

**City Receives Early Christmas Gift**

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**BY PAT KROCHMAL - STAFF WRITER**

Des Plaines officials and the Des Plaines Community Senior Center know exactly how they will use the really big Christmas gifts they will receive - thanks in part to U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th.

The city will use a \$1 million federal grant announced Monday for the much-needed improvement of alleys and sidewalks. The seniors will use their \$72,750 grant to complete their fund-raising campaign for a new center.

"For the last couple of years, all of the municipalities have been strapped for money. We all have been fighting a battle since the crisis of Sept. 11, 2001. And for years, we also have been fighting the battle of backyard and other kinds of flooding. Last year, we passed an agreement that would solve some of the backyard flooding, but every time we felt we had the money to go ahead with the project, something always happened (to prevent it)," said Mayor Anthony Arredia.

"Because of this money, we will be able to take care of the alleys in the first and second wards - that is if the council agrees with me (on its use). At the same time we fix the alleys, we will also address backyard flooding because a lot of the flooding is the result of the poor condition of the alleys. So we are very, very happy to get this money," he added.

Sharon Smith, the Des Plaines Community Senior Center's executive director, said that local and state legislators have long supported the center's mission to serve seniors.

"Now, through Jan's support, we are enjoying support from Washington, D.C., and the federal level. This is the first federal funding the center has ever received and that is directly attributable to Jan and her staff," Smith said.

"We are creating a national model. We have done it for 30 years and we are presently on the brink of something that every other senior center in America will look at as a model," she added.

The funds that the center will receive will allow it to end its capital campaign, said Graham Hill, chairman of the senior center's fund-raising effort.

"These funds will open the doors of a brand new senior center for us. It was just a dream just a couple of years ago and now seniors will be able to use the facility faster than anticipated due to the congresswoman's help," Hill said.

This is a "significant" amount of money, especially when it is compared to the amounts that other communities have received from the federal government, Schakowsky said.

"A lot of people talk about how they don't want to pay taxes, but its hard to imagine anyone building his or her own sewer, improving the sidewalks, or the quality of life of seniors," Schakowsky.

"This was an opportunity to bring some of those tax dollars home to the community to exemplify the kind of partnership that the federal government has with the local government and the way that we can all work together to improve life in Des Plaines," she added.

This is also just another example of the communication and working relationship that the city officials have with other elected officials, Arredia said.

"The congresswoman has always been there when we have needed help ... She knows and understands everything that goes on in our town - especially our wants and needs," he added.