

THE TIMES

Valpo has plan to help 'silver tsunami'

By Phil Wieland phil.wieland@nwi.com, (219) 548-4352 | Posted: Monday, September 26, 2011 1:33 pm

VALPARAISO | The city unveiled a five-year plan at a press conference Monday to offer sufficient services and opportunities for Valparaiso's growing population of senior citizens.

"We've been hearing for many years that our older population is increasing rapidly," Mayor Jon Costas said. "It's very important to be aware of and understand trends. Our older population has doubled and could triple soon."

Costas said it is essential seniors be given choices because the interests of seniors are varied, and they have a lot to offer the community.

Called ElderStyle, the program is the result of a partnership started in 2007 between the city's Parks Department and the Pines Village Retirement Communities. MGT of America was hired this year to draft the plan with the assistance of a committee of local service providers.

The plan is to "provide a blueprint for addressing critical strategic issues related to Valparaiso's older adults."

This will be done by making sure older adults are aware of the resources available in the community, that age-friendly design concepts are applied to homes and public places, and the safety net is strengthened to more fully respond to seniors below the poverty line and who are isolated.

Fred Seamon, senior partner with MGT, said the "silver tsunami" is overtaking communities. He said Valparaiso is ahead of most in developing a plan to make sure Valparaiso is where older adults choose to live. He said the level of nonprofit services for the elderly and volunteerism in the city is among the best in the country.

Gary Olund, president and CEO of Northwest Indiana Community Action, said the city hopes to develop a model that can be extended to other communities. It has to be a partnership of the public, private and volunteer segments of society because, while the area has a good network of services available, they all are threatened by funding needs.

Now that the strategic plan is developed, the task force will begin working on implementation.