

Social Security program to be honored at museum

77 years later, FDR's legislation still invaluable

By John Davis
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HYDE PARK – The impact of the Social Security program 77 years after it was enacted will be celebrated today at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

The festivities will include readings from the 1935 and 1983 Social Security signing statements and multimedia presentations as well as birthday cake and refreshments.

"It certainly is one of the most important programs ever introduced in the United States," said Lynn Bassanese, acting director of the FDR library. "Seventy-seven years ago, nearly half of our seniors could not support themselves."

On Aug. 14, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Social Security Act. The program has provided

old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, guaranteed income for those unable to work due to disabilities and financial aid to parents with dependent children.

Bassanese said the enactment of Social Security is worth celebrating because it is still meeting the needs of Americans faced with the same problems that existed in 1935.

"We still face unemployment," she said. "We still face the problem of older people being let go because of age discrimination."

Doris Kelly, 69, a long-time Hyde Park resident, said her monthly Social Security check enabled her to retire as a teacher at age 55.

"I lived on my pension for a time, recognizing when I turned 62 I would collect Social Security, which would cover the cost of inflation for a period of time," she said.

Kelly said the guaranteed income provided by Social Security is the only income for many seniors who worked jobs that did not provide a pension.

"I think there would be a lot of people who would be in poverty if it wasn't for Social Security," she said.

The birthday event today is co-chaired by Christopher Breiseth, a Frances Perkins Center board member and former president and CEO of the Roosevelt Institute. He will lead the festivities, which will include readings from a book he co-edited, "A Promise to All Generations: Stories and Essays about Social Security and Frances Perkins."

The event's other co-chairman, Stefan Lonce, is editor of the Montauk Sun newspaper on Long Island. He will read from his forthcoming book, "Driving with FDR: A Calendrical Biography."