

Photos showcase the plight of food access for Preston County senior citizens

by Theresa Marthey STAFF WRITER | Posted: Tuesday, October 20, 2015 12:30 am

KINGWOOD — Photography showcasing the problems of availability, accessibility, affordability, accommodation and acceptability of food access within Preston County on Friday at the Preston Community Arts Center beginning at 1:30 p.m.

“I will be honest. I was surprised by the fact there are senior citizens of all income levels who are having food access problems,” West Virginia University School of Public Health Assistant Professor Lauri Andress, Ph.D., said. “The commonality of the issues were poignant. There is no splurging on a food they may want just for fun.”

“High, middle or low income, they have to make choices between bills and the amount of food they can buy, for one,” Andress said. “Getting to a store was also a problem due to the location of many stores.”

Some areas of Preston County do not have easy access to a grocery store to do their shopping and have to travel great distances.

“For example, Bruceton Mills seniors don’t have a local grocery store,” Andress said. “So if they have trouble getting transportation in the first place, they don’t want to be stranded somewhere.”

Many seniors rely on public transportation, and if they have limited mobility such as being in a wheelchair, they have problems with the actual shopping, as well as getting items back into their homes.

“Something you don’t think about is the location of the grocery items on the shelves,” Andress said. “They may not be able reach the items on the top shelves or bend to get the items on the bottom shelves.

“Then they have the problems of getting the groceries from the car, or public transportation, into the house and putting them away,” Andress said. “There are also seniors who are shut in and don’t have people or local family to check in on them that is problematic.”

During the exhibit, Andress said the exhibit will also feature solutions and ideas the senior citizens came up with in addition to the problems faced.



Empty freezer

An empty freezer is just one of the pictures that will be on display at the Preston Community Arts Center on Friday as part of an exhibit on senior citizens and food access.

“We will have some solutions to the problems addressed, and we are committed to working with the community to help with some of these problems,” Andress said. “I think Preston County is a place that would pull together to address some of these issues.”

The project began in February 2015, and the completion was accelerated for October because of the upcoming winter weather. The research began with phone meetings and moved to face-to-face meetings and then community meetings.

“We went to the senior centers, mainly Kingwood because of the location and the time of the year, asking them to make food diaries,” Andress said. “We also gave them disposable cameras so they could take pictures dealing with food for two weeks.”

Photos showcase the seniors concerns and interests, and they were able to speak about their issues through these items.

“Most people took about 14 photos, some a little over 20 with the cameras,” Andress said. “We also went back out with some of the seniors and did more photos with the cameras and smart phones.”

The Preston Community Arts Center is located at 123 South Price Street, Kingwood.

The project was funded through the Caroline Haase Trust, and was conducted by the WVU School of Public Health in collaboration with Preston County Senior Citizens, Inc., Preston County Family Resource Network, Preston Memorial Hospital and the Preston County Health Department.