

Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale
January 9, 2009 Podcast
Where We've Been and Where We're Going—No Senior Left Behind

Our senior citizens truly are our greatest generation. To them we owe respect, gratitude and care as they are responsible for the greatness of our community. Since I took office in 2002, I have worked to ensure that no senior gets left behind, forgotten or overlooked. It's been important to me to better the lives of the seniors including our veterans. Our administration has worked hard to do this.

Our community has made great strides in caring for our seniors.

East Tennessee is home to over 40% of the 285,000 veterans living in our state. Recognizing this, we started lobbying in 2002 to locate a Veterans Home in Knox County. Four years later, we opened the Ben Atchley State Veteran's Home. This regional facility would not have been possible without Knox County's donation of land and a \$6 million contribution. This facility helps us ensure that our veterans are treated with the utmost respect.

Caring for the basic needs of our seniors is important, but we also want help them remain independent and active.

To provide independence, Knox County, in conjunction with the Knoxville Area Transit, began offering free rides to senior citizens on any KAT bus route anywhere in Knox County. This is such a great program because it provides seniors with the sense of independence they sometimes lose as their transportation abilities become limited. KAT even helps seniors plan their daily travel by supplying an operator to help determine which busses to ride. All seniors have to do to participate is show their social security card and a form of ID.

In the last eight years, we've opened senior centers in Halls, South Knoxville and Carter. We've expanded the Corryton Center, renovated the Frank Strang Center, and jointly-funded the O'Connor Center expansion with the City of Knoxville.

Right now, more than 50,000 seniors are able to remain engaged, active and involved in their community because of these facilities. With computer, cooking, dance, exercise, foreign language, music and photography classes, walking and pool facilities, Red Hat Societies, and pot luck dinners, it's easy to see why center attendance grows exponentially. KAT busses run to almost all of our senior centers.

To give our seniors a voice, our administration spearheaded the *No Senior Left Behind* initiative. That included input from seniors, service providers, social service agencies, private businesses and citizens on a wide range of issues. As a result, we held four Senior Summits between 2002 and 2005. This taught us how important it was for seniors to be able to protect themselves and their quality of life.

In 2007, we joined with Mayors and District Attorney Generals from a 17-county region, in an effort to reduce the cases of fraud and abuse of seniors and raise awareness of the problem. Our

first *Regional Senior Summit on Fraud and Abuse* drew approximately 2,500 seniors and 75 service vendors and health care agencies. The Summit created new initiatives and activities to help address the fraud and abuse problems.

Last year, the Summit was a great success. Over 4,000 citizens received crucial information that will protect them from predators and empower them to take charge and live better lives.

The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that between one and two million Americans over the age of 65 have been victimized. They also estimate that for every case of elder abuse or neglect that is reported, five go unreported. Because of statistics like these, the theme for the 2009 Summit will again be senior health, fraud and abuse. We will focus on financial fraud, identity theft, crime prevention, and other issues.

This year's Summit will be a part of the Blue Cross Healthy Living Expo. As always, its free to seniors, their families and caregivers. The event boasts free health screenings, a family fit area, cooking and activity stages, and an appearance from Dr. Bob from the *Dr. Bob Show*.

We are proud of what we've done for seniors and we will do more in the future. We will continue serving seniors in every way we know how and as always welcome suggestions from you.

I'm Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale and thanks for listening to our pod cast.