

localnews

'Virtual' Kindness

Outgoing county aging czar opts for an alternative to the traditional retirement party.

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Managing Editor

One night a few months ago, Arnold J. Eppel said he was lying in bed next to his wife — “I’m not trying to sound too sexy here, I was just watching the news,” he chuckled — contemplating his impending retirement from the Baltimore County Department of Aging.

“In my head, I had images of a rubber chicken dinner at Martin’s West,” he said, alluding to the Wood-lawn catering hall. “So I turned to my wife and said, ‘I just can’t do it. I just *can’t*.’”

So Mr. Eppel — who worked for the county for 28 years, 19 of them at its Department of Aging — came up with an alternative to the conventional retirement soiree replete with cornball speeches and a gold watch. He calls it a “virtual retirement party.”

volunteers, prepares and delivers more than 800,000 meals annually to homebound individuals, as well as providing other support services.

“They’re one of my favorite organizations,” said Mr. Eppel, who earlier this month became executive director of the Atrium Village senior lifestyle community in Owings Mills. “This is a great way to give back to the community. There’s such a need out there. The economy is bad right now and the government is cutting programs, so this is a great way to help at the personal level. I’ve gotten a lot of good responses.”

Mr. Eppel said he hopes to raise \$7,500 or more through his virtual retirement project. He said about \$4,000 has been collected so far.

Mr. Eppel plans to hold a ceremony July 17 at Atrium Village with Baltimore County Executive James T.

“When Arnold called me about this, I didn’t know what to say, I was so humbled. It really helps us at this critical time.”

— A. Thomas Grazio, Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland

Through an e-mail campaign coordinated by the Department of Aging, on senior center newsletters and several Web sites, Mr. Eppel is asking friends, associates, supporters and others to mark his career milestone by making contributions to Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland. Mr. Eppel served as director of the Department of Aging for seven years.

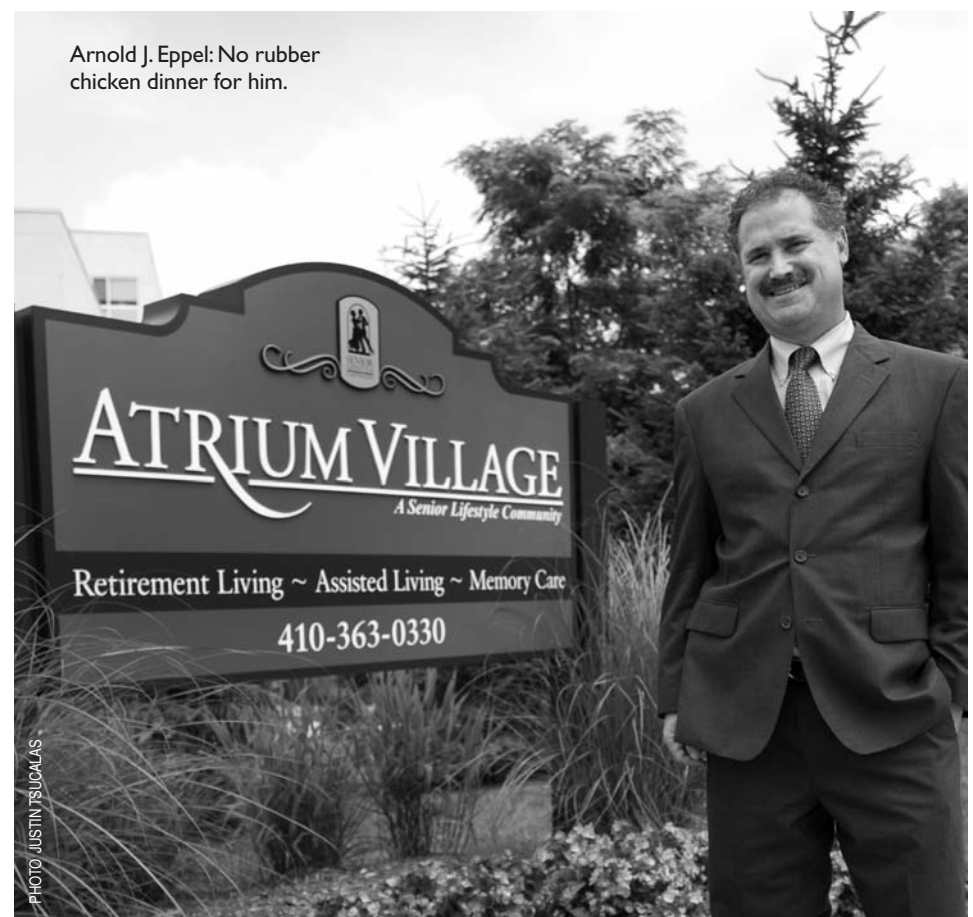
Meals on Wheels is a non-profit organization that, through staff and

Smith Jr. and present a check to A. Thomas Grazio, executive director of Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland.

Notice of the virtual retirement was posted on the Web sites of the Department of Aging and Meals on Wheels, as well as internal employee county Web sites. An announcement also appeared in the Department of Aging’s *Senior Digest* publication.

Mr. Eppel, a Reisterstown resident who belongs to Beth Tfiloh Congre-

Arnold J. Eppel: No rubber chicken dinner for him.



gation and Winands Road Synagogue, said he hopes his virtual retirement concept will be replicated by others. “I hope people will say, ‘Hey, I’m going to do the same thing as that guy,’” he said.

Mr. Grazio said he had never heard of a virtual retirement party, but he said it reflects the content of Mr. Eppel’s character and commitment to seniors.

“This was his idea *all* the way,” said Mr. Grazio. “This is what he wanted to do. To us, this is a very special event. Arnold really does care about the seniors, especially vulnerable seniors, and their needs. He knows who he refers to us and he knows that if they can’t pay we’ll still feed them. This is his way of giving back.

“When Arnold called me about this, I didn’t know what to say, I was so humbled,” Mr. Grazio said. “It really helps us at this critical time. I told him, ‘If it’s 50 bucks, I’ll take it. I’m in his debt.’”

Phyllis Myers, executive secretary of the director’s office at the Department of Aging, said Mr. Eppel will be sorely missed there. “He was just too much. He has so much energy and

vision,” she said. “He was so good at what he does.”

Mr. Smith nominated Joanne Williams, deputy director of the Department of Aging, to succeed Mr. Eppel. The Baltimore County Council will vote June 30 on her nomination.

Mr. Eppel said his decision to leave the county government was a difficult one.

“I absolutely *loved* that job. It was my heart and soul,” he said. “But I replaced it with something very special, serving in my own community at the grassroots level. This was a chance to take a large residential organization and work with it at a personal and neighborhood level. This is a good organization and I want to make it great.” □

To make a contribution to Mr. Eppel’s virtual retirement project, send checks (suggested donation is \$25), made payable to Meals on Wheels, to Phyllis Myers, Baltimore County Department of Aging, 611 Central Ave., Room 303, Towson, Md., 21204.

For information, call 410-887-2109 or check out mealsonwheelsmd.org/.