

HAUPPAUGE

# FREE FOOD FOR SENIORS

Annual Long Island Cares resource fair helps them cope with rising prices, limited income

BY AIDAN JOHNSON

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As high food prices continue to impact consumers, senior citizens had the opportunity to get fresh produce for free last week at the Long Island Cares Harry Chapin Food Bank.

Wednesday's fourth annual seniors farmers market and resource fair, created by a partnership between PSEG Long Island and Long Island Cares, helped seniors gain access to "some beautiful locally sourced fresh produce," said Jessica Rosati, vice president for programs and community services at Long Island Cares.

Amityville couple Terrence Washington, 66, and Joann Kama, 57, attended the event at the food bank, in Hauppauge, and said food prices are leaving them stressed.

"We are afraid because of the way the economy is going. We are homeowners and we are nervous," Kama said, adding that events such as the free farmers market help them cope.

Washington, a military veteran, encouraged others to take advantage of the various programs offered by LI Cares, while Kama stressed that seniors should not be afraid to ask for help. "People are so ashamed," she said of reaching out for assistance with food and other needs.

Long Island Cares media relations manager Peter Crescenti said the organization is "not here to judge you."

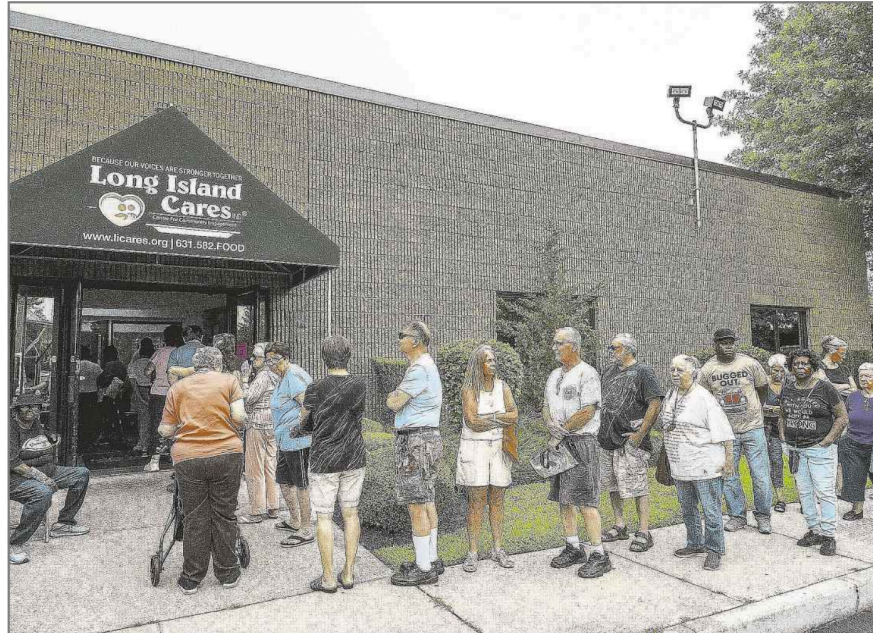
"We're not here to do anything other than love you, hold out our arms to you and help you put three meals on the table," he said.

According to LI Cares, 493 seniors and 202 households attended, with 4,815 pounds of produce distributed.

## 'Genesis' of food insecurity

The annual resource fair also offered other services for seniors.

"Inside the training center we have about 18 different se-



A line forms around the block during a seniors resource fair hosted by PSEG and Long Island Cares.

nior-focused organizations that are offering an array of different services that are free for seniors to take part in," Rosati said.

"And then outside we have our senior mobile farmers market where seniors have the option to self-select the produce that they would like, or they can take a grab and go bag of fresh produce home with them," she said.

Co-sponsor PSEG Long Island spokeswoman Amy Di Leo said this year, the produce it sponsored was bagged beforehand to curb a possible "logjam" and lessen the amount of times seniors had to stand.

Rosati said seniors are "a vulnerable population" that have "limited income" and "limited community resources."

Martin Cantor, director at the Long Island Center for Socio-Economic Policy, described the financial challenges that lead to seniors being at higher risk for



Left, PSEG volunteer Jessica Messina hands food to Joann Kama, 57, and Terrence Washington, 66, of Amityville on Wednesday.

food insecurity.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, inflation has increased food prices by 33%. Then when you add in the cost of energy and property taxes, you're squeezing se-

niors for their available cash," Cantor said in an interview.

He also pointed to the gap between the increase of prices due to inflation and market conditions in the last five years, versus Social Security cost-of-liv-

## Fresh finds

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■ **The event was created by a partnership** between PSEG Long Island and Long Island Cares. For more information on programs to help those in need, go to [psegliny.com](http://psegliny.com) or [licares.org](http://licares.org).

ing adjustments.

"So you have costs exceeding the revenues coming in, and so what happens is now that seniors are faced with all these expenses, they take a look at 'Where can I cut back?'" Cantor said.

"Unfortunately, seniors will cut back on food, and . . . that's the genesis of the food insecurity," he added.

## Another goal: awareness

Crescenti said LI Cares' primary goal "is to provide as much food as we possibly can to the food insecure Long Islanders," which he said is "well above 300,000 now."

"And another goal is to bring awareness to those that are not food insecure who really don't have a conception of what's going on in a lot of parts of Long Island," he added, explaining that despite people viewing Long Island as prosperous, it "does have pockets of food insecurity."

Di Leo encouraged people to check out PSEG's programs aimed at helping those with financial difficulties. More information can be found on the PSEG Long Island website, [psegliny.com](http://psegliny.com).

And for those seeking more information on how to find food, go to the LI Cares website, [licares.org](http://licares.org).