

## **Always Room for More: Lincoln County Opportunity Company**

Hamlin is a lovely little town in the heart of Lincoln County. Like many quaint communities across the state, Hamlin is a community of individuals and families whose roots run deep. In the center of this familiar and comfortable community stands Lincoln County Opportunity Company, Inc. With its 50-year history, most folks can't remember a time when LCOC was not in their midst.



At a glance, you can see the buildings that house LCOC are attractive, well-groomed and inviting. Look a little closer and you quickly realize that it is a hub of daily activity. The focus is on providing the seniors of Lincoln County a wide range of services. “We are committed to first rate service and quality care as far as we can reach,” said William “Bill” Carpenter, executive director. “If not, what would be the point?”

This attitude of commitment is solidly ingrained in the work and spirit of the staff and the reason why LCOC continues to be well regarded. With operating centers in Harts, Hamlin and West Hamlin, Bill and the entire LCOC team come to work every day to not only provide needed and appropriate services, but also to continuously add to the quality and enjoyment of the lives of each senior who come through their doors.

It is because of this attitude of service and commitment that Bill and the staff of LCOC were asked to expand their reach and take four additional senior centers into their fold. The challenges involved in such an undertaking were going to be numerous. The transition success of the Westmoreland, Wayne, Fort Gay and Bison Senior Centers into the LCOC fold was not going to be instantaneous. The centers were administratively managed differently in every way. There were significant issues to be dealt with which included everything from physical maintenance of buildings, meal service, equipment repair and morale. “We knew it was not going to be an overnight transition, but with consistency and hard work, I knew that what we were about to undertake was a huge opportunity and that it could be done,” Bill said.

With that, it was decided that the best way to get things off to a good start was to have an in-person visit with the seniors who utilized each of the four

centers. Ask any senior what they think of their center, and you will hear words like, community, friends, fun events, inviting, and like a family to name a few. “It’s one thing to be familiar with folks from the beginning, and it’s another to have to change from what you have always known to a question mark,” Bill stated. He and his LCOC staff, including Johanna Eplin, Fran McComas, Kathy Curry, DeAnna Carpenter, Crystal Porter and Jaimee Gue, visited and spent time becoming familiar with what existed, so they would know how best to proceed. During these visits, he took the time to share LCOC’s philosophy, history and his vision for what and how services could be improved. He also asked for their patience, trust and understanding as they worked through and resolved several critical issues. It took lots of hard work, but it did not take long for the seniors to begin to see positive changes. What they saw was improvements in daily meals and menus, improvement to facilities were noticed, transportation services for shopping trips and other activities became more consistent, overall moral improved with the additional staff and equally important, the seniors felt that someone was listening to them.

Since October of 2016, congregate meals served have increased by 23.5% with Home Delivered meals increasing by 73.2%. Lighthouse services increased by 28 % and FAIR services by 50%. In total, LCOC’s service employees number grew to 210 from 175.

Even with the additions of clients, staff, necessary training, and putting new processes in place, at the end of the day, the staff of LCOC have but one primary mission, which is to offer the most needed services for, and show the respect that seniors deserve. “This was truly a blessing,” said Bill. “It allowed me to present existing staff with an opportunity to grow professionally through the many new challenges we faced. As a Senior Provider, it gave me a fresh opportunity to create a sense of security and stability to the newly incorporated members of our senior community and the staff that decided to stay.”

We at the WV Bureau of Senior Services applaud Lincoln County Opportunity Company, Inc. Their ability to expand their reach to include four additional centers, demonstrates what can be accomplished under the most challenging of circumstances. We appreciate their tireless pursuit of exceptional service to the seniors of West Virginia.





