



Vital Aging Network  
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## June 2004 Bulletin

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### June 8, 2004 VAN Forum ...

#### Coming to Terms With Our Mortality

Presenter: William Cox, Spiritual Eldering Institute

For many years, we did not talk about death in our culture. However, coming to terms with our mortality frees us to live more zestful and vital lives in the present. Through the interaction planned for the June VAN Forum, we will look at some of the issues of life completion and experience ways we may add meaning and energy to our elder years.

William Cox is a retired United Methodist Pastor, Life Coach, a member of the community faculty of Metropolitan State University, and a Certified Seminar Leader with the Spiritual Eldering Institute of Boulder, Colorado. His passion in his elder years is to shift the image of aging in our culture from one of inevitable decline to one of possibility, vitality and contribution. This program is based on the work of Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi and his book: *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*.

The Program Facilitator will be Maureen Bazzett, a 2004 graduate from the Advocacy Leadership Education for Vital Aging Certificate program.

**Time:** 10:00 a.m. to Noon, Tuesday, June 8, 2004

**Place:** Fairview Community Center in Roseville (easy to find and to park)

**Directions:** The meeting will be held in the EDC Great Room at the Fairview Community Center, 1910 West County Road B, in Roseville. County Road B runs parallel to and just south of Highway 36. The center is located one block west of Fairview, between Fairview and Cleveland on County Road B. Park free in the large parking lot that lies in front of the center. If you are having trouble finding it, call Polly at 651-604-3500.

**Questions?** Need a ride? Call the Vital Aging Network (VAN) at 612-626-5555. Everyone is welcome. There is no charge for VAN's monthly forums.

# The Vital Aging ~ Vital Communities Summit

## May 13, 2004

“All together now: *The vital act is the act of participation!*”

### **Wrap-up from the Summit’s “weaver”, U of MN First Lady Susan Hagstrum:**

“One of our panelists, Jane McDonald, has related how, as the years went by, her views of the world around her grew more complex, more nuanced, until she was compelled to question the beliefs she had grown up with, and take action. I think that many of us can relate to this maturation process. In our 20’s and 30’s and 40’s, many of us were totally engrossed in building our careers and raising our families. There’s nothing wrong with that – it’s part of the rhythm of life. Often, it is not until we reach our 50’s or 60’s that we turn our attention outward beyond our own families, and decide to make a difference in the world. Another panelist, Alfred Babington-Johnson, eloquently suggested that when we get that feeling that ‘someone ought to do something’ about an issue or a social injustice, it’s our call to action -- our clue that the ‘someone’ is us!

“This VAN Summit focused on “What’s next for us?” – as opposed to a focus on “What’s next for me?” One of the most effective ways we can begin to answer this powerful question is by taking stock of community resources. As Jody Kretzmann from the ABCD Institute told us, all kinds of unimagined things become possible when we look not at the needs but at the assets of our community. We already have all of the resources we need – we just have to recognize them.

“Jim Scheibel, the chair of VAN’s new effort to galvanize our Vital Force, says ‘No one ever retires from public work.’ I encourage you to answer the call. Share your passion, your wisdom, your gifts with your community. Join Vital Force or another organization that does important public work, and leave your impression upon the world.

“In the end, it comes down to how we want to live our lives, and what we want to leave behind. I’m reminded of Martin Luther King, Jr., who, a few years before his death, contemplated how he would like to be remembered. He asked that whoever would deliver the eulogy not talk for too long, and not mention the awards he had received. He wanted to be remembered for his love for others. He said, ‘Say that I am a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. That I was a drum major for righteousness. I won’t have any money to leave behind. I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. I just want to leave a committed life behind.’

“Thanks to all of you who showed your commitment to vital aging and vital communities by participating in the Summit: shedding tears in song with Peter Yarrow, telling us what it means to age successfully, describing your community’s strengths, sharing your hopes for the future, and feeling together the heartbeat that goes on.....”

## **What people said they liked best, from the evaluations:**

Energy, Spirit, Passion, Celebration, Hopefulness, Seeing possibilities, Diversity, Movement, Music, Seamless flow, Fun.

*The peaceable, fulfilling work of Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul and Mary) accessed my soul...The great chemistry of Connie Goldman's panel was very inspiring...Jody Kretzmann's excellent presentation filled the glass...The video gave us ideas for building vital communities...I'm excited about Jim Scheibel's plan for community-building through Vital Force...Susan Hagstrum was a classy weaver...Andy Halper and the drummers made it fun...Exercising with Pat Samples was a nice change...The convenors, Reatha Clark King and Bernie Brommer, gave us the framework...Awesome group!*

*I love feeling empowered to make a change, make a difference, help myself and others to embrace aging and celebrate the journey!*

## **The “Vital Communities that Support Vital Aging” Toolkit is available on the VAN Website for everybody!!**

Go to: [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu) and click on the “Advocating for Vital Aging” pathway. The toolkit includes:

- List of References
  - “Significant Factors”
  - “Community Assets for Vital Aging” Questionnaire
  - “Vital Aging in Vital Communities” Video Guide
  - “Creating a Vital Force” Diagram and Interest Form
  - “Explaining ABCD: Asset-based Community Development”
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## **VAN LAUNCHES EXPANDED WEBSITE**

The Vital Aging Network has expanded the Finding Personal Direction and Advocating for Vital Aging pathways of the website. The expansion has introduced material written by vital agers and professionals who add to the rich content already present.

### **Finding Personal Direction**

Karen Greer introduces seven essays written by well-known experts in vital aging in the Finding Personal Direction pathway. The essays are meant to help vital agers find their way in old age. The authors and topics include:

- Connie Goldman suggests that we need the 'courage of the lobster' in being willing to change.
  - Vern Drilling shares strengths needed to feel a sense of success in our lives.
  - Jim Gambone lists core values of belonging, giving back and taking risks for us to consider.
  - Janet Hagberg explains how relational journeys are really spiritual ones.
  - Trish Herbert says life isn't about getting happier, it's about getting deeper.
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- Sandra Hirsh shares an approach to finding spiritual and life gifts, personality, values and passion.
- Dick Leider encourages us to take our place of wisdom at the new elder's fire.

### **Advocating for Vital Aging**

A highlight of the 2004 Summit included a Toolkit that was developed out of the planning for the Summit. The Toolkit is meant to provide civic leaders and older adults with planning tools to use to adapt communities. Using the tools older adults can make connections with communities to inform, guide, and promote vital communities.

**Further Information can be found at VAN's website at [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu)**

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## **SPOTLIGHT ON JIM SCHEIBEL**

Chair of Vital Force

**Jim Scheibel, Chair, Vital Force** is the Executive Director of Ramsey Action Programs, a community action agency. He is also a member of VAN's Leadership Group and the creator of VAN's new approach to civic engagement.

In the 1970s, Scheibel was a group organizer for the agency, which serves low-income families and individuals. During the '80s, Jim served eight years on the St. Paul City Council and one term — from 1989 to 1993 — as mayor. In both roles, he urged leadership in service learning at every level of government.

Jim later served as director of the federal Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program for the Clinton administration. In that position, he launched the Experience Corps as a demonstration program and consistently emphasized the positive impacts of older adult volunteers.

Jim returned to the Twin Cities as the director of Progress for Pride in Living (PPL) in Minneapolis. He suffered a heart attack while preparing for the 10-kilometer Twin Cities Marathon, Fall 2002. He made a personal resolution during recovery to get more deeply involved in finding fresh approaches to civic engagement. He resigned from PPL Spring 2003, began writing a guide to volunteerism, and initiated the conversations with VAN that led to Vital Force. While developing the "Vital Force" program concepts in collaboration with VAN, Jim borrowed from both the Experience Corps and the national organization for which he has previously served as board chair, Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps.

Vital Force is a process to engage older adults in advocacy and service that will make use of their skills, fit with their interests, help them learn new skills, and create the flexibility for them to shape a team effort. A few pilot groups have formed to work together for one year, each led by an older adult coach/connector/organizer. Training to date has integrated guidance from the University's Center for Democracy and Citizenship, the Center for Non-Profits, and the Advocacy Leadership Education for Vital Aging Program

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As Jim says, “The idea is to get people together around their common interests. We will provide a framework that includes a process for reflecting on the learning that has occurred, some tools for planning and getting the work done, and some common language. We recognize that everyone will have something important to offer to the process. Vital Force is structured around the principle that the most important lessons of democracy come from doing public work, from solving problems, and finding ways to cooperate with people who are different.”

Interested in Vital Force? Fill out the Interest Form in the “Vital Communities Toolkit”, found by clicking on “Advocacy for Vital Aging” at the top of the VAN Website homepage, [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu).

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## **The Third Age Leadership**

Notes from the April Monthly Forum

### **ROLE MODELS**

The facilitator for the forum, Shelby Andress, asked the group to think about seniors who have been role models in their lives and briefly mention what stood out about these individuals that made them a role model. While it took about 45 minutes for everyone to mention their role models, it was a perfect lead-in to the topic because one of the Third Age tasks is redefining our images of aging. The images of senior role models that came out of the introductions included people who:

- are active individuals, teachers in their own way, coaches
- would stand up for women
- are achieving growth through the arts
- stimulating, fiesty and independent, great conversationalists
- live to the fullest, working for peace, starting a revolution, taking a senior center to a new level
- have maintained positive attitudes even with health issues
- inspirational, showing how to live life
- are spiritually connected, having creativity, growth and continuous learning

### **RONN WILLIAMSON, PRESENTER**

Shelby introduced Ronn and apologized that Nancy Cosgriff could not be there to co-present due to a death in the family. Ronn is an independent business consultant but has also been involved with The Center for Third Age Leadership, LLC for the past three years. He is currently on the board of directors for the Center, which has a growing list of individuals actively engaged in developing and promoting its work. More on Third Age can be found at [www.thirdagecenter.com](http://www.thirdagecenter.com)

Ronn focused the presentation on three main areas:

- What is The Third Age?
- What is the process of transformation?
- What are the tasks of Third Age Transformation?

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Without the lens of Third Age, society views the milestone of turning 50 to be the

beginning of decline. We all hear the phrase that life is "downhill from here." Yet turning 50 is really the entry to a new frontier - The Third Age - which represents a "30-year life bonus" that has emerged slowly in the last hundred years in the United States. Statistically, the average life expectancy has grown by about 30 years between 1900 and the year 2000. The meaning of this life bonus is still difficult to grasp for many people, particularly as we still conceive of retirement by age 65. In fact, there is a trend of people retiring as early as possible, often in our 50's. For many, the question is "now what?"

When a group of teachers in their 50's were asked by the Center how many years of active retirement they envisioned, about half the group indicated no more than 10 years and another 25% thought it might be only as much as 5 years. This is at time when more and more people are increasingly active in their 70's, 80's and even 90's.

What is missing for people is the recognition that while we are leaving the "age of achievement" as we move through our 50's, we now have the possibilities of a new "age of fulfillment" ahead of us. But this involves a change in our personal identity to really shift from pursuing achievement to pursuing fulfillment. The analogy Ronn used for Third Age is in the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. While being biological in nature, the emergence of a butterfly is a great way to envision the significant, but positive emotional changes that can come with entry into our Third Age.

The Third Age transformation process involves the common stages of unforming, transforming, reforming and performing that occur often in life with or without any control on our part (career change, job loss, death of loved ones, empty nests, etc.) Here, transformation is embraced to support the specific goal of redefining our personal identity to achieve greater personal fulfillment. We have to first change our lifelong, negative images of aging. We have to redefine success in new terms that lead to personal fulfillment rather than what the world considers achievement. Finally, we can build this new identity on the paradoxes that Dr. Bill Sadler refers to in his book and research about Third Age.

Not "either/or" but how much of each will you choose for your Third Age?

- Work and Play (how do they differ when we enjoy our work? Meaning versus fun?)
  - Reflection and Risk Taking (not just "doing" but also "being")
  - Realism and Optimism (a balance of being practical while embracing new possibilities)
  - Older and Younger (in spirit, attitude, outlook, excitement; embracing both wisdom and innocence)
  - Freedom and Intimacy (Liberation without losing personal connections and relationships)
  - Self and Others (balancing care for self with care for others)
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## **DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDAR**

**July 13 VAN Monthly Forum**

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Topic: ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

Presenter: Charles (Chuck) Dayton, MN Center for Environmental Advocacy

Location: 10 a.m. to noon, Hennepin County Library -- Brookdale

Elders have traditionally seen themselves as stewards who protect the earth for future generations. How can we do more to engage older adults as effective advocates for environmental sustainability?

August 24 & 25 **The Age Odyssey**

St. Cloud Civic Center

Minnesota Board on Aging and Department of Human Service Conference on aging for those working in the field of aging throughout Minnesota. Visit

[www.mnaging.org/theageodyssey](http://www.mnaging.org/theageodyssey) for more information.

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VAN connects older adults with education to promote and support their self-sufficiency, community participation, and personal enrichment. VAN is supported by the University of Minnesota's College of Continuing Education.

See the VAN Web site at [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu)



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