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Platform  
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**Senior levy a county asset  
Renewal will continue valuable services at no added cost to taxpayers**

On Nov. 6, 2001, Washington County voters passed the county's first-ever Senior Services Levy. The levy was for five years and is set to expire at the end of 2006.

On Tuesday, voters will be asked to replace the senior services levy so that important services can continue. The millage does not change. It remains at 0.85 mills.

What does that mean in terms of cost to individual taxpayers? For a homeowner with a house valued at \$100,000 it is only \$26.03 *per year*.

That is only 50 cents per week; less than a cup of coffee or pack of gum. The levy is administered by the Washington County commissioners and provides necessary funding for vital services like meals on wheels and medical transportation for seniors.

The senior services levy made it possible to start the prescription assistance for seniors program. In its first four years this program assisted over 900 Washington County seniors. Seniors from every township have received free prescriptions from pharmaceutical companies as a result. Many have commented that before this service, they could not afford to purchase needed medications, or that they did not take them as prescribed because of cost.

Proper nutrition in older adults is also essential to maintain good health. Over 78,000 meals were served at senior dining centers located in Belpre, Beverly, Layman, Lower Salem, Marietta, and New Matamoras. The senior services levy made it possible to open two new senior dining centers. In Layman, seniors enjoy a noon meal at the dining center located in the social hall of Layman United Methodist Church and in Belpre, the daily meal is enjoyed at the Rockland United Methodist Church social hall.

For various reasons, many seniors are unable to leave their homes or to prepare their own meals. The senior services levy made it possible to deliver over 146,000 hot, nutritious meals on wheels to hundreds of older residents throughout the county. These seniors look forward to that daily knock on the door and the driver's friendly face. For some, it is their only connection to the outside world.

All the expert medical care in the world is useless if one cannot access it. The senior services levy made it possible for hundreds of older adults to receive the medical care they needed. Specially equipped vehicles can accommodate wheelchairs and drivers are trained to assist people with special needs. Over 36,000 trips were completed.

Sometimes, the most basic help can mean the difference between remaining at home and moving to assisted living or a nursing facility. Simple interventions such as shopping, cleaning, providing help with

the laundry, or meal preparation make it possible for older adults to continue to live where they prefer - in their own homes. Because of the levy over 26,000 hours of in-home help was provided.

For many seniors, family and friends provide needed help on a regular basis. Providing care to a loved one can be a very rewarding experience.

It can also be tiresome and stressful for family members who must often balance other family and work obligations with their caregiving responsibilities. The levy made it possible for many older adults to participate in the adult daycare program. This service provides needed respite for the caregiver as well as social interaction, nutritious meals, help with personal care, and daily medication dispensing for the senior.

Older adults have something special to give. Through their varied life experiences they have acquired skills and knowledge that can benefit our communities and our citizens. The senior services levy provided support for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program which recruits and places active senior volunteers with organizations that are making a difference in our communities and in the lives of others. These volunteers have given over 55,000 hours of service per year to our community.

The senior services levy has also provided funds for the development of community senior centers throughout Washington County. Senior groups in Barlow, Bartlett, Belpre, Beverly, Churchtown, Independence Township, Little Hocking, Lowell, Newport, and New Matamoras, have been able to make needed improvements to facilities and to acquire the equipment and furnishings necessary to have a safe and comfortable meeting place.

Social supports like those provided at community senior centers are important. Continued involvement helps seniors avoid isolation and loneliness, and prevents depression which is a common problem with older adults.

The Washington County senior services levy is making a difference in the lives of thousands of older adults. Without the senior levy, many of these services would not be available to help seniors remain healthy and independent.

Remember, this is not a new tax. The millage does not change. The senior services levy costs each of us very little, but its impact is enormous!

Join me in voting for the senior services replacement levy on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Harry Cogswell is chairman of the Washington County Senior Services Levy Committee.