

Profile

The Leader of a Global
Engineering Firm
PEMCO, LTD. p.14

The Toughest Cameras in
Scientific Imaging
THERMO FISHER
SCIENTIFIC (CIDTEC) p.36

The Partners of a
95-Year-Old Insurer
GENERAL AGENCY COMPANY p.49

"You're only as good as your last job in this business."
Kent Hammond, Epoxy Films

MAKING A SCENE

FOUR LEADERS IN FILM PRODUCTION DELIVER A SNEAK PEAK
AT ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST COMPETITIVE INDUSTRIES

SOWEGA Council on Aging

From \$8,000 to a \$65 million budget, one nonprofit maintains its mission to assist the elderly

STRATEGY TO SHARE

ALWAYS SEEK OPPORTUNITIES

Be ever aware of opportunities to grow and expand services to the elderly. This includes seeking grants, donations, fundraisers, bequests, and any means to expand existing services and add new services. Meaningful partnerships are developed, which expand our opportunities, and extensive media coverage keeps the agency highly visible. Status quo is never an option.

by Cristina Adams

In 1966, a University of Georgia home economist, an 85-year-old woman with a walker, and two other concerned individuals took over operation of the Albany-Dougherty County Council on Aging. The agency's mission was—and still is—to help meet the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of older and/or handicapped individuals in greater Albany, Georgia. With a minuscule budget of \$8,000—\$2,000 of which was donations—and plenty of gumption, the Albany-Dougherty Council on Aging was born.

That University of Georgia home economist was Kay Hind, executive director of what is now the Southwest Georgia (SOWEGA) Council on Aging. From a tiny budget and two employees, SOWEGA has since grown to include 145 full- and part-time employees. Moreover, its services are now in demand and available in a 14-county area of 6,000 square miles. The flow of money has also increased—the current annual budget is \$6.5 million—as SOWEGA's constituency of senior citizens has expanded. The group's mission, however, hasn't budged.

"We serve people from all walks of life, including those who are strong, contributing members of the community as well as those who are in need of services," Hind says. "Our programs allow them to live independently and with dignity. If we were not here, some of these people would have to go into institutional-type settings."

Since its founding, SOWEGA's market has been adults 60 years or older as well as handicapped individuals. That market comprises more than 60,000 seniors throughout its region—a number that Hind says is growing substantially every year. It's a good thing, then, that SOWEGA offers a variety of programs and services at an affordable price; most programs are free of charge or require a cost share.

That price tag has been particularly welcome during the country's current economic downturn. There's no

doubt that recessions aren't good for most businesses, but nonprofit organizations are often hit hardest by the loss of donations and government funding denied; SOWEGA hasn't been an exception to the rule. Like so many nonprofits around the country, it too has taken a hit in its grant dollars and voluntary contributions. As a result, Hind says that it has done away with several of its programs and cut back on others. More importantly, she points out, is the effect the downturn has had on those who depend on SOWEGA's services.

"We have seen an increase in the number of people seeking our services," Hind says. "The high cost of everything, especially food and medicine, has negatively impacted many senior citizens."

Despite these financial blips, Hind says that contributions from throughout the region have been steady, and fundraisers have proven very successful over the past year. That's probably because SOWEGA's programs have become key in the lives of so many. At last count, 10 percent of the population of southwest Georgia—more than 59,000 people—is 65 years or older; within that group, 31 percent are low-income, 62 percent live in rural areas, and 25 percent live alone, making SOWEGA a critical presence now more than ever.

Among the services the organization provides are information about and assistance with community resources; elder-abuse prevention and outreach; advocacy for the elderly; assistance in understanding the complexities of Medicare and Medicaid; senior nutritional programs; family-caregiver support; activities for seniors with Alzheimer's; legal services for seniors; volunteer programs for those over the age of 55; and much more.

Hind, however, says that two of SOWEGA's services are in greater demand than others: Meals on Wheels and the Community Care Services Program. Meals on Wheels



KEEPING SENIORS
HEALTHY
COSTS LESS MONEY

TAKING A STAND: The staff of the Council attend a "Be There 4 Seniors" rally on the steps of the Capitol in Atlanta.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$8,000: initial budget to begin SOWEGA • **14:** counties SOWEGA serves • **6,000:** miles SOWEGA's service covers
15: SOWEGA centers • **\$6.5 million:** current annual budget



Kay Hind, Executive Director



PARTNERING UP: The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) partners with Albany's local Lowe's to build a wheelchair ramp for a young paraplegic woman.



The Council on Aging (COA) plans, provides, develops and coordinates services for all people 60 years of age and older in a 14 county, 6,000 square mile area of southwest Georgia.



1105 Palmyra Road
Albany, Ga. 31701

"Area Agency on Aging"

Ph: 800-282-6612
www.sowegacoa.org

ensures that seniors confined to their homes as well as those in economic straits receive a healthy, hot meal every day. For independent-living seniors, the Community Care Services Program offers different types of help—nursing, adult day rehabilitation, emergency response, respite care, and more—to make sure they can continue to stay in their homes.

Looking ahead, the organization is in the initial phases of a renovation and building project. Donated by a hospital, the site consists of several buildings, most of which will be demolished to make way for a state-of-the-art multi-purpose senior center in Albany. The lone building—not slated to fall to the wrecking ball—will be renovated to house both staff and a senior center. Although SOWEGA already has several grants from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Hind says that the major project will also require plenty of fundraising. As a result, it will likely take several years to complete. Not that such a challenge will prove daunting to SOWEGA—the group knows its mission and intends to deliver on it.

"What we do is important because we're able to improve and maintain the quality of life for older people in this region," Hind says. "We achieve these goals by continually engaging older people through our senior centers and our programs." [P]