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Hot sun in the summertime

This week ushers in the hottest month of the year, but seniors got a jump start on keeping cool with free fans.

By [Fred Durso Jr.](#)

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A combination of the sun's scorching rays and oppressive humidity July 27 was not a deterrent for Lou Garbarino. During the hottest day of the month, he patiently waited for his free fan, which would complement the air conditioning in his home on the 3200 block of South 13th Street. The fans were distributed at a "heat-relief party," organized by the [Sports Complex Special Services District \(SCSSD\)](#).



"I was the first one in line," Garbarino proudly said while enjoying the festivities on the 3300 block of South Seventh Street. "I waited a half-hour to get in."

After snagging his own cooling device, the senior took shade underneath a makeshift tent for a refreshing - not to mention free - water ice.

Growing accustomed to this summer's heat waves, residents have devised their own ways to beat the heat. But how much longer will the mercury meltdown continue?

According to the National Weather Service, July's average temperature for Philadelphia in 2005 was 79 degrees - two degrees above its overall city average. The service's Climate Prediction Center forecasts that August, normally the hottest month of the year, has an "equal chance" of being either above or below its average temperature of 76 degrees, said Urszula Gizot, a visiting meteorologist at the NWS office in Mount Holly, N.J., which monitors the city's weather.

And residents are preparing for a repeat of the sweltering conditions. At the heat-relief party, more than 600 fans were distributed to the area's seniors, who each handed over vouchers they received in the mail which were needed to obtain the devices. Residents age 55 or older were eligible to receive the free fans.

The giveaway was an effective way to keep seniors cool, said Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of SCSSD.

"One-half of the households in the district have senior residents 65 or older," he said while he himself endured that day's 98-degree weather.

There have been 14 heat-related deaths this year in Philadelphia. Jean Castiello of the 2400 block of Hutchinson Street and Beverly Morrow, 58, of the 1900 block of South 17th Street, both died last week from a combination of heart disease and heat stress.

Places like the South Philadelphia Older Adult Center, Passyunk Avenue and Dickinson Street, have extended their hours and are offering an air-conditioned space for seniors not possessing the luxury.

"The nights the city declares a heat emergency, we stay open until 6," said Carole McKelvey, the center's director. Regardless of outside temperatures, the center foregoes its normal closing time of 4:30 p.m.



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and shuts its doors at 10 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays year-round.

Keeping people attune to the dangers of the heat is an ongoing task, said Mark McNutt, spokesperson for the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, a nonprofit dedicated to improving the quality of life for seniors. When the National Weather Service issues excessive heat warnings, the organization implements its "heatline," which provides tips such as drinking fluids every 15 minutes, avoiding caffeine and staying indoors during dangerously high temperatures.

"If someone's not feeling too well or if a caregiver thinks their mother, father or spouse is acting differently and it might be heat-related, they call our heatline," added McNutt.

PCA also has an on-call nurse who dispatches a "mobile unit" to check on residents feeling ill or requesting assistance.

"Oftentimes, [seniors] will have their windows closed or their fan on with their windows unopened," McNutt said. "This is really deadly."

Some seniors with air conditioning tend not to use it "because they are afraid of the extra expense," he added.

July and August are typically months when energy usage is at its highest, said Cameron Kline, spokesperson for PECO Energy, who noted power demand hit an all-time high during last week's heat wave. Customers looking to cut energy costs only have to modify their practices at home, he noted, including keeping thermostats set at a constant temperature and increasing the use of fans.

"Our rates have not increased for quite some time," said Kline. "But if people want to save, we encourage them to conserve. It's real easy to do and they do make a difference."

Despite last month's increased demand, PECO, which recently spent \$200 million to boost power capacity in growing areas, is capable of adequately servicing its customers in the event of future heat waves, Kline said. While eagerly loading a new fan into her car, Eva Pinardo is not sweating over the potential for warmer weather.

"Who knows? It might be cool," said the resident of the 1200 block of Johnston Street. "You never know what the weather might be like."

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