



Letter to the Editor, as published in the *Palm Beach Post*, Saturday, March 3, 2007

***Agency on Aging hangers proving their effectiveness***

After the three devastating hurricanes of 2004 and 2005, the Area Agency on Aging mobilized staff, volunteers and partner agencies to respond to the needs of area seniors and provide much needed disaster relief help. As a result of our Agency's leadership and hands-on response efforts, more than 456,000 meals (and corresponding quantities of water and ice) were delivered door to door to 167,492 elders. For those of us in the trenches, these three disasters demonstrated the need for engaging communities at all levels to check on the well-being of others, with special attention to the most vulnerable among us.

During these efforts, it became painfully obvious that a means of neighbor looking out for neighbor was the best approach to identify those at greatest risk. Subsequently, on the eve of the 2006 Hurricane Season, the Area Agency on Aging, Palm Beach/Treasure Coast, Inc. introduced the **AAA Help Alert Door Hanger** emergency notification tool. This simple, but effective communication device, was envisioned by Agency volunteers, *seniors helping seniors*, as a way for neighbors to communicate with and help other neighbors in times of need. The value of this communications tool is tremendous within large senior residential communities, such as those impacted by Hurricane Wilma, for both community responders (like our Agency) and neighborhood association volunteers alike. The "Door Hanger" was the brainchild of graduates of the Agency on Aging's 13<sup>th</sup> Leadership Institute for Active Aging as a class project and was underwritten by the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners and other community and business partners.

On Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup> *The Palm Beach Post* delivered 200,000 door hangers as inserts in the full-run Sunday edition. This extraordinary effort was donated as a community service. As a result of a recent article, ***Post-hurricane door hangers ready for work*** (Susan Miller, 2/17/07), Dr. Gloria Zimmerman, Emergency Readiness Coordinator, reports that the Agency has received requests for 30,000 additional door hangers, bringing us shy of our original distribution goal of 1 million. Thanks again to the *Post* for its support.

Though we were spared a hurricane disaster last year, it is important that we continue our emergency readiness efforts with senior communities and others. A letter from a senior in Riviera Beach discovered the door hanger was proven useful beyond its original intent and was put to immediate use. In Villa Franciscan, this elder who was not feeling well enough to go downstairs to the mail boxes to "turn her button" (which lets Villa staff know the resident is okay), had used her door hanger to communicate with her neighbors and her community.

We are proud to serve the senior residents of Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast and of the dedicated and generous partnerships we have developed in this effort. Should anyone wish to know more about the Area Agency on Aging or order free Door Hangers, please call 561.684.5885.

Sincerely,

Robert L. McFalls  
Chief Executive Officer

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Serving Seniors in Palm Beach □ Martin □ St. Lucie □ Indian River □ Okeechobee Counties

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