

Spring 2005

Silverwire Newsletter

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Silverwire

Vol. 3, No. 2 Spring 2005

NEWSLETTER OF THE UMAINE CENTER ON AGING

Older Americans Month Celebrates Long-Term Living!

Recently, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Washington Counties' Mary Hunter sat down to describe a typical day in her life: She begins by leaving the house at seven in the morning, arriving at the Hospice of Eastern Maine offices, where she'll volunteer her administrative support until 9:30 am. Next, she'll be off to Stillwater Health Care until 5:00 pm or so, where she "paints fingernails, leads exercise classes, reads to residents, does activities, and crafts." After dinner, she volunteers as a phone friend through Eastern Agency on Aging, where she has four older adult phone friends with whom she keeps in regular contact. After phone calls, Mary will spend the evenings quilting or creating other crafts that she will donate to local schools and churches for raffles, fundraisers, or decorations.

Christina Diebold isn't quite sure how she is going to use her new title yet, she shared a short time ago, giving a gentle laugh. As a Penobscot Valley Senior College's (PVSC) newly named Philomath, Christina has taken part as both student and teacher in 12 classes since the first course offering in 2002. "A Philomath is a lover of learning," said PVSC Executive Director Stan Marshall, Jr. "It is a title widely used by the publishers of almanacs and seems to



Mary Hunter (above) joined RSVP in 1996, volunteering over 11,800 hours to date. She has been nominated recently for both the Points of Light Foundation Service Award and the Governor's Service Award. Most of her time is spent at the Stillwater Health Care facility. "I love the people. Not only the residents but the staff," said Mary.

Volunteering is nothing new to Mary. She grew up in Athens Georgia, where her first memory of volunteering was at church. Mary and her late husband John were avid volunteers throughout their lives, working together in schools, participating in community events, and through church.

"I recall I wanted to become a nurse," Mary said. "This was more than fifty years ago. There was a question about chemistry on the application and I didn't take chemistry in high school. That chemistry question blew it, but that didn't stop me from helping people,"

To find out more about the volunteer opportunities available through RSVP of Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Washington Counties call (207) 581-4412 or visit

www.mainecenteronaging.org.

describe our most devoted participants. Our honorees may use their title as they see fit, and we hope with good humor." Christina, no stranger to learning, having earned degrees in English from Wellesley and Yale, enjoys the atmosphere of the PVSC. "That's the advantage of Senior College," She said. "You don't have to work, pull an all nighter to get in a paper, no one's testing you. Learning for the fun of it is all you're here to do. It's nice not to have any duress... There's nothing threatening-you don't have to be bound by stereotypes and meeting expectations of the past."

This May, the UMCoA is pleased to celebrate Older Americans month-and people like Mary and Christina. Older Americans month is
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Lenard W. Kaye, Director

Leah Ruffin, Editor

SILVERWIRE is published three times a year, in the Fall/Winter, Spring, and Summer.

The Center on Aging is an interdisciplinary research center associated with the University of Maine's School of Social Work and the College of Business, Public Policy, and Health. Our mission is to promote and facilitate activities on aging in the areas of education, research and evaluation, and community service, in order to maximize the quality of life of older citizens and their families in Maine and beyond.

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From the Director

In late 2004 the world lost another great elder. Philip S. Reisman died on Dec. 11. Precious few readers of the *Silverwire* knew him. He was not a public figure, not a great leader by customary standards, not a war hero, not a sports icon, or a music legend. He died quietly at the age of 95 at his residence in Dirigo Pines, a retirement community in Orono, Maine, with loving family and caregivers by his side.

Elders achieve greatness in countless ways. In part they do it through material and personal accomplishment. But in the overall scheme of things I would argue that such achievements are ultimately poor standards against which to define human greatness at the end of the life span. Rather, it is the emotional, social and familial legacy left by the long lived that is remembered and cherished over the long term by those dear to them. It is these affective qualities that contribute most to shaping the lives of those who survive these individuals.

That you may not have known Philip is irrelevant because no doubt many of you, if you have been blessed, have sweet memories of men and women just like him. They have made the lives of those crossing their paths during their living years measurably richer. Don't misunderstand me. Philip was a skilled physician and surgeon, respected by many. He was engaged in the work he loved well into his eighties and he was superb at his craft. But in my eyes that expertise and those workplace accomplishments pale in comparison to what Philip offered as a dedicated father and grandfather, a generous philanthropist, and civil human being.

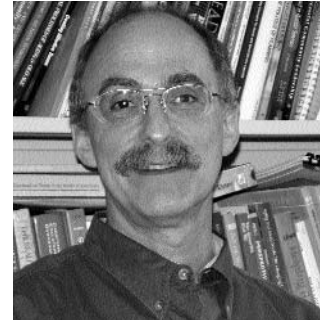
In the last few months of his life I was blessed with the opportunity to get close — to share my feelings, to care for him, to express my love. I am so very grateful for that opportunity and his willingness to accept my expressions of affection. And Phil, frail and incapacitated, restricted to bed, reciprocated, caring for me and expressing his love openly and honestly.

His failing health was no barrier whatsoever to his ability to display that love to me and all those around him. That was Phil's character shining through. And it shown through to the last breath of air he took. In the aftermath, those who remembered him spoke without fail of the quality of his character, his humanity, and his caring soul. As I can remember, no one referred to his surgical skills, his administrative acumen, or the fact that he was a reliable breadwinner. Let this be a lesson learned by all of us. I know it has been one he taught me.

Take a moment to reflect on the lives of the great family elders and significant others living into advanced old age that have touched you deeply and meaningfully and take solace in the many ways these individuals have enriched your lives and the lives of others. And don't be disappointed that those individuals may not be world leaders, sports heroes or Nobel Prize winners. In fact know that those accomplishments are just artifacts to perhaps be recorded in a book of history but not to be indelibly etched in the hearts and souls of those individuals they touched deeply.

Elders are the precious glue that holds our communities together; the lifeblood that galvanizes our families from one generation to the next in good times and bad. All families and communities are blessed to have them. Never take them for granted.

Portions excerpted from the Thursday, December 30, 2004 edition of the Bangor Daily News



Lenard W. Kaye

Partnerships and Programs.....

AMERICORPS*VISTA SENIOR \$ENSE PROGRAM CELEBRATES FIRST YEAR

In January 2005 the Senior \$ense program hit a milestone as two of the first VISTA members, Cynthia Dowd and Suzanne Ambrose Thomas, completed their year of service. Each accomplished a tremendous amount during their time with Senior \$ense. We will all miss their ongoing participation and dedication to the program. Happily, both Suzanne and Cynthia are going on to employment due, in large part, to their service with the Senior \$ense program.

Suzanne, a VISTA member at the Penobscot Community Health Center, has accepted a case management position there, while Cynthia, formerly placed with the Western Maine Workforce Investment Board (WIB), will now be a Business Consultant Employment Training Coordinator with Portland's Training Resource Center. Congratulations are also due to Susan McNerney, who also leaves us this year. Susan has accepted the position of Acting Program Director for the Senior Companion Program, the same program she served with as a VISTA member

As the program's first year ends, Drew Matlins and Theresa Boettner, Program Director and VISTA Leader, are planning a celebratory ceremony for all program volunteers and affiliates. They also continue to focus on recruiting VISTA members as well as new host sites. In the past few months, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and United Way of Eastern Maine joined the list of host sites, while six new VISTA members have joined the team.

The VISTA members and the agencies they are serving continue to do extraordinary work. Over the past year, the program has provided 18 financial management and literacy workshops to over 200 elders; conducted focus groups and surveys on financial literacy, employment, and community needs in which 851 older adults have participated; helped coordinate six workshops around the state on employment issues for older adults, where over 400 persons participated and 22 reported they found work after the sessions; and assisted in providing over \$140,000 in free prescriptions to low income older adults. Please visit www.seniorsenseforme.org for more information about the Senior \$ense program.



*Left: Martha Morrison, Founder, President Board of Directors, MedHelp Maine, AmeriCorps*VISTA Senior \$ense Program volunteer*

MEDHELP MAINE RECEIVES MEHAF FUNDING

On April 25, 2005 the Maine Health Access Foundation (MeHAF) announced the presentation of a \$200,000 grant to MedHelp Maine, a program developed and staffed by Martha Morrison an AmeriCorps*VISTA member with the Senior \$ense program. Martha founded MedHelp Maine 2 years ago with the mission of assisting hospitals, health centers and physicians offices to developing prescription assistance programs for low-income Maine people of all ages and their families.

The Maine Health Access Foundation, created in 2000, is the state's largest health care foundation. MeHAF promotes affordable and timely access to comprehensive, quality health care and seeks to improve the health of every Maine resident. In particular, MeHAF targets projects that serve the medically uninsured and underserved. The new funding will support MedHelp Maine's proposal to work with six geographically diverse health care facilities as they develop prescription assistance programs for their patients.

Participating organizations are Oasis Health Network, Brunswick, Cary Medial Center, Caribou, Maine Coast Memorial Hospital, Ellsworth, Community Health Connection, Kittery/York, and the Penobscot Valley Hospital, Lincoln.

This is a great accomplishment for Martha; MeHAF grants are highly competitive. The Center on Aging and the AmeriCorps*VISTA Senior \$ense program congratulate Martha and look forward to assisting MedHelp Maine and partners in their efforts.

SPRING 2005 CONTINUING EDUCATION SERIES BEGINS

As spring blooms in Maine, the UMCoA is proud to announce the beginning of our fourth annual continuing education series in gerontology. This year, we have combined our popular Professional Excellence in Geriatrics Series (PEGS), our Geriatric Organizational Leadership Development Seminars (GOLD), and our new Institute of Gerontological Social Work (IGSW)



sponsored Rural Social Work and Aging: The Skills You Need to Know workshops in one program.

The eleven sessions will begin in May and run until the end of June.



The series will begin with the first of three free presentations (this time in Presque Isle), followed closely by a gala kick-off dinner in Orono, where we will celebrate our theme of healthy productive living. Then we are off to Augusta, Belfast, and Bucksport for the remaining sessions,

thanks to our generous community partners. We return to Orono for our final session on June 22, 2005.

We invite you to join us in this wonderful learning experience. Our



presenters will inform you about the newest trends in aging while providing a solid skills base for your practice. Whether you are already working in the field of gerontology or are simply interested in learning more about aging, these sessions are designed

for you. Please visit www.mainecenteronaging.org and click the continuing education button to download the brochure and registration form. You may also call (207) 581-3444 to have information mailed, faxed, or emailed to you.



CENTER ON AGING STAFF VOLUNTEER TO “KEEP ME WARM”

On a chilly day this past December, members of the UMCoA staff and AmeriCorps*VISTA Senior \$ense volunteers met and formed two teams. Each team headed north toting plastic sheeting, staple guns, energy saving light bulbs, v-9 weather stripping, and shrink-to-fit window wrap. Each team had a mission — to weatherize the homes and apartments of lower-income older adults, for whom a brutally harsh Maine winter would mean substantial hardship and expense.

The UMCoA was not alone in this mission. Hundreds of teams from all over Maine's sixteen counties volunteered through Operation Keep

ME Warm, a statewide effort to weatherize over 1,600 homes.

The project was a collaboration of many minds, including Governor Baldacci's office, the Maine State Housing Authority, the Maine Emergency Management Agency, the Maine Department of Transportation, the Maine Energy Resources Council, the Public Utilities Commission, the Maine National Guard, the American Red Cross (Maine Chapters), Community Action Agencies, and the Maine Commission for



Community Service. Project leaders estimate that each weatherization kit will provide electricity and heating fuel cost savings of about \$78 per year for many years to come.

Above: (from left) AmeriCorps Promise Fellow Erica Salanius, Senior \$ense Volunteers: Judith Brosmer, Suzanne Ambrose Thomas, and Theresa Boettner

Left: (from left) RSVP's Chevelle Marshall, Senior \$ense's Andrew Matlins, and RSVP's Jane Harris Bartley

Christina Diebold (right) has lived in Maine for 25 years. With a background in literature and the journalistic expertise earned through her work at the Bangor Daily News, Christina is a highly skilled asset to the Penobscot Valley Senior College.



As well as the many classes she has taken, she also co-facilitated "exploring world religions" with Bill Philips. The class brought speakers from many faith communities to present to the 20 members. Christina has enjoyed different facets of all of the classes, and as a member of the PVSC curriculum committee. "I've heard that members get to know people in class, make friends, and see the same people in classes," she said. "The curriculum committee is always looking for more suggestions and volunteers." For more information about PVSC call (207) 581-1947 or visit www.mainecenteronaging.org.

HONOR (continued from cover...)

a perfect time to acknowledge the contributions of past and current older persons to our country. Every President since JFK has issued a formal proclamation during or before the month of May asking that the entire nation pays tribute in some way to older persons in their communities. Older Americans Month is celebrated across the country through ceremonies, events, fairs and other such activities.

According to the U.S. Administration on Aging, "The theme 'Celebrate Long-Term Living' was selected to honor older Americans as a national treasure, and to highlight the need for mid-life and older persons to be prepared to live longer than previous generations. Older adults and baby boomers need to make thoughtful choices now so they will be more likely to remain healthy, productive, and financially secure in their later lives."

The UMCoA is proud to embrace Older Americans Month. Please join us as we celebrate through our ongoing programming, this issue of *Silverwire*, and the launch of our spring 2005 continuing education series.



The University of Maine's Center on Aging, in conjunction with Bangor's Families and Children Together, presented the results and recommendations of a policy white paper January 13, 2005. The presentation, growing out of the work of a series of task forces associated with the Center's Relatives as Parents Project (RAPP) (funded through Generations United) capped three years of research into factors making it difficult for grandparents and other relatives to become recognized guardians for children who are unable to live with their parents. A second presentation is scheduled in Portland on May 26, 2005.

For more information, please contact the UMCoA at (207) 581-3444.

AMERICORPS*VISTA SENIOR \$ENSE MEMBER : THERESA DENBOW

by Barbara Urquhart, SCSEP Trainee

Over the past few years, Theresa Denbow, like many of us, spent time caring for her parents and other older relatives. After a little research, it struck her that the AmeriCorps*VISTA Senior \$ense volunteer program would be a good way to continuing her work with older adults. Currently, Theresa volunteers at the Aroostook Agency on Aging addressing issues of financial literacy education for older adults. As a VISTA volunteer, Theresa holds workshops once a month in many small towns focusing on how to avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud, making tough financial decisions, and medical expense management. Recently, she developed a list of ten money saving grocery tips to distributes to community members.



One of the ways that Theresa sees her community honoring older Americans is through an increase in older adults hired to work at the local Wal-Mart, Graves, and I.G.A. Theresa hopes her work can make a difference in her community.

Theresa Denbow, AmeriCorps*VISTA Senior \$ense

ELDER SUICIDE, PRIMARY CARE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

By Barbara Hermann, M.S.

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S. and represents a significant public health issue, particularly for the older segment of the population. Among the various age groups, the elderly are significantly overrepresented in prevalence rates for suicide, accounting for 20% of all suicide deaths (United States Public Health Service, 1999). White men over the age of 65 account for 82% of all suicide attempts (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 1999) and their rate of completed suicide is four times higher than the rate for the nation as a whole. Within this over-65 age group, men 85 and over are the most at risk for suicide.

Approaches to the prevention of elder suicide are hampered by the observation that older adults are less likely than younger individuals to express suicidal ideation (Fiske & Arbore, 2000-2001). Research has, however, identified significant predictors of suicide in older persons, including psychosocial factors such as being a divorcee or widow(er), receiving assistance with daily tasks, family discord, and economic problems (McIntosh, Santos, Hubbard, & Overholser, 1994; Roff, 2001; United States Public Health Service, 1999; Waern, Rubenowitz, & Wilhelmson, 2003). For those 75 years of age and older, the presence of a physical illness has been found to carry a three-fold increase in suicide risk, with having seriously impaired vision carrying an eight-fold increase (Waern et al., 2003). Apart from physical illness, depression has been found to have a strong association with elder suicide. Estimates of the percentage of suicides among the elderly that are depression-related have ranged from 60 to 80 percent (Angst, Angst, & Stassen, 1999; Blazer, 1991; Conwell, 1994; United States Public Health Service, 1999). Rates of major depression in older primary care patients range from 5% to 10%, while rates of minor depression have been estimated at 20% to 30% (Hendrie, Callahan, Levitt, Hui, Musick, Austrom, Nurberger, & Tierney, 1995; Linzer, Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, Hahn, Brody, & deGruy, 1996). The presence of any serious mental illness has been significantly associated with suicide risk in both the 75 and over and the 65 to 74 year old age groups, with major depression predictive of suicide in those 75 and older and minor depression predictive of suicide in those 65 to 74 years of age. Several investigators have shown that even mild levels of depressive symptoms are associated with negative outcomes, including impaired physical and social functioning and reduced life satisfaction (see Fiske & Arbore, 2000-2001 for review).

Better recognition and treatment of both major and minor depression, especially in the context of physical illness, represents an important target for the prevention of suicide in the oldest old (Fiske & Arbore, 2000-2001; McIntosh et al., 1994; Roff, 2001). The lack of attention paid to elders at risk for suicide is highlighted by the finding that older individuals are less likely to have been treated for depression during the year preceding suicide than are younger populations (Waern et al., 2003). Seventy five percent of elderly who committed suicide had visited their primary care physician within the month of their suicide, including 39% within the week before death (Conwell, Olsen, Caine, & Flannery, 1991; Conwell, 1994; Foster & Burke, 1985). Carney, Rich, Burke, & Fowler (1994) found that the proportion of suicide attempters who saw a health professional within the last 30 days was higher among those over 60 (57%) than in mid-life (44%) or among youth (30%). These data point to the primary care office as a viable setting to initiate screening and intervention programs.

Further underscoring the potential of utilizing primary care practices as an avenue to address elder suicide is the observation that elderly persons contemplating suicide are much less likely than younger persons to turn to suicide prevention centers, crisis telephone lines, or any kind of mental health services (Glass & Reed, 1993). Older adults are in fact more likely to seek treatment for mental health problems in the physical health sector rather than mental health sector (Estes, 1995). Education of primary care professionals could improve awareness of this critical issue and, subsequently, increase identification and treatment of those at risk. Initiatives aimed at identifying depression and other risk factors for elder suicide within the primary care setting warrant consideration and research attention.

Note: A full listing of references cited in this article is available upon request

Barbara Hermann, M.S., is a doctoral candidate in Clinical Psychology at the University of Maine.

Previews and Preludes.....

CENTER ON AGING RSVP RECEIVES HEALTHY ACADIA MINI-GRANT

RSVP is the recipient of a 2005 Good Health Starts Here Mini-Grant. The award of \$850.00 will support the expansion of the successful RSVP Bone Builders osteoporosis exercise and educational prevention program to Lamoine and Trenton.

For information on RSVP Bone Builders please call Jane Harris Bartley at (207) 581-4418 or email jane.harris.bartley@umit.maine.edu.



MAINE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY (MGS) GOES ONLINE

The Maine Gerontological Society (MGS), a statewide association of individuals interested in issues impacting older adults in the state of Maine, has developed a website now fully accessible to the public. Viewers will be able to download MGS membership information and the application, read the latest board meeting minutes, contact members of committees, and join the MGS listserv.

Information about the Society's annual education event is posted, including the final report of 2005's At the Crossroads: Aging Policy in Maine conference. The UMaine Center on Aging is pleased to be the sponsor of the MGS website.

To access the website please visit www.mainecenteronaging.org and click on the MGS button.

AMERICORPS ALUMS ORGANIZE

Senior \$ense VISTA Leader Theresa Boettner recently participated in a daylong gathering with AmeriCorps alumni, program representatives, and state staff as part of the Hands On Network National Leadership Conference in Portland, Oregon. The National AmeriCorps Association, the program's alumni group, is merging with Hands On Network, an international network of organizations that build communities and cultivate leaders through service and civic engagement. This alliance will lead a national campaign to reinvigorate the AmeriCorps alumni movement. Alumni and other stakeholders gathered to help plan for this new organization and organize the local and national leaders in the field to engage their alumni peers in continued service and community change. Current AmeriCorps alums are encouraged to contact Theresa at (207) 581-3604.

Make a Donation to Honor a Special Elder in Your Life

I/we want to make a gift in support of the UMaine Center on Aging and its programs in service to Maine's older adults, their families, and their communities in honor of a special person in my life.

Enclosed please find a check for \$ _____ Please charge my account for \$ _____

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At the Crossroads: Aging Policy in Maine



Left: Maine DHHS Commissioner John Nicholas responds to audience comments

On February 2-3, 2005, the Maine Gerontological Society (MGS) was proud to offer the unique educational opportunity “At the Crossroads: Aging Policy in Maine,” in South Portland Maine. Over 170 people from around the state attended the MGS premier educational event, which highlighted the current and projected policy challenges associated with Maine's aging population.

Speakers included the honorable Governor John Baldacci, Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner John Nicholas, Interim Bureau of Elder and Adult Services Director Catherine Cobb, as well as experts representing the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the National Academy for State Health Policy, the Maine State Planning Office, the University of Maine's Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy, and the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Statewide authorities in aging and policy also presented three series of workshops throughout the day.



Left: Two attendees enjoy the networking opportunities



Above: Area Agency on Aging leaders facilitated policy recommendation sessions

As an officially designated U.S. White House Conference on Aging event, the two-day program culminated in written recommendations on the most crucial aging issues. The experiences and expertise of conference attendees contributed directly to the recommendations, formed by small interest groups. To read the recommendations, please visit www.mainecenteronaging.org and click on the MGS button.