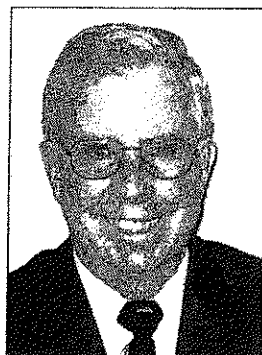


# Senior Leads Fight That Wins Safer Crosswalks

Sherman Pines moved into Newport's Donovan Manor senior housing last year. Before retiring, he had worked many years for a local social service agency and was familiar with local resources and how to access them. He soon became a trusted person whom other residents turned to for assistance as they sought to navigate systems like their health plans and Medicaid.

He heard many com-

## On the Senior Agenda



By William F. Flynn Jr.

plaints from other residents about a dangerous crosswalk nearby, on busy Memorial Boulevard. They said a senior was hit and killed in the crosswalk some years earlier, and they reported many "near misses." They said their complaints to city officials hadn't produced any improvement. Then this spring an elderly resident reported that a driver stopped while she was in the crosswalk, got out of his car and screamed

at her for moving too slowly. Sherman moved into action and began calling Newport City Hall.

After his phone calls went unanswered, he made an unscheduled visit to the Newport city manager. When he threatened to go to the press about the crosswalk problem, the manager agreed to a community meeting at Donovan Manor. Sherman did his homework by checking out other crosswalks around the city, as well as researching crosswalk safety on the Internet. He determined that a blinking light and better signage was needed to alert drivers about the crosswalk. He persuaded residents who encountered crosswalk problems, including the woman who had been screamed at, to come to the meeting and tell their stories. I was able to help Sherman plan the meeting that was held at Donovan Manor. The city

manager, director of public works, three police officers, and an RI Department of

sumed, Sherman asked the officials, "What are you going to do for us tomorrow?" They responded that a permanent fix would take a least sixty days. Sherman stood his ground, asking several more times, "What can you do tomorrow?" Finally the officials promised and delivered much quicker action. In less than a week the city had positioned a portable blinking light at the site, and promised a permanent one within 60 days. The city also eliminated fif-

teen on-street parking places that obscured the signage about the crosswalk.

At the Senior Agenda we get calls from individuals and groups asking us to take action on their behalf. When we offer to help them organize and build power to win their cause, they often decline, expecting us to fight their battle for them. Marva Collins, who organized parents to fight for better schools in Chicago, said it best: "My greatest challenge is convincing people that they can do things for themselves, and that they don't have to wait for others to do it for them."

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Transportation representative came. Several other local elected officials also attended. After residents told their stories, the meeting moved outside to view the crosswalk site. When the three police officers stood at one end of the crosswalk and tried to cross but were repeatedly ignored by drivers, the residents had made their point.

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