

Norwalk Senior Center gearing up for annual fundraiser

By LESLIE LAKE

Hour Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 1, 2013 3:45 pm



NORWALK -- After months of planning, a team of volunteers and staff from the non-profit Norwalk Senior Center is putting the finishing touches on its largest annual fundraising event. Billed as "Cocktails and Cabaret" the event will assist the Center in providing services to more than 2,000 area seniors and help offset reduced funding over the past four years.

The Norwalk Center, just one of three self-supporting centers around the state, has felt the pinch of a 45 percent decline in contributions over the past four years, yet through the commitment of staff and volunteers has maintained services to its members, including providing an on-site lunch program to an average of 225 members five days per week, and Meals on Wheels deliveries to 85 homebound clients daily.

"The decline we've seen in contributions has been in line with most non-profits for the past four years," said Norwalk Senior Center executive director Paul Palermo. "What has set us apart is our volunteer base and dedicated staff."

For the past several years the staff at the Norwalk Senior Center has been tightening their belts so that their clients don't have to.

"The staff had come together and voluntarily took a two day per month furlough, with no salary increases for several years," Palermo said. "The level of commitment from our staff and volunteers has been what's kept this place going at its current level."

The Center coordinates programs and services for healthy, active seniors as well as providing lunch, Meals on Wheels and transportation for frail elders. All programs are designed to promote dignity and independence through the aging process. In South Norwalk, the Center's satellite site at 92 Cedar St. has programs in English and Spanish. Beside the daily activity schedule organized by the Program Department, the center's Outreach Department ensures that seniors are connected to services they need to allow them to age in place as long as possible. The Senior Housing Assistance Fund, funded by a grant from the Fairfield County Foundation, ensures that seniors have access to affordable housing.

"Thanks to the generosity of the community we provide a hot lunch daily to seniors at a nominal cost of \$3 a day," Palermo said. "And for those who aren't able to afford that, we provide lunch to them also."

The Center relies largely on the generosity of foundations, a nominal membership fee from its members, program fees, contributions from the community, and events such as the Cocktails and Caberet fundraiser.

Cocktails and Cabaret will be held at the Silvermine Tavern on May 9 and will feature a live cabaret performance by professional vocalist Bertilla Baker Thompson, who will be joined by John Mobilio on bass, Jim Royle on drums and Chris Coogan on piano.

"The entertainment has been donated to us. Also, each year we invite area restaurants to support us," Palermo said. "Local businesses have donated wine and beer for the event."

Food and dessert stations and drinks are sponsored by Norm Bloom & Son, Cafe Romanacci, Robeks, Da Pietro's, Bull's Head Market, The Wine Basket, Creative Culinary Services, Maplewood Senior Living, Basso Café Restaurant, Cathy Knies Catering and Sweet Ashley's.

In a long-time tradition for the Senior Center, Mayor Richard A. Moccia will be serving as auctioneer. Live auction items include trips to Cancun and Lake Tahoe; rounds of golf at Weeburn Country Club, Shorehaven Golf Club, Silver Spring Country Club, and New Canaan Country Club; lunch and sail on Long Island Sound; Park Hopper passes for Disneyworld; a guitar signed

by legendary blues guitarist Buddy Guy, his 14-year old protege Quinn Sullivan and Tom Hambridge, Grammy-Award winning producer, songwriter and solo artist; a 2012 New York Giants signed football, US Open Tennis tickets; and a \$1,000 Gift Certificate for Klaff's.

"We've also had numerous silent auctions items that have been donated by local businesses and individuals," Palermo said. "Our board members have been tremendously generous, and there's always a board gift."

The event is sponsored by AT&T, Fairfield County Bank, LeagueAthletics.com, Linda McMahon, Tom & Sophie Murphy and General Atlantic Service Company, LLC. In-kind graphic design, printing and photography have been provided by Carol Nolin, Accel Printing and Graphics and Richard Bonenfant.

"Cocktails and Cabaret": 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., Thursday, May 9 at Silvermine Tavern, 194 Perry Ave., Norwalk. Tickets: \$100. Program ads and event sponsorship opportunities are available.

For more information, please call Paul Palermo at (203) 847-3115 ext. 103 or email at paul-nsc@snet.net or visit www.norwalkseniorcenter.org.