



THE ROMEO OBSERVER

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Study: One in three MI seniors can't afford basics

by **CHRIS GRAY**
 Observer Staff Writer

When driving in Romeo and viewing well-kept historic homes, it'd be tough to believe that one of every third house that belongs to a senior is struggling to afford it.

But a recent study from Wayne State University (WSU) has revealed that one in three Michigan seniors have trouble affording basic necessities such as food, housing and transportation.

Additionally, the study showed that one out of every three seniors ages 65 and above living in Macomb County are at or below poverty levels.

The study, conducted by the WSU Institute of Gerontology's "Seniors Count!" project in conjunction with Wider Opportunities for Women, states that 37 percent of Michigan's senior citizens are at or below economic security.

Economic security was defined as affording food, transportation, health care, housing and other necessities at a basic living standard in accordance with the Elder Economic Security Standard Index.

"This is specifically geared toward senior living expenses versus a generic poverty measure," said Jason Booza, faculty member of the WSU Department of Geography and Urban Planning and co-author of the study. "In Michigan it takes a look at the actual costs in each geographic area, so it looks at all 83 counties."

The Elder Index results are well above the official 9.7 percent poverty level as reported by the U.S. Census, which showed an average income of \$32,392 for seniors in 2008.

"We have these hidden pockets of senior poverty," said Booza. "It's the same issues within suburban and rural communities, especially those like Macomb County where you would think there aren't issues."

In Macomb County, the U.S. Census showed 8.2 percent of seniors living below poverty. The Elder Index, however, listed 36.8 percent of seniors living below the thresholds for poverty.

Debbie Webber, director for the Romeo and Washington senior centers, said she wasn't surprised by the study's findings.

"We're seeing more seniors coming in and asking for assistance with their utility bills, groceries, their prescription drugs," she said. "It wouldn't seem like it, but we do have a lot of seniors that have low income and only live on Social Security and struggle to get by."

According to the study, 64.9 percent for Michigan seniors whose income is 90 percent or more from Social Security are below the poverty level.

The percent shrinks to 23.7 percent for seniors with less than 90 percent of their income derived from Social Security.

Additionally, 20.3 percent of Michiganders who obtain income from pensions or retirement plans are below poverty, while those without either are at 53.4 percent.

Webber said part of the issue in the local area is that senior citizens have a hard time maintaining older homes

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