

MINNESOTA RADIO TAPE FOR WEEK OF JUNE 3, 1964

FOR BROADCAST WEEK OF JUNE 7, 1964

Ladies and gentlemen - -

This is Senator Humphrey, speaking to you from my office on Capitol Hill

in Washington. . .

Today I want to report ^{about} ~~the story~~ of how a rural county in Minnesota cares for its aging people. Aitkin County, in Minnesota has a proportion of older people that is more than ^{50 percent higher than} ~~half again as high as that~~ for the State and the Nation. To do something to make life richer and the days less desolate for the elderly, has been a challenge to the county for a number of years. They have met that challenge in a remarkable way. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare has recently made the Aitkin story the subject of a booklet which it distributes as a model for other communities over the United States to emulate.

Aitkin County not only has a large number of elderly people. It covers an area of almost 2000 square miles of rural land, dotted with lakes. Many of

its older people have low incomes, live in ~~so~~ isolation, loneliness, and in some cases hardship.

Real effort to do something about it in Aitkin¹ began in 1959 when the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging decided to spend one-half of its Federal grant for preparation for the White House Conference on Aging, to see what could actually be accomplished on behalf of older people at the local level with local effort. From that exploration a successful cooperative community effort began. It combined professional guidance by a State consultant, local leaders willing and determined to work, and support from the county~~y~~ government.

The program built first around a Center in Aitkin, but soon Golden Age clubs were organized in Tamarack, Hill City and the Cuytler-Pine Lake area. The ~~on-going~~ programs are impressive in variety. There are many arts and crafts. Robes and towels are made for hospitals, toys are made for donation to children at Christmas time. Playing cards, chess, checkers and many other companionable games are available every afternoon of the week. Movies and forum discussions occupy other time. Birthday parties for members are happy occasions. Hobby shows, choirs, and other activities permit the club to present special programs outside of the Centers. ^{Older people} ~~They~~ drive sometimes from 30-40 miles to the Saturday night dances at the center in Aitkin, and when the 3 piece band strikes up a two-

step, there are those over 90 who step forth.

The stories are legion of how much these programs have meant to many people. Severely crippled people have been taken to the center. Finding friends and activity, they have developed new incentives to get out again rather than to submit to loneliness and despair. Others were self-conscious about some affliction. With encouragement from others they have overcome it. Some older people still must work for a living and can only afford a few hours at the center. But as one such woman says: "It is my only recreation and I do not know what I would do without it". Doctors recommend the Golden Age activities to their patients. Whether by coincidence or otherwise, there have been no commitments to mental institutions because of senility since the county program began.

The Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging is now firmly rooted in the county government structure, with a constitution, by-laws, and operating budget. But behind that is a story of vision, persistence, and determination of a few State and local leaders, of drawing funds from meager resources, and stretching limited finances to carry on the most needed activities. Most of all it is the story of enthusiastic response by the older people themselves. What has been done in the space of four years against what seemed like insurmountable

difficulties is gratifying and almost phenomenal. Leaders in Aitkin know how much more there is to be done, even while they are being called on for consultation by other counties seeking to establish similar programs. They are to be congratulated for this pioneering effort. The problems in a rural county are different than those in an urban area. But determination, energy, and a great amount of community support have proved adequate. Hopes are high that with time, they will do more.



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