

## **LEDYARD SENIOR CENTER HISTORY**

The exact date that the Ledyard seniors formed a club is unknown; however, in the early 1970's a few friends got together and started holding social meetings at each others homes and a little later at the Gales Ferry Firehouse. They met every other week, enjoyed refreshments and snacks, and exchanged gifts at Christmas time. Their purpose for meeting then, as it is now, was to promote good fellowship, take part in community affairs, share information, and to promote activities mutually beneficial to each other.

As the group became larger, they started meeting at the United Methodist Church and the Ledyard Congregational Church and eventually they met regularly at our Lady of Lourdes Church every Wednesday.

After awhile various Church groups, youth groups, PTO's, homeowner associations and other organizations volunteered to serve luncheons at the Wednesday meetings. The groups still serve a luncheon to the club members every Wednesday.

Over the years, as part of their social activities, the club organized day and overnight trips. They also conducted other activities including square dancing, line dancing, chorus, card games, etc. Eventually, these functions were picked up by the Town of Ledyard. The Senior Citizens' Drop-In-Center was established when the Town of Ledyard agreed to rent St. Luke's Church Hall two days a week from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. in September 1980. That was the same time the TVCCA Meals-on-Wheels program was started.

The daily operation of the Senior Citizens' Drop-In-Center was a united effort of the Permanent Committee on Aging, the Senior Citizens' Club, the Municipal Agent, and the Parks and Recreation Department. In addition to the rental fee for the Drop-In Center, the Town was also sponsoring a weekly exercise program and a weekly music program. Canning, weight watching, crafts, quilting, and trips were offered to seniors on a weekly basis through the initiative of the Seniors Club and volunteers. The coordination of various recreational programs became very time consuming for the recreation subcommittee of the Permanent Committee on Aging. Eventually these functions were picked up by the Town of Ledyard and administered along with many other new activities by the Senior Citizen Program Director. A request for a part-time Program Director was approved for inclusion in the next year's budget (1984).

In 1989, the TVCCA Elderly Congregate Nutrition Program was added to the Drop-In-Center for only one day a week. A hot meal proved to be the number one activity at the Drop-In-Center that helped increase the attendance 25%. In 1990, the Town increase the number of days the Drop-In-Center would be open from two days to three days and increased the Program Director's hours from 15 hours to 25 hours a week. The "Elderly Nutrition Program" was the first step towards getting a Senior Center because it did more towards increasing the attendance at the Drop-In-Center than any other activity that was scheduled. Its Importance insured balanced nutrition and created a strong socializing force at the Drop-In-Center.

In September 1989, the Town of Ledyard was awarded a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant from the state center. In 1990, the Town Council appointed 7 residents to a Building Committee to draw up plans for the Town's first-ever Senior Citizens' Center. A proposed planning and construction schedule indicated the new Senior Citizens Center would be open for business early in 1992. After dealing with the many challenges facing the Building Committee, the project was finally approved by the town residents and the new Senior Center was officially opened March 10,

1993. It was completed behind schedule, but the seniors finally had a place to recreate, socialize or just get together and enjoy each other's company. No longer would the programs for seniors be scattered throughout the town and under constraints because we used rented facilities.

The Senior Center is now the focal point for all senior activities. A single location finally eliminated the confusion throughout the town. The new Senior Center encourages the Senior Citizens who formerly did not get involved, feel like a part of the community.

Over the years, Ledyard had primarily focused on recreation facilities for youngsters through middle-aged citizens. The new Senior Center was an idea whose time had come. The Senior Center provides one central facility for all the seniors to congregate, socialize and partake in both nutritional and emotional sustenance.