

**Resident-Driven!**  
*A Key Aspect of Life at Horizon House*

February-March 2016

Since our inception in 1961, Horizon House has taken pride in being a uniquely resident-driven retirement community. The Residents' Council is an independent 501(c)3 corporation in its own right. And then there's the resident-run, money-making Monday Market that funds the activities of the 70+ resident committees and interest groups that make our community the vibrant place it is. We've certainly grown and changed over the decades, but residents remain at the center of life at Horizon House.

### **Beginning at the Beginning**

As early as 1958, civic leader Myrtle Edwards dreamed of a retirement where she'd be surrounded by cultural activities and interesting people doing interesting things. She and other members of Seattle's University Congregational Church and associated bodies convened a "senior citizens committee" to study that idea. Right from the start, there was interest in complete apartments with kitchens for independent living and proximity to all the downtown amenities, in addition to the more traditional desires for excellent healthcare and dining services. The committee's deliberations became increasingly serious. By 1961, The Baldwin, an existing apartment house on First Hill, had been purchased, a small amount of additional construction had taken place, Horizon House, Inc. became a registered nonprofit Washington State corporation, and the first residents, including Myrtle Edwards, moved in. Clearly, resident involvement was part of our DNA.

### **The Residents' Council**

The first Horizon House Residents' Council was elected in 1962. Unique then and uncommon even now, the eleven members of the Council were responsible for "general supervision of the social, entertainment, and hobby activities of Horizon House's residents." Some of their first actions included setting up woodworking, sewing and weaving, art, and lapidary rooms. There was even a "wrap" room full of donated papers, ribbons, and other gift-wrapping materials. The Council created a library of mostly donated books and a club room for meetings. Committees, chaired by residents, were formed to visit the sick and produce social events. To fund its activities, the Residents' Council held pay-to-play bridge parties and bake sales. As early as 1967, the Council established an annual Residents' Associates drive to subsidize the monthly fees of residents whose funds were running out—the precursor to today's Residents Assistance Fund.

At the present time, the Residents' Council is 15 elected members strong, each serving three-year terms. The Council holds an all-house meeting monthly, and they remain responsible for representing the interests of residents to the Board of Trustees and the administration, overseeing expenditures, and organizing the various resident activities and programs offered at Horizon House. To that end, the Council has created a number of Program Groups—Environment, Classes, Supported Living, Communication,

Discussion Groups, Education, Entertainment, Art, Liaison, Social Events, and Games—within which over 70 committees operate. New programs are added and old ones are phased out as needs and interests change. To this day, Horizon House has never had to hire a social director, thanks to the extensive resident involvement. Interestingly, the engine behind all this activity is the Monday Market.

### **From Jumble Sale to Flea Market to Monday Market**

In 1981, a resident had the brilliant idea of cleaning out closets and holding a sale of unwanted or unneeded items, with all profits going to Residents' Council activities, like the performing arts program she chaired. The first sale brought in the princely sum of \$1,000. The once-a-year sale became a twice-a-year sale, profits increased, and five years later these sales events morphed into a flea market that was open one day a week. The Monday Market, as it's called today, now brings in over \$70,000 a year. Although the Council receives some donations and bank interest, it is principally funded by Monday Market income.

### **Governance – Of, By, and For Residents**

Horizon House has always been formally governed by a Board of Trustees, but the degree of resident participation has been and continues to be unusual among senior living communities. As early as 1963, the newly formed Residents' Council took responsibility for resident programs and activities in a joint agreement with the Board. By 1984, one third of the Board's voting members were residents. In 2006, the elected president of the Residents' Council became a standing member of the Board of Trustees. All this remains true today. Fifty-five years later, residents are as active in the organization as ever, and still at the heart of what Horizon House is all about.