

Editor
Park Ridge Journal-Topics

We read Heather Holm's article, entitled "Parks Waiting for Seniors to Accept Suit Settlement," in a recent issue of your newspaper. Unfortunately, the article is misleading on a number of points. We are writing to set the record straight about those items, and to encourage you to contact us if you have further questions or would like to get our statement of the facts prior to publishing any future stories on this topic.

First, the lawsuit filed by Teresa Grodsky was filed because the Park District made a claim for the Kemnitz money. As a result, Ms. Grodsky had to ask the court to determine who the rightful owner of the estate should be. The bulk of the Kemnitz bequest had already been deposited with Senior Services for over a year at the time the suit was filed by Ms. Grodsky, who apparently thought that was exactly how Betty intended her bequest to be disbursed. We mention this because your article implies that Ms. Grodsky was the driving force behind the suit-- in fact, it was the Park District's claim that caused the lawsuit to be initiated.

Second, you stated that "[i]n May, the park district relinquished any claim to the bequest" but did not mention that there were strings attached to that offer to relinquish. In return for its offer to relinquish any claim, the Park District wanted us to agree to spend all of the Kemnitz money on capital improvements to the building and other items to be used at the 100 S. Western building, which would become the property of the Park District if we chose to relocate to a new building. We rejected this offer to settle because it required us to essentially turn over every penny of Betty Kemnitz's bequest to the Park District. We did not think that was Betty's intent, and also knew that if we moved to a new location we would want to take the items we purchased with her bequest with us.

Third, there was an additional settlement offer following the first offer which we had all but technically accepted. That offer said, simply, that the park district would relinquish its claim to the Kemnitz money if we agreed that the Kemnitz issue would be finally put to rest between the parties. That offer came to us on Wednesday afternoon, but before we could even officially accept it, another revised offer came to us the next day. This offer said that we would now need to agree not to spend any of the Kemnitz money on "costs and/or attorney fees of any future litigation which may be brought by or on behalf of SSI ... against the Park Ridge Recreation and Park District."

This offer was, in fact, turned down by our Boards because our attorney had advised against it. There are actually a few open issues which we will need to resolve with the Park District. It would be foolish to limit our ability to properly protect our interests by agreeing not to use any of our assets to do so.

We believe we are the rightful recipients of the Kemnitz bequest, and for that reason have been unwilling to accept offers that would essentially negate our ability to govern

ourselves and maintain independence, or leave ourselves unable to defend ourselves regarding unresolved issues with the Park District, which their last offer is demanding.

We believe we are better able to judge how Betty would like to spend her money, as our mission is focused on seniors. The Park District by necessity cannot have such a narrow or specific focus. We believe Betty intended us to distribute her assets; if she had wanted the park district to make decisions about her money, she would have made her bequest to the Park District-- which she did not.

Finally, we would like to respond to Mr. Biagi's statement in the article, that "it would be highly offensive to Park Ridge taxpayers if SSI does not accept the latest settlement." In fact, many members of the Senior Center, most of whom are Park Ridge taxpayers, disagree with this statement, and have encouraged us look into a new home to use as our base of operations. We are, in fact, looking into such locations as a preliminary matter.

If, as Ms. Mountcastle states, the park district is only interested in going along with the wishes of Betty Kemnitz, they should drop this lawsuit immediately and stop spending taxpayer dollars by having park district staff and outside attorneys work on settlement proposals. We believe the citizens of Park Ridge should be aware that this lawsuit began with the Park District and could now be quickly ended by the Park District. They simply have not chosen to do that, and instead have deceptively pointed a finger toward the seniors. We could not sit by and allow that impression to stand.

We have attached some additional information for you to review relating to the history of the Senior Center and the current position it finds itself in. Please feel free to contact either of us should you have any questions.

Barbara Hameder
Senate President
Park Ridge Senior Center
847-698-6813

Carla Owen
Chairman
Park Ridge Senior Services, Inc.
847-692-7831

