



Citizen Patriot | Lauren Wood

Clay Carroll

At 62, and with a full career under his belt, Clay Carroll could be kicking back in retirement, fishing or traveling whenever he wants.

Instead, he's often at the Jackson County Department on Aging, voluntarily helping elderly people navigate through complicated, confusing health insurance plans and tax forms.

"He is a huge help," said Amy Minix, the department on aging's Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program coordinator.

"He's here for three or four days a week for six weeks during open enrollment. Without him, we would not be able to help as many people."

Carroll's dedication has made him one of the Citizen Patriot's Distinguished Citizens for 2011.

"I truly enjoy it," said Carroll, of Horton. "It's not work. I'm just really glad I can give back."

Carroll spends much of his time at the department on aging helping senior citizens navigate through Medicare Part D plans and private supplemental health insurance policies so they pick the best and most cost-effective plan for them. He took six days of classes to be able to do this volunteer job.

"This is not something elderly people can figure out on their own," he said. "It really annoys me. There are 35 drug plans, and they tell an 80-year-old to go on a computer and pick one. I'm passionate about helping these poor people who really can't help themselves."

In 2009, Carroll did 148 comparisons for people, helping them save anywhere from \$100 to \$1,000, Minix said.

"Having someone go through this face-to-face with them is a real relief to people," she said. "Clay really is a dedicated person."

Carroll also works with the AARP Tax Program, helping seniors fill out tax forms. And he assists with the Household and Outdoor Maintenance Especially For Seniors (HOMES)

program that helps the elderly with minor safety-related household repairs and improvements.

"I have witnessed his dedication," said Renee, his wife of 25 years. "He's happier when he's keeping busy and helping people."

Carroll, a lifelong Jackson County resident, spent four years in the U.S. Air Force, serving in Vietnam, after graduating from Parkside High School, in 1966. He went to work in the human resources department of Tomkins-Johnson, which was bought by Aeroquip and then by Eaton Corp. before he retired in 2006 after 33 years.

"I was very, very fortunate in my life to have worked at the same place for a long time, so I'm really enjoying this opportunity to give back," he said. "When you see the smile on seniors' faces when you've been able to help them and see how appreciative they are, that's all the pay you need."