

Commission on Aging needs new home

By report to The Advance

Kings County Commission On Aging (KCCOA) is in jeopardy on several fronts and its continued viability and existence is in question. It is in need of a new home.

KCCOA is located in Mary Brock Hall, which is slated for demolition in the near future. It is not a Kings County department; it is an independent non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization

In September 2007, the Kings County Board of Supervisors approved a ten-year blueprint for the government complex that calls for the demolition of three 80-year-old buildings, including Mary Brock Hall, Kings Building, and Rossen Hall.

KCCOA receives its funding annually through contracted grants, city and county support, United Way and private tax-deductible donations, according to Sharon DeMasters, executive director of KCCOA.

"Kings County Commission On Aging is the only agency in Kings County that provides a full spectrum of services to seniors," said DeMasters.

Those services include adult day care centers (in Hanford & Lemoore), information and referral (including consumer services), Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, Behavioral Health Outreach Program -- Senior Access for Engagement (SAFE), and senior nutrition site management.

In addition, through networking and coordination, KCCOA provides a one-stop concept for a wide range of senior services, including KART, public health assessments, legal services, AARP 55 Alive classes, and health insurance counseling. KCCOA assists with more than 18,000 requests and questions per year. No other program in the county duplicates these unique services.

"Simon Lakritz was a mentor and friend," said DeMasters. "He was one of the founding authors in 1970 of Kings County Commission On Aging, of which he remained an active board member and served as its treasurer until he died. KCCOA retains a diversified, county-wide, 21 member governing board."

"The last time I spoke with Simon Lakritz, which was only a few days before he passed away," continued DeMasters, "he was concerned about 'where the Commission was going to be relocated.' He advised me to 'go to the papers' with the current situation about the relocation of the Commission On Aging."

Lakritz's thoughts represent the concerns of many Kings County residents who value the contribution the Commission On Aging makes to the quality of life for the county's senior citizens, DeMasters said.

KCCOA has worked hard to develop trust and respect in the community as an educated voice for the frail elderly and their caregivers, according to DeMasters.

"When or if KCCOA is abandoned, there will be no substitute," she said. "No parallel services are in place to replace it. Community support is needed."

KCCOA has been meeting monthly concerning the relocation with various community agencies, including the Kings County Human Services, to seek available options. If anyone reading this has any available space at extremely reasonable rates that could house the agency, please contact DeMasters at 582-3211, Ext. 2828.

For more information, please contact Sharon DeMasters, executive director, Kings County Commission On Aging, 1197 South Drive, Hanford; call the above number; or email sltdemasters@yahoo.com.

(Oct. 2, 2008)