

HDN
12/22/10

Need help making ends meet? County has several agencies ready to serve

By RANDY CASTRO
randy.castro@hillsdale.net

For most of us, it's not about escaping for the cold winter months, it's about making them more bearable.

That could mean any number of things, from dressing properly to conduct simple tasks like shoveling or snow blowing, down to fulfilling basic needs such as food, heat and electricity.

For those struggling to make ends meet during the winter months, the Hillsdale Community Action Agency offers a wide array of programs aimed at helping those who qualify.

The agency is geared toward individuals with low income, with the agency's director, Maxine Vanlerberg, noting that many of the county's seniors fit into that profile.

She said the agency tries to help people before their situations become critical.

"People come to us with complex needs," Vanlerberg said. "Some people are running out of money and can't buy food or pay their light bill or put fuel in their tank."

Programs currently offered by the agency include emergency assistance—helping individuals to get their electricity turned on or preventing them from getting it turned off, renter assistance and volunteer income tax service, which is aimed at helping people receive earned income tax credits, homestead tax cred-

Food pantries in Hillsdale

- El Bethel
- Hillsdale Baptist
- King's Kupboard
- Salvation Army
- St. Anthony Family Center

its and heating tax credits. Vanlerberg said the agency will again be engaging the Heat the Home campaign.

The campaign, which will begin in January, is done in collaboration with McDonnalds and targets those who are experiencing home-heating-related emergencies.

"Obviously because it's cold, most of (people's needs) center around fuel," Vanlerberg said. Weatherization, a year-round program which is considered a non-emer-

gency program, provides insulation and safety-measures that can cut heating costs.

Vanlerberg said the agency has been and continues to work in conjunction with the Salvation Army and area food pantries to ensure that low-income residents are able to have access to enough food throughout the winter.

"There are those who don't have enough money for food or can't prepare it for themselves," Vanlerberg said. "We show them how to stretch their money or how to use food pantries."

There are several food banks throughout the county, including five in Hillsdale: El Bethel, Hillsdale Baptist, King's Kupboard, Salvation Army and St. Anthony Family Center.

Another way to make the season more bearable is to

properly prepare for the weather conditions when heading outdoors as a way to stay safe.

Dr. Daniel Spencer, of Contract for Health Chiropractic in Reading, stressed the importance of taking the necessary precautions before doing any physical outdoor activity during the winter months.

"We've all heard those stories of people going out and having heart attacks because they're not used to the strenuous activity," Spencer said. Spencer noted that using common sense while shoveling or snow blowing can minimize risk for injury.

Proper attire and footwear that limit exposure to the harsh conditions and minimizing risk of injury are of added importance.

"It's not wise to be out doing heavy lifting...don't bend at the waist," Spencer

said. "The more force you put into it, that will come back on your spine."

Spencer offered several tips on remaining injury-free during the winter chores, including letting the neighbors know you're out there in case of emergency and being sure to not overexert yourself.

"You can always pay one of the kids in the neighborhood to do it," Spencer said. For those looking to remain active during the winter months, the Perennial Park Senior Center continues to offer a variety of classes and programs, including the growing-in-popularity Zumba classes.

"When it gets colder out, people tend to come in more," the center's Health and Wellness coordinator Jessica Piper told the HDN in September. "People love to come try (Zumba), out and then they'll bring their friends."

What has been described as "exercise in disguise," the beginner's Zumba class offers a workout centered around Latin-style dancing. A 10-class punch card is available to senior center members for \$25, or single session classes run \$3 each. For non-members, a 10-class punch card is \$50, with individual classes set at \$5.