

# PRESS RELEASE



For Immediate Release  
Oct. 28, 2008

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## Gatekeeper Program Equips City Employees to Help Seniors

City of Plano employees are learning how to detect the telltale signs of a senior in need as part of the new Gatekeeper Program. The program has been developed in coordination with the Geriatric Wellness Center of Collin County (GWCCC), Adult Protective Services and the North Central Texas Council of Governments' Area Agency on Aging to identify older residents in need of social services to easily connect them to local providers.

Training of employees began in late September with the Property Standards department and key employees of other departments participating. Property Standards will be the first department to pilot the program. Property Standards Department Director Cynthia O'Banner said, "Many times when an older person begins to need help, their yard and house maintenance begins to show signs of neglect. When our team speaks with an elderly home owner about a code violation, these assessment tools will allow us to be aware of and watch for potential signs of a greater personal need."

Employees are taught to look for indicators of unmet needs for social services, in addition to potential elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. The confidential referrals are made by the Gatekeepers to the Geriatric Wellness Center of Collin County (GWCCC) for follow-up by a master's level social worker or to Adult Protective Services for follow-up by an investigator.

GWCCC Elizabeth Kent said, "This partnership puts the City of Plano's front line of customer contact in a position to serve seniors at a deeper level. These assessment tools are great for an initial screening. The Wellness Center can then conduct a detailed assessment to determine what resources may be available to address the seniors' needs.

The Wellness Center may also collaborate with our private and public community partners to address unmet needs.”

Even before the program was fully initiated a representative of the Plano Police Department in the initial training group made the first senior referral. Since then a law enforcement agency in Tarrant County has contacted the Geriatric Wellness Center of Collin County for advice on how they can develop their own program of this type.

For more information about the Gatekeeper Program, contact Elizabeth Kent at the GWCCC at (972) 941-7335.