

# SENIOR Advocate

A Quarterly Publication Dedicated to the Well-Being of Oakland County Seniors

Fall/Winter 2005

Volume 3, Issue 1

## Santa is Not Just For Kids!



The Oakland County offices of Home Instead Senior Care and Oakland County's Senior Citizen Advocate along with area retailers and elder care agencies worked together to bring a little Christmas into the lives of senior citizens who may have been overlooked this holiday season.

The Area Agency on Aging, Alzheimer's Association, OLSHA, Amsted, Christmas in Action and many local senior centers are the organizations that have identified seniors in our community who would be cheered by a visit from Santa. Christmas trees were placed in participating CVS and Walgreen locations and other area stores. The trees featured ornaments with the first name of seniors and their respective gift request.

Holiday shoppers were asked to pick up an ornament, buy the items on the list and leave them at the store with the ornament attached. Home Instead Senior Care and its team of volunteers along with elder care associates, and many nonprofit agencies collected, wrapped and distributed the gifts to the seniors in need. Oakland County sponsored one of the gift-wrapping parties.

Shannon Wygant and Tina Rowley, owners of the Home Instead Senior Care offices in Oakland County, agreed, "More than just supplying a gift, 'Be a Santa to a Senior' is also a wonderful opportunity to bring a touch of warmth and human contact for seniors who are unlikely to have guests during the holidays". Shannon and Tina share the wonderful philosophy that drove the Corporate Office of Home Instead Senior Care to develop such a program that gives so much back to the community.

If you would like to volunteer for next year, call one of the Home Instead Senior Care offices, N.Oakland 866-922-1400, S.W. Oakland 866-472-0530 or S.E. Oakland 248-203-2273.

As we celebrate the holidays and give thanks, let's think about how we can reach out to seniors everyday. As our County Executive, L. Brooks Patterson likes to say: "Our seniors helped build our communities; we should help them create quality of life in their later years."



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# From the Editor



What a difference a decade makes! Ten years ago I was appointed as a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging by Congressman Joe Knollenberg. Little fanfare surrounded the Conference. Few press articles were published on its recommendations. And, the only people who paid much attention to aging issues were

providers and a few dedicated political leaders.

Fast forward ten years to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging; and our society has been transformed! You probably know that our older citizens are poised to double in number by the year 2030. As mentioned in our article regarding the Medicare Sign-Up Day elsewhere in this edition, the first of the Baby Boomers turn 60 this year. And some of the most controversial issues facing America have to do with the aging of our society.

Some major areas of discussion (as determined at Regional Think Tanks with seniors) include:

- encouragement of life-long planning for safe and secure seniors
- more effective prevention and enforcement against harming seniors

- modernizing federal programs while protecting the rights of seniors
- developing workplaces of the future to allow for mature workers to continue with flexible jobs
- assistive technology
- smart and effective housing options
- bringing senior centers into the future
- training and education of older drivers
- safer highway design
- effective emergency response systems
- encouraging mobility and independence of seniors
- supporting caregivers
- health and wellness
- technology

Mary Miller, Director of the Rochester Older Persons' Commission, is a delegate to this year's White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA), appointed by Congressman Knollenberg. I am her alternate. As I write this column she is attending meetings in Washington and will return with the final recommendations. We co-hosted a town hall meeting prior to the Conference; and we will again invite the public to hear what she brings back from our nation's capitol. We will keep you posted.

We wish all of our Senior Advocate readers a happy, healthy New Year shared with family and friends. Thank You for your loyal readership!

*Lynn Alexander*

## SENIOR Advocate

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You can now access this newsletter as well as a Senior Resource Directory on-line at our new Oakland County Senior Website. The address is [www.co.oakland.mi.us/senior](http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/senior)

We welcome and encourage you to send us your articles, photographs, suggestions and comments.

E-mail [alexanderl@co.oakland.mi.us](mailto:alexanderl@co.oakland.mi.us) or call Lynn Alexander at (248) 858-0213, or write to us at:

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# Caregiver Corner

## Oakland County Medicare Sign-Up Day Reaches Hundreds of Our Residents

In partnership with the Area Agency on Aging 1B and Oakland County Schools, we hosted a sign-up day for the new Medicare Part D Rx Program. Around 250 seniors and other eligible citizens received intensive coaching and the chance to sign up on the spot for the new program. We had fifty laptop computers and trained counselors on-site at any given time. Refreshments and newspapers were available along with comfortable seating for all and priority seating for participants with physical challenges.

Many of our residents have called with questions as to how this new program will affect our two existing Oakland County Programs. And, it is important to note that individuals who do not sign up for the new Medicare Program by May 15th of 2006 will likely face a stiff penalty if they do sign up at a later date. Due to this complex set of circumstances, our County Executive, along with his executive team, has made the following policy decisions:

- We will continue the Prescription Relief Program begun two years ago which provides Rx coverage at \$8 per prescription and is income based. (Folks who qualify must have family income at or below \$31,000 and below or individual income \$19,000 and below). We believe that there will always be a need for this type of program through the pharmaceutical companies.
- Our Prescription Savings Program, which has been in existence for a number of years, may no longer be available sometime in 2006. When our Rx programs were launched we stated that we would continue them until something better came along. We will remain committed to our constituents and assure a transition process in all cases so no one will be totally left without coverage.

**Those individuals who are eligible to sign up for the Medicare Part D Program should make an educated decision regardless of their circumstances before the sign-up deadline of May 15th.** We do not want to discourage any eligible residents from signing up because of the fine/penalty that may be incurred if

you wait and sign up at some point in the future.

**We recommend that you call the Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program Hotline (MMAP) at (800) 803-7174.** Please be patient since they are inundated with phone calls. However, we assure you that your patience will be rewarded since they are the single best source of neutral information you can receive.



Please be sure to call them before making any decisions. If you have what is considered “creditable” coverage through a former or present employer and have received a letter to that effect, do not sign up for any new program! You will likely be in danger of losing your present coverage if you do so! The counselors at MMAP can help you make the right decision that best suits your circumstances.

Finally, do not allow yourself to be scammed! As we like to say: “Be a smart and savvy senior.” There are many plans out there that will try to encourage you to sign up for their plan even if it may not be best for you. They

are simply trying to get as many enrollees as possible. Also, there are some imposter groups out there as well. Do not send any money without checking out the organization. Either check them out with the MMAP Hotline or check with the Medicare website at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

Prescription Drug coverage is likely to be a hot issue at the White House Conference on Aging which is converging as this article is being written! Since this new Medicare program is the first major program of its kind since Social Security and Medicare were founded, go ahead and sign up. Then continue to use your advocacy with elected officials to improve it as you use the benefit.

Aging issues are much more high profile than they were ten years ago when the last White House Conference on Aging was convened. And, since the first of the Baby Boomers turn sixty years of age this year, these issues will continue to grow in importance. If you bring together the Greatest Generation with the Boomers, we will represent the most influential voting block in American history! Let’s all work together to

# Accounting Aid Society Sponsoring Training For Tax Volunteers

The Accounting Aid Society in partnership with the Tax Credit Initiative Coalition serving Oakland and Livingston Counties is sponsoring free training classes for volunteers who want to help low-income families get the income tax refunds and tax credits they deserve.

Last year, Accounting Aid Society tax volunteers helped 6,950 families in Wayne, Oakland, Livingston, and Macomb counties. This resulted in almost \$6 million in tax returns and tax credits that went directly to low-income residents in metropolitan Detroit, and in turn, into Michigan's economy.



Volunteers are trained on computers with tax software and learn how to do local, state, and federal income taxes and assist clients in with tax credits -- home heating, homestead property tax, child, and earned income tax credits. Last year, the average tax return of \$854 per family added up to 10 percent of each client's household income. These much-needed refunds were used to purchase necessities, pay utility bills and other living expenses.

Training classes for tax volunteers will begin in January at more than six locations throughout the metropolitan area, including several in Oakland County. Once trained, volunteers will begin the free income tax and tax credit preparation service in February at more than 20 locations, including several in Oakland and Livingston Counties. At training volunteers are able to select the tax sites and dates that they are available for. Most tax sites are open on Saturdays but there are weekday and evening opportunities.

"Our dedicated team of volunteers makes a real difference in the financial bottom-line of low-income families," says Marshall Hunt, CPA, and director of Accounting Aid Society's Tax Assistance Program.

For more information and to volunteer, call the Accounting Aid Society at 313-647-9620 or visit their Web site, [www.accountingaidsociety.org](http://www.accountingaidsociety.org). Volunteers can sign up on line.

*Contributed by the Oakland County Community and Home Improvement Office.*

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## Brown Bag Lecture Series

The Brown Bag Lecture Series is sponsored by the Oakland County Office of Arts, Culture & Film. The presentations are from noon to 1:00 p.m. in the Oakland County Auditorium, located in Building 49 West, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, MI. Please bring your lunch. Coffee and tea will be served. All lectures are FREE and registration is not required.

Call (248) 858-0415 or visit [www.artsoakland.com](http://www.artsoakland.com) for more information.

**January 19, 2006**

"Asylum: Pontiac's Grand Monument from the Gilded Age"

Bruce Annett, author & historian

**February 16, 2006**

"Bob-Lo: An Island in Troubled Waters"

Annessa Carlisle, author

**March 16, 2006**

"Beyond Storytelling - Tales from Around the World"

Pat Roan Judd, artist

**April 20, 2006**

"African American Art: Walter O. Evans Collection"

DIA Speakers Bureau

**May 18, 2006**

"Vintage Base Ball - Rochester Grangers"

Pat McKay, Director of Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm

**June 15, 2006**

"Shakespeare in the Park" - Water Works Theatre, Royal Oak

# Senior Business

This edition we have three recognitions:

1. We want to recognize the tremendous work of our Oakland County Medical Examiner, L.G. Dragovic, M.D. In many counties elder abuse goes undetected due to inadequate autopsies by medical professionals ignorant of senior issues. Our medical examiner is ahead of the curve with regard to autopsies of elderly patients recently he was quoted in the Detroit News: “It is imperative that in cases involving even the very oldest nursing home residents a death investigation must be conducted by medical examiners. If there is careful scrutiny, then some completely different statistics may emerge, and then we would not be talking about the tip of the iceberg, but instead actual deaths that would push us to eliminate those dangers for these vulnerable age groups,” Dragovic said. “This is what the taxpayers expect us to do.”
2. The staff of Meriwether’s Restaurant (10 Mile and Telegraph Roads) were observed giving senior friendly customer service both in taking orders as well as assisting seniors in the parking lot while getting into their cars.
3. A similar observation was made at Meijer’s Thrifty Acres (12 Mile and Telegraph Road). A cashier was very patient with a confused senior assisting her with change while keeping an eye on other customers and letting them know that she would be with them shortly.

# Schemes, Scams and Swindles

## Nigerian Scam

In the Nigerian Scam, or 419 Fraud, a wealthy Nigerian sends letters, faxes, or e-mails to gullible civilians, promising hefty rewards for their help with transferring family funds. These wealthy foreigners claim the helpers are entitled to 20% of the fund while they receive 70% and 10% is left to pay taxes and other expenses. However, the transaction goes wrong, or some other catastrophe occurs, and the victims pay sums of \$5,000 or \$10,000 to compensate for these delays. The victims do not think twice because they are immensely consumed with the proposed fortune of about \$2 million. Eventually, the helpers realize they have been scammed, but sadly, they will never be able to reclaim their money.



These scams are quite popular, even in Oakland County. In 2002, Dr. Mbuso Nelson, of the Ministry of Mining in Pretoria, South Africa offered Ann Marie Poet \$4.5 million to help him transfer \$18 million to the United States. She allegedly embezzled \$2.1 million employer to pay expenses to this South African scammer. She is now facing criminal charges in Detroit for this action.

Be careful when making business deals and educate your loved ones about these scams. If you receive a Nigerian Scam e-mail, fax, or letter, do not reply and contact the Secret Service (419.fcd@ussf.treas.gov) to report the incident.

## A Happy and Healthy New Year

By: Dana Maleszyk

Every year people make New Year’s resolutions, only to find they are often abandoned early on. Here’s a positive strategy to help with success:

**Be Healthy-** make healthier food choices everyday by selecting carrots, for example, instead of cookies. In addition, the website, [www.chatelaine.com](http://www.chatelaine.com) suggests incorporating fruits and vegetables into your diet, forming a healthier relationship with food, and exploring new recipes. Exercise is also very important. Walking briskly for 30 minutes, 3-5 days per week will do the trick. Stretching for 10-15 minutes, 3-5 days per week or taking the stairs instead of the elevator helps burn more calories.

**Be positive-** reflect for a few minutes every night, being thankful for all of your blessings. Also, maintain a positive attitude, especially through difficult times. The website, [www.humanitarianservice.org](http://www.humanitarianservice.org) has some great motivational examples.

During tough times, remain confident, believing you will overcome these obstacles.

**Be happy-** cherish the past as you plan for the future. Rent old-time movies for a movie fest, look through family photo albums, start a scrapbooking project, or trace your family tree along with your grandchildren. Enjoy!

Happy New Year to all our Senior Advocate readers!

# Senior Spotlight

## May Harris

We were impressed by the number of Centenarians in Oakland County! This month's Senior Spotlight is truly amazing!

May Harris was 102 years young on September 17, 2005. She was born in Cape Town, South Africa and lived several years in Scotland and England before her family moved to the United States in 1913. At the age of 16, she began working at Parke-Davis Pharmaceutical Company. In 1928 she married Carl Harris and they moved to the area that is now Southfield, Michigan.

Tom Violante, Sr., the owner of Holiday Market in Royal Oak, wanted May to have an extra special 102nd birthday. He gave her a beautiful cake to share with the residents at Royal Oak Manor where she lives. It's no wonder May claims this birthday to be the most memorable of her 102 years.

We asked what she believes contributes to her longevity and she said, "good backbone," an old-fashioned term meaning a good foundation and good genes. She also cited determination and a positive attitude. Evidently May has all of this – and more – in great abundance. Oh, that we might be as fortunate!

*Photo caption: May Harris Celebrating her 102nd Birthday at Royal Oak Manor, Royal Oak, MI*



# Oakland County Works For YOU

## Make a Difference as a Mentor

It really doesn't take much to make a difference in the lives of others.

Mentors Plus is a program sponsored by Oakland County Youth Assistance, which is a unit of the Circuit Court. As part of its ongoing mission to prevent delinquency, neglect, and abuse Youth Assistance has been matching caring adults with young people who need them since 1973. Thousands of "matches" have been made over the years, many of which have grown into lasting friendships.

The children who are served range from the young ones who may be at-risk without some support to those who have had some minor court involvement who need a helping hand to guide them back on the right track. The Honorable James Alexander, Presiding Judge of the Circuit Court - Family Division expresses his enthusiasm for the program, "This program has been proven to be effective and it is one that we want to continue to support and grow. I wish more people could see what a positive impact they could have on the life of a child by investing only a couple of hours a week."

While we probably all agree that mentoring sounds like a great idea, did you know that it actually works? Reliable statistics from a long-term mentoring program show that after only 18 months, youngsters who met with their mentors an average of three times per month were 46 percent less likely than a control group to start using drugs, 27 percent less likely to start drinking, 53 percent less likely to skip school, and 37 percent less likely to skip a class. They were also more confident in their schoolwork, less likely to hit someone, and doing better within their families.

Only a few hours a week can have an impact that is dramatic. And according to long time Mentor, Andy Oliver, it is a fun way to interact with a young person. "We have done things like going to movies and playing board games. Other times we are more active and like walking on nature trails or hitting a baseball. As we have gotten to know each other better we spend a lot of time laughing," he said.

To find out more about this dynamic prevention program or figure out how you might help, give them a call at 248.858.0041.

# The Aging Brain

Here's what's new over at the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology. We thought this would be of great interest to our Senior Advocate readers.

## THE BRAIN

– a complex and largely unexplored frontier that teases researchers with hundreds of unsolved mysteries. This wrinkled wonder needs someone with a big brain to study it. Detroit's own Naftali Raz, Ph.D., more than qualifies. He has spent much of his life thinking, writing and teaching about the brain, particularly how it ages. After 20 years, though, he continues to feel like he's barely scratching the surface.

This summer, the National Institutes of Health granted Dr. Raz \$3 million to keep scratching. He received their prestigious MERIT award for his outstanding record of scientific achievement. A professor at the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State, Dr. Raz will use the generous grant to continue his groundbreaking research into aging and brain function. This year alone he and his colleagues have studied how estrogen affects brain tissue; how the brain shrinks with age; and how gender, age and brain size affect learning.

Here are some recent results to wrap our own brains around:

**Size Matters (but not completely)** – Generally, bigger brains work better and, sadly, all brains shrink a bit with age. Certain brain tissue shrinks faster than others and many factors can affect the degree of shrinkage. Don't despair, though. While shrinkage may slow information processing, problem solving, eye-hand coordination, and learning – it need not stop it. An older brain takes a little longer (we've got time, right?) but it definitely is able to learn new information and improve skills with practice.

Keep blood pressure under control because hypertension can lead to greater shrinkage.

For the ladies, Dr. Raz's research shows estrogen replacement may slow shrinkage and memory loss in female brains. Don't head for HRT yet, though. More studies are pending.



**Take Mental Leaps** – And bounds, sprints, hurdles, crunches and push-ups. In other words, exercise your brain by learning new skills. Practice deep concentration, embrace challenging information and spend quiet time focusing on accurately remembering events with vivid details. Sprawling on the couch watching sitcoms doesn't count. Writing a script for one does. When it comes to brain cells, use 'em or lose 'em.

**Brains Need to Breathe** – Not breath exactly, but they do need oxygen, which means they need blood flow so keep your cardiovascular system strong. Avoid foods that clog arteries (fried, high fat and often quite tasty). Get regular exercise that strengthens the heart and gets blood pumping into every nook and cranny. Brain cells need nutrients and oxygen to keep sparking. Without the spark, you're in the dark.

*Contributed by: Cheryl Deep of the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology.*

## DEPRESSION IN ELDERLY MAY PREDICT STROKE

Depression in the very elderly is not always psychological in nature. It could, in fact, be a life-saving medical warning of impending stroke.

Recent research published in the *Journal of Gerontology* has identified depression as a significant factor in predicting the possibility of stroke in older persons. While often assumed to be psychological, depression can also result from poor blood and oxygen flow to the brain, the same factors that cause stroke. Family and physicians are cautioned not to overlook the medical significance of depression and assume a purely psychological cause.

Researchers at Wayne State's Institute of Gerontology collaborated with the University of Louisville and Michigan State on a 10-year study of 110 residents of an elder care facility. All subjects were at least 80 years old when the study began and suffered from health problems such as high blood pressure, abnormal heart beat, high cholesterol, and weakened heart muscle. Not surprisingly, these problems greatly increased their risk of having a heart attack.

What was surprising, though, was that when depression was also present the risk of having a stroke skyrocketed. In a four-year time span, 58% of depressed subjects suffered a stroke while only 4% of non-depressed subjects did. "Depression may likely be a key harbinger of stroke," said Institute of Gerontology Director Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, "especially among the very elderly."

*Contributed by Cheryl Deep at the Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology.*

# Contact Information

**Oakland Co. Rx Relief Program**  
(866) 378-4686

**Oakland Co. Rx Savings Hotline:**  
(866) 731-7213

**Oakland Co. Health Division Services to the Aging Nurses:**

South Oakland: (248) 424-7090

North Oakland: (248) 858-1375

West Oakland: (248) 926-3318

**Area Agency on Aging:**  
(800) 852-7795

**Oakland Co. Sheriff's Dept.**  
for free 911 cell phones  
(248) 975-9700

**Social Security Administration:**  
(800) 772-1213

**Legal Hotline:**  
(800) 347-5297

**Pension Rights Hotline:**  
(800) 347-5297

**Oakland County Parks**  
248-858-7596

**Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program**  
(800) 803-7174

**State Long Term Care Ombudsman**  
(866) 485-9393

**Quality of Life Magazine**  
(248) 593-8090

**Michigan Office of Services to the Aging:**  
[www.miseniors.net](http://www.miseniors.net)

**AARP:**  
[www.aarp.org/statepages/mi.html](http://www.aarp.org/statepages/mi.html)

**US Administration on Aging:**  
<http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/default.htm>

**National Council on Aging:**  
<http://www.ncoa.org/>

**Senior Centers:**  
For your nearest center check with your city and township offices or your local Chamber of Commerce or access the [www.seniors.net](http://www.seniors.net) website.