

BUTLER COUNTY

# Butler County Elderly Services Program celebrates 20 years

Voters continue to support agency with renewal levy.

By **Wayne Baker**  
Staff Writer

BUTLER COUNTY — The Butler County Elderly Services Program will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in November. Voters passed the first tax levy in November, 1996 for it and the program began shortly after that. Voters have continued to support the program every time the levy has been on the ballot since then (2001, 2005, 2010 and 2015). In 2015, the renewal levy passed by nearly a 75 percent margin — the highest ever.

Last year, the program served more than 3,700 Butler County seniors and their families, providing home-delivered meals, home care assistance, home safety modifications, transportation, and other services that help frail older adults stay in their homes and avoid unnecessary placement in nursing homes according to Ken Wilson, vice president of Program Operations for the Council on Aging.

"I was involved in the effort to pass the first senior services levy and I remember many people did not think it would pass," Wilson said. "We proved them wrong, but we have never taken voter support for granted. We are constantly working on ways to make the program better and more efficient. We've had a great partnership with the Scripps Gerontology Center, for example. Their research has enabled us to measure quality, customer satisfaction, and efficiency which has led to service improvements."

Wilson said the greatest challenge facing the program is the growth of the older population in the face



Rosemary Wisecup, with the help from the Elderly Services Program, has lived in the same home for 25 years. She reached out to the program for help after she was injured in a fall. CONTRIBUTED

of limited resources.

"That includes workforce shortages which are happening in parts of our region as well as around the country," he explained. "Direct care workers are providing personalized care in people's homes but they are not paid enough for the critical work they're doing. The situation worsens in an improving economy where people have more employment options."

The Elderly Services Program (ESP) makes it possible for nearly 4,000 Butler County seniors to remain independent in their homes through services such as Meals on Wheels, homemaking, and medical transportation. (The program served 3,787 seniors in 2015.)

Without this program, many older adults would be forced into nursing homes, before it is necessary. They would lose much of their independence, privacy, and connection to home and community. And, for those who go on Medicaid, the cost of their care would be

much higher for taxpayers. In 2015, it cost an average \$302 per month per client on the Butler County Elderly Services Program, compared with more than \$4,000 per month for Medicaid nursing home care.

"The Elderly Services Program is a point of pride for the people of Butler County," said Laurie Petrie, vice president of communications for the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio. "Few places around the country do as much to help their frail, older residents remain in their homes and avoid unnecessary placement in nursing facilities. In fact, in 2015, the program was featured as part of a public television documentary called Caring for Mom and Dad."

To be eligible for the program, seniors must be a resident of Butler County, be age 65 or older and be unable to perform certain basic daily activities without help. Potential clients must undergo an in-home assessment. If their income

is over a certain level, they must pay a monthly co-payment, based on a sliding scale. About one-third of clients have a co-payment.

Rosemary Wisecup, 90, with help from the Elderly Services Program, has lived in the same home for 25 years. She reached out to the program for help after she was injured in a fall.

Through the program, she received a walker and a stair lift that enables her to go up and down her basement stairs and still do her own laundry. She also wears an emergency response device from the program. She told the Journal-News that she is glad to be able to stay in her home — enjoys playing music, sews quilts, and has a little dog and enjoys life. Without these things, she said, "I'd just be sitting and I'd be gone...Now I couldn't be in a better situation."

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