of Evergreen Park!



MARY ANN DIEHL

How long have you been involved with the OCS?

I've been with the department for twelve years. I served as Jolene Churak's assistant until her passing in September of 2012. The village named me as the Director of the OCS two months later, in November. In the forty-two years of the OCS' existence, there have been four directors; Virginia Wrobel, Ann Dykstra, Jolene and myself. Those are some very honored footsteps to follow.

And you mentioned that you are long-time Evergreen Park resident.

Yes! My parents moved into the village in 1957 and I've lived here my whole life. I worked with my dad in his business for many years. Then in the mid-1990s I had applied here at the Village and have been with the OCS ever since.

The OCS has grown over the years. What kind of programs do you coordinate now?

We're on a "no down time" schedule here (laughs). We've got exercise programs, line dancing, card-playing, crafts; we've got a Monday afternoon movie program. We've got our Double-Nickel Chorus, which has been with us since the very beginning. And we coordinate special seasonal programs here, like the AARP Smart Driving Classes and Tax Help. One of the more fun things to plan is our series of one-day trips; we have four of those scheduled throughout the year.

When is the next one?

June 21, a Tuesday. It's our "Incredible Edibles" trip; we go to the Long Grove Confectionary in Buffalo Grove; then lunch at Lou Malnottis, then a trip to Lynfred Winery in Roselle. All the transportation is done right out of our parking lot here. The registration deadline is coming up! May 13.

Your department facilitates things over at the Village Pantry, correct?

Yes. The Pantry is a separately chartered organization, they are a 501(c)3. But so much of it is coordinated through this office. I serve as President of the Board and Village Clerk Cathy Aparo is Secretary. We register the volunteers, help order the food from the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Plus there are many organizations that have donation programs and fundraisers for the Pantry, and we work with them. For those that don't know, the Village Pantry is located at the old Firehouse at 98th and Washtenaw. It's there for Evergreen Park residents who need some help in an emergency situation, like an illness, or unemployment, or a fire. It's open on Fridays from 10am-Noon, then 2pm-4pm. But then we have the Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinner program through the Pantry as well, and again, all those registrations for food pickups is done through our office.

And now your biggest continued event is just around the corner. How old is the Farmers Market?

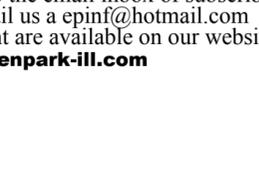
We are going into our twelfth year. We open up over at Yukich Field on Thursday, May 5. The Market really takes off once we hit June, though, once produce starts coming in strong. One of the reasons that our Farmers Market is so popular is that it has a wide variety of vendors, from farm produce to restaurants to nut/candy sellers to organics and candles. Very often we have vendors join us after we've opened for the year; they come in and visit and then come up to us and say, "Hey, this is really nice, how can we join you?" There's a little process involved, you know, if they're selling food and they need to have certification and insurance checked. But we're glad to have them. One of the biggest draws is when one of the banks has a paper shredding day at the Market, usually in October, right before the Market closes for the season. The Farmers Market has very nice following here in the Village. Once February rolls around, people begin asking us about it. They are so hungry for anything Summer-related by that time!

Photo Wall of Fame

Where we display two more entries in our Village Photo Contest, recently ended. . .



"MY BACKYARD" Submitted by Miranda Law



"HOLIDAY GAZEBO" Submitted by Mauri Savisky

SCRAPBOOK OF MEMORIES

Hamilton B. Maher was the Village Clerk from 1965-1985. The Maher Community Center is named after him. He wrote this article shortly before his sudden passing in 1985. Editor's notes/updates are in italics

WHILE LOOKING for a smaller home, we met a building contractor who was constructing a house in Evergreen Park at 93rd and Lawndale and was for sale. We rented a car and drove out to look at it. We liked it and we bought it.

This was in 1949. The sign at 87th and Kedzie said "Population of Evergreen Park, 10,000". There was nothing on the east side of Kedzie, and, on the west side was a cemetery. At 91st and Lawndale, all the neighborhood roads were dirt. Looking west from our dining room windows, there was nothing between us and Cicero Avenue but the Coral Theatre (now the Kinkos lot). Our house was built on ground that had been part of Ed Solle's truck farm. He was still running his fruit and vegetable stand.

In 1951, the Tribune Home Festival listed several buildings for sale in Evergreen Park. Because of that, Lawndale and Ridgeway built up rapidly. Better streets were constructed, to interest buyers. When we moved here, the southeast corner of 95th and Kedzie was vacant and used for ballgames, etc. Panos' Tavern was then on the southwest corner. The First National Bank opened its doors for the first time in 1949 west of Panos (Panos eventually moved to the southeast corner, where Chase Bank is now. First National Bank. . . now Fifth Third Bank. . . eventually moved to its present location at 95th and Utica). There was also Wolf's Bakery and a grocery store on that southwest corner. In 1957, the population sign was changed to 14,000.

95th Street was a two-lane highway and Kedzie Avenue was an old time asphalt road put in by the WPA. When the street was reconstructed later, the workers found many of the tools and wheelbarrows were down under the ground where the WPA had left them in the excavations. In 1957, I was elected Worth Township Justice of the Peace; we could sit in any court in Worth Township and surrounding villages. We could hear traffic cases, civil and automobile suites, misdemeanors up to a certain point and perform marriages. Most of the marriages were performed in my home, though sometimes I traveled to their home. Two or three times I went to a hospital to perform the ceremony.

The State Constitution abolished that office in April, 1965. Henry Klein was Mayor in Evergreen Park at the time and invited me to run for the office of Village Clerk. I did and was elected. It has been very rewarding for me to meet the people in Evergreen Park all these thirty-five years and I would not trade this for any other location. It's a good place to live and I am glad we rented that car and drove out here that day in 1949.

The Village Hall / Police Department / Fire Department as it looking in 1967. . .

THE VILLAGE GREEN

is a supplement to our free weekly informational electronic newsletter which is delivered to the email inbox of subscribers. To subscribe, simply email us a epinf@hotmail.com The eblast and this supplement are available on our website, www.evergreenpark-ill.com