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Johnson, others offer drug plan help

By Bill Yelenak
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MERIDEN — Evelyn Felix and Bob Wojan came to the Max E. Muravnick Senior Citizens Center on Monday, hoping to find out how they could get cheaper prescription drugs through Medicare.

They weren't the only ones. About 60 people attended an enrollment event for Medicare Part D on Monday, getting advice from counselors on the best plan for them. Many attended after having problems signing up for a plan on their own, including Felix.

"I was all confused and frustrated about what options I should take, and I couldn't do it," Felix said.

While Felix is paying less than $170 a month for prescription drugs, she wanted to see what plan might be able to save her more money. Wojan also had problems and enrolled in the wrong plan to begin with, he said.

"It cost me more than if I walked in off the street," he said. "I don't have that many drugs, but you never know what happens in the future."

U.S. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson, R-5, was on hand to meet with residents, talk to them about their options and discuss the Medicare Part D enrollment. Johnson believes residents will be well served by the multitude of options offered in the state and talked to city resident Olga Boris about the cost saving opportunities the plans provide.

"It's saving people at least half and sometimes as much at two-thirds," Johnson told Boris.

Johnson also introduced people from her district who have benefited from signing up for Medicare Part D. Cheshire resident Gail Glazewski will save almost $2,000 per year through the new prescription plan, she told the audience.

"I had used the program all January, all February and twice in March," Glazewski said. "Don't let the numbers overwhelm you."

Senior center Director John Hogarth believes the turnout for the event was "excellent," and thinks counselors from the CHOICES program helped residents learn about different prescription drug programs that could help them. The state Department of Social Services runs the CHOICES program, which helps provide health insurance assistance and other information to seniors and those with disabilities.

"It was a worthwhile event, I think, and if there are other people who want additional help, they could certainly come in and see me or other people on my staff," Hogarth said.

Those who didn't attend the event can also use the Medicare Prescription Drug Finder on the Internet at *http://www.medicare.gov*. People will be able to enter what prescription they use and their dosage, and the site will tell them the least expensive Medicare prescription drug plan for them.

While some seniors Monday expressed frustration with the number of plans and the process of choosing one, Johnson believes they will be more receptive after going through the process and finding out how much money they can save.

"We've had people call our office and be irate, and when we ask them have they tried it, they say no," Johnson said. She encouraged people to call her office if they wanted help. "It's not so complicated. My staff can help you. Just turn to those who can help, see what your options are, see what your savings are going to be and make your decision."

About 42 million people across the country and 525,000 in the state use Medicare. More than 286,000 state Medicare users have already signed up for the prescription drug benefit, said Craig Schneider, a networks manager for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The enrollment period without a penalty fee ends May 15.

Important dates:

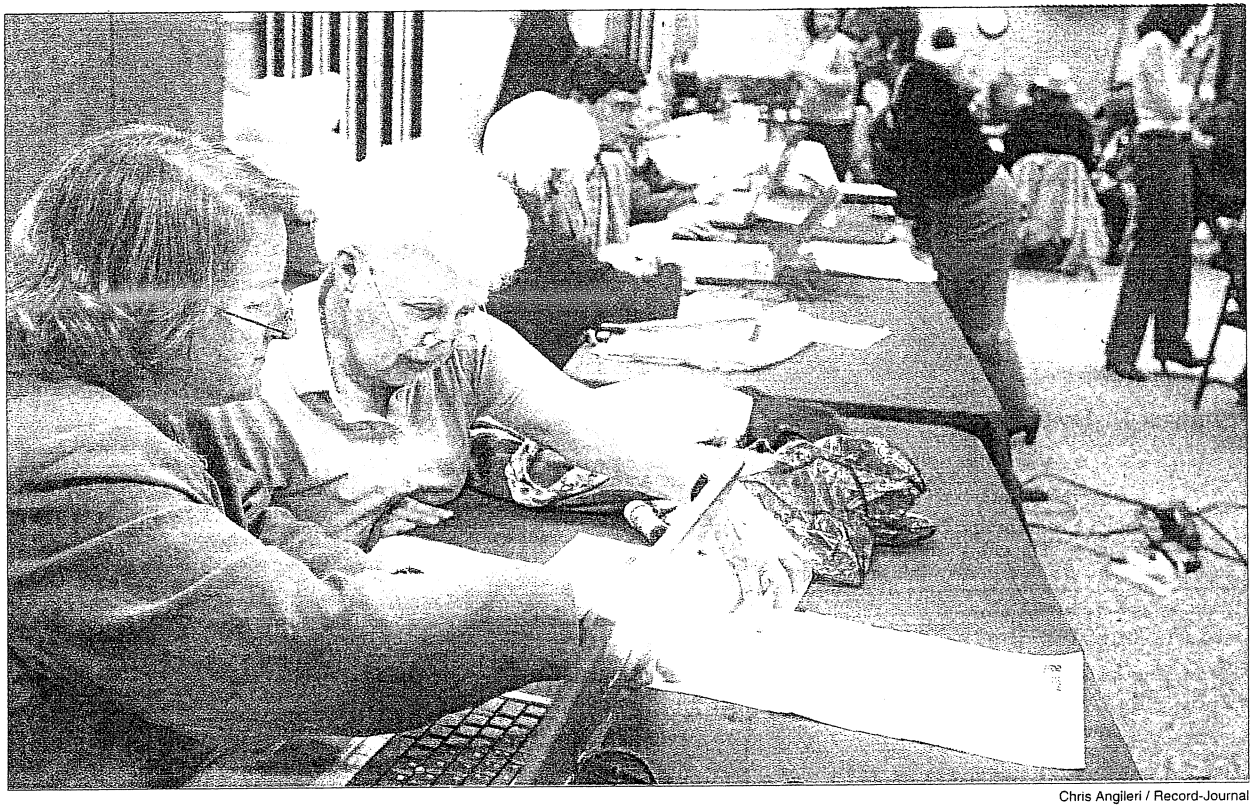
May 15, 2006: Last day to join a plan offering coverage for 2006

Nov. 15 - Dec. 31, 2006: Next opportunity to enroll.

Source: www.medicare.gov

For information about enrolling for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit go to ***http://www.medicare.gov.***

For further assistance call 1-800-MEDICARE or U.S. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson's offices at (860) 223-8412 or (203) 630-1903.



Chris Angileri / Record-Journal

Cheryl Cipolla, left, advices Meriden resident Evelyn B. Carabetta, right, on how to reduce the cost of her medicines. The two were at the Max E. Muravnick Senior Citizens Center during an event where Medicare specialists are beginning a 14-town tour in 10 days.