

A group of East Palo Alto senior residents began meeting at St. Francis de Assisi Church under the sponsorship of Father Otte in 1967.

The purpose of the meetings were to get seniors out of their lethargic condition; to rescue them from being house-bound; and to get them involved in their own well-being.

They became an official senior citizen group in 1970.

There were about 25 seniors attending on a regular basis. At first, there was a Wednesday only program. Seniors with cars would voluntarily pick up other seniors. A business meeting would be held from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. A pot-luck luncheon would follow from 11:00 to 12:00 noon. Crafts - sewing and knitting - were scheduled for 12:30 p.m. Bingo would be conducted starting at 2:30 p.m. As part of the crafts program, Mrs. Myra Ansell, one of the seniors, donated over \$1200.00 in Tri-kem paints; she also instructed a class in painting on material. Thelma McGee taught beadwork - making necklaces and jewelry; Mrs. Besse taught knitting; and Iva Dimack was responsible for doing "boutique" things.

Occasional speakers varied the program.

Mr. Manuel Marshall served as president with Rose Walls serving as secretary, and Mrs. Webster as pianist/chaplain.

Federal funds for implementation of nutrition programs were made available in the early 70's. The deal granting funds to begin a nutrition site in East Palo Alto was consummated in early October 1973. Mr. Marshall along with several other Senior Club members worked diligently behind the scenes to bring this

about. The nutrition component eventually moved to St. Francis with the already established Senior Club. The group later split into two: one group, following the advice of the Economic Opportunity Commission administration, selected the Tulip Jones Women's Club on Bay Road as the nutrition site. An amount of \$15,000 was allocated for renovating this facility - roof repairs, constructing ramp for physically handicapped seniors, painting, et cetera. This facility was never really adequate for meeting the needs of those seniors: it was too small; it was located on one of the busiest thoroughfares in the community (thus, noise, air pollution, and speeding cars were problems); it was subjected to lots of vandalism; during the rainy season portions of its grounds were constantly under water; in fact, during the 78-79 rainy season, the seniors were without restroom accommodations; outhouses had to be brought in.

The senior group remaining at St. Francis tried to recoup its lost strength. It continually tried to bring to the attention of various officials and agencies (East Palo Alto Municipal Council, the Commission on Aging, and the Area Agency on Aging) the vital need for an East Palo Alto Senior Center. After many starts, stops, and delays, the EPA Council convened a Task Force to determine what were the needs, problems, and expectations of the seniors. The seniors were constantly reminded that the reason they didn't ever get any consideration and funding was due to the fact that they were not organized; that there were too many fragmented segments, each alleging to be THE SENIOR VOICE. In the beginning, the seniors realized that if they didn't get a place - a permanent space where they

could meet, develop strategy, do crafts, have congregate meals, et cetera - they would always be in a position of powerlessness. A sub-committee was designated to look for sites where a senior center could be established. The committee found several sites which might be adapted/renovated into a center. One of the most promising turned out to be space at the Ravenswood City School District Headquarters Complex. Many of the rooms in this building at 2120 Euclid Avenue were either unused or were used for the storage of books and instructional materials. Much of the stored articles was mostly junk. The Instructional Materials Center (IMC) occupied about 4100 square feet of this building. Over a period of months, by documented observations, only 10 persons availed themselves of the services of this IMC through walk-in service. The sub-committee approached the Superintendent, Dr. Seabrook, in the Spring of 1978 inquiring about the possibility of acquiring space for a center; the committee felt the space occupied by the IMC would be excellent for a multi-service senior center; first of all, it was tremendously underutilized; and secondly, the committee believed that in the scheme of things, humans ought to have a higher priority than inanimate objects. Dr. Seabrook indicated that the District had space available to meet senior requirements. He indicated, additionally, that renovations were needed and that there would be a rental fee.

The monthly meetings of the Task Force for an EPA Senior Center continued. The various agencies still remained totally unresponsive to the seniors' struggle. In the early Fall 1978, after a staff member of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) stated

the group needed a needs assessment in order to get support from the various county agencies, the seniors approached the Municipal Council. The Council after studying the request agreed to reprogram \$5,000 in 4th year Housing and Community Development (HCD) monies for a Senior needs assessment. In October 1978, after HCD received the Council's list of projects, the Director, Mark Nelson, did not support the needs assessment for the seniors and recommended against the \$5,000 expenditure. As an outgrowth of this situation, a meeting was convened; present were Royer and Bacciocco from the Board of Supervisors, Wilks and Mouton from the East Palo Alto Council, Nelson from HCD, Jordan from AAA, County manager Dave Nichols, and staffs of the various agencies. As a result, each of the involved entities - EPAC, AAA, HCD - were to sketch out what it could do (or could not do) relative to addressing some concerns raised by the Task Force.

Soon after this the EPA Council reprogrammed \$75,000 in HCD funds for the renovation and rental of a senior center site. HCD promised to expedite the project in whatever manner it could and to provide architectural support. Lastly, AAA agreed to somehow come up with some planning funds to get the project going. A proposal was written; as a result, \$4,400 was made available in May 1979 for a project director, installation of a telephone and the acquisition of essential supplies.

A second proposal submitted in May 1979 to AAA (copy enclosed) requesting \$54,000 was funded. The \$31,000 granted by AAA is for the 1979-80 program year.

The Ravenswood site is ideal. Located in a very pleasant

section of the community, it is very accessible; it is adjacent to the Ravenswood Recreation District; the recreation needs of the seniors can be met with close programmatic coordination and cooperation (i.e. swimming, horseshoes, shuffle board, badminton, dancing and the like).

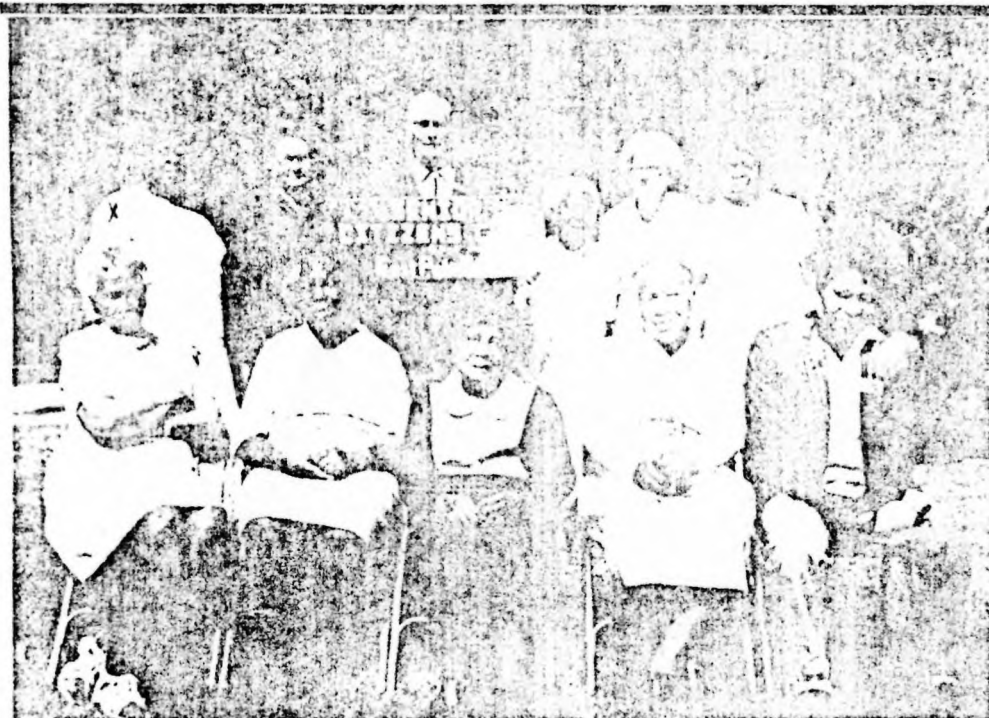
Additionally, it is located adjacent to the Charles Drew Medical-Dental Center. Any emergency can therefore be quickly accommodated. It is one block from SamTrans bus stops. Most importantly, the location is populated in such a way as to give a sense of personal security to the senior citizens. Although the Board of the Ravenswood School District has verbally assured the seniors that it is willing to do whatever is necessary to help implement a senior center, the District's administration seems to be continually placing barriers to prevent the concept from being consummated. At present, we are awaiting a finalized version of the agreement with the School District to be prepared by HCD. Because EPA is unincorporated, the County must act as agent.

It is very hard to wait out these developments; in the fall and winter of one's life, time is of the essence.



SENIORS GET-TOGETHER — A group of Senior Citizens of East Palo Alto got together last Wednesday afternoon at the Francis of Assisi Church to discuss issues of mutual concern which included the senior bills pending before the

state legislature. The seniors discussed the possibility of forming a lobbying group to cater to their interest in Sacramento. Aside from the serious aspect of their get-together, the seniors made merry by singing.



SENIORS NUTRITION PROGRAM — The deal granting the oldsters of East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park a share of the Federal Government Senior Citizens Nutrition Program was consummated last Monday. Manuel Marshall, (pictured holding the seniors' sign), a resident of East Palo Alto and a member of the San Mateo County

Commission on Aging for several months worked behind the scene to ensure the oldsters east of the Bayshore freeway are included in the pact. The officers of the seniors' club got together for this photo at a recent meeting. The program will allow seniors 65-years of age and older to buy lunch for 25 cents.