



Vital Aging Network  
minnesota :: [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu)



## February 2007 Bulletin

VAN Forum - 1

VAN \$200,000  
Challenge Match- 2

New 55+ Program  
at Hennepin County  
Library - 2

Caregiving- 3

The Science of  
Longevity - 4

Summit on the  
Aging Workplace –  
6

Longterm Care  
Planning Tool -- 6

Older Adults and  
Online Social  
Networking - 7

Calendar Items - 7

### VAN FORUM

February 13, 2007

Augsburg Park Library  
7100 Nicollet Ave.  
Richfield, MN 55423

[View map](#)

### CREATIVITY – THE VITAL HUMAN FORCE

What is Creativity? Who has it? What is it for? How can we get more of it?

Dr. Berenice (Bee) Bleedorn will consider the value of creative expression and creative production in the arts, in science and technology, in semantics, and in the art of creative leadership. She believes that “self expression is the primary sacrament of the universe.”

Making good use of creative potential in individuals as well as in teams and organizations can create a powerful force for positive change at every age.

Dr. Bleedorn established and directed the Center for Creative Studies at the University of St. Thomas. She was instrumental in the design of public school programs for teaching the gifted and creatively talented. A member of the Creative Education Foundation Hall of Fame, Dr. Bleedorn has worked in the field of creative education for more than 40 years. She has led numerous seminars on creativity for business persons, educators, and community leaders, nationally and internationally. She is the author of four books on creativity.

To read more about Bee’s work, visit her Web site:

<http://www.creativityforce.com/>.

**Directions:** The Augsburg Park Library is located north of I-494, and east of 35W., at the corner of Nicollet and 71st St. in Richfield. The library phone number is 952-847-5300.

## VAN \$200,000 CHALLENGE MATCH

The Vital Aging Network (VAN) received a challenge match from The Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation to raise \$200,000 by the end of this year, as part of the \$650,000, three-year grant, which VAN received in 2005. Now moving into the second year of the grant, VAN must secure \$200,000 in matching funds to receive the final grant year's allocation of \$200,000 in 2008.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for our friends and supporters to help VAN build and expand our programs statewide," said Sue Diekman, VAN program director. Specific programs supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies grant include the VAN monthly speaker forums, the Advocacy Leadership for Vital Aging (ALVA) certificate program, VAN speakers bureau and the Vital Communities Toolkit."

These funds will allow us to further our mission of promoting self-determination, community involvement, and personal enrichment for and with older adults through education and advocacy. By successfully raising this \$200,000 challenge match we can continue to be the premier educator and promoter of vital aging, and the champion of older adult civic engagement, including social entrepreneurship," Diekman said.

For additional information, or to discuss a personal gift, please call 612/612-625-1218 or e-mail [sdiekman@cce.umn.edu](mailto:sdiekman@cce.umn.edu)

You may also make a secure online financial gift or pledge to help meet this challenge match through the U of M Foundation web site by visiting [www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu) and clicking on [Donate to VAN Today](#).

## NEW 55+ PROGRAM AT HENNEPIN COUNTY LIBRARY

Hennepin County Library is introducing new services and a revised website aimed at better serving the 55+ customer, a familiar one at the Library, according to Margaret Gillespie, the Library's coordinating librarian for partnerships and communications. By applying best practices for resources and programming, and employing a system-wide approach, the Library hopes to expand its base to include intergenerational families and caregivers. Dolores Zeller, of VAN's Leadership Group has agreed to serve on the external Advisory Board, comprised of seniors, service and education professionals, and Library staff, to shape programming and volunteer opportunities.

For an overview of the **55+ Age Well Live Smart** initiative, follow this link: <http://www.hclib.org/seniorlinks/AgeWellLiveSmart.pdf>.

## CAREGIVING

By Connie Goldman

There are only four kinds of people in this world, says former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, who once served as a family caregiver: “Those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers. That pretty much covers all of us.”

There’s wisdom in knowing how others have handled the challenges that often face family caregivers. Hearing about the learning and healing that many have experienced in such circumstances can help current caregivers cope with their situations.

Most people know that being a caregiver can be stressful and isolating. There is often the sacrifice of time and energy, the pushing aside of personal priorities and commitments, the guilt of not being able to do more to heal the person in need. Caregivers often are stressed and worried, faced with the need to juggle work, children, a spouse, running a household of their own and potentially the home of the person in their care.

One of the most important rules to being a good caregiver is to make time for your personal needs. While that’s easier said than done in many situations, little else is more critical. When you feel like you just can’t get away, remember the saying, “Take care of yourself so you can take care of others.”

So find someone—a friend, relative, or professional—who can come in a few hours a week to let you run an errand, get some exercise or sleep, spend time in the garden, or have lunch with a friend. It’s important to stop feeling guilty and let go of the notion that no one can care for your spouse, parent, sibling, or friend better than you.

While caregiving can be enormously challenging, tending to a loved one also can come with many rewards. Some of these positive returns might not become apparent until after the caregiving period is over, yet we can learn from the experience of others. Many caregivers observe that the time they spent helping another person was a time of new understanding and deep personal growth.

They learned compassion, patience, the value of small conversations, and the process of slowing down. Caregiver Wendy Lustbader, who moved her mother-in-law into her home, described the time she spent caring for her as a personal wake up call. When she took her mother-in-law on walks, they had to move very slowly. But that pace allowed her mother-in-law to observe every flower, garden arrangement, and statuette, and find delight in all she saw. Lustbader says she still carries the gift of slowing down and really seeing the world with her today.

Taking care of a loved one also can be a time to heal troubled relationships and deal with unresolved anger or misunderstandings from the past. Many caregivers say the time they spent tending to a loved one drew them together and allowed them to connect, even if it was simply by holding hands or rubbing the patient's back.

Serving as a family caregiver can be a time of learning—whether you are 40 or 80. Healing comes from looking beyond the stress and grief of the situation and knowing that others have found insights and learning through even the most difficult of times.



Connie Goldman is an award-winning independent radio producer, author, and public speaker formerly on staff at National Public Radio in Washington, D.C. She has written four books, including *The Gifts of Caregiving: Stories of Hardship, Hope and Healing*. Goldman's latest book is *Late Life Love: Romance and New Relationships in Later Years* (Fairview Press, 2006).

## THE SCIENCE OF LONGEVITY

Learning from the Oldest of the Old

- By Jennifer Amie

Shrews live 18 months, Canada geese live 25 years or more, elephants commonly reach their 60s, and tortoises can outlast them all, with a life span of more than 150 years. But how long can humans live? This question took root in the mind of biologist James W. Curtsinger when he met the oldest man in the world.

Curtsinger, a professor in the University's Department of Ecology, Evolution and Behavior, was introduced to Christian Mortensen in California in 1997. Mortensen would die the following year at age 115 years and 252 days. "He enjoyed smoking and had an excellent sense of humor," recalls Curtsinger, who had arrived at Mortensen's nursing care facility bearing cigars. Born in Denmark in 1882, Mortensen could remember sailing into New York harbor in 1903, at the age of 21, and being processed at Ellis Island. Age had taken its toll on his short-term memory, however, and he suffered from cataracts and hearing loss. "Meeting him was an uplifting experience, but it was also sobering because he was no longer self-sufficient," says Curtsinger, who marveled at Mortensen's longevity. He began to wonder: What made Mortensen so special that he could live to such an advanced age?

Curtsinger, whose background is in population genetics, teamed up with demographic researcher James W. Vaupel to study the oldest of the old—the centenarians at the outer edge of the human life span. In particular, they set out to investigate a commonly held belief about life expectancy: that a person's risk of dying increases exponentially with increasing age. "What this implies," says Curtsinger, "is that there is an age at which the risk of death is so large that almost no one survives beyond it." But the oldest of the old, like Mortensen, defied those odds to such a degree that Curtsinger and Vaupel began to wonder whether this so-called "wall of death" existed at all.

The two researchers took the unusual step of pursuing both demographic research, conducted by Vaupel, and laboratory experiments conducted by Curtsinger. Together, they launched a 15-year project, funded by the National Institutes of Health, to compile data on mortality rates among humans and among experimental colonies of fruit flies.

Finding reliable data on human life spans proved to be tricky. In the 1970 United States census, for example, 100,000 people reported that they were centenarians. “The real number,” says Curtsinger, “was closer to 4,800.” It turns out that the oldest people tend to over-state their age, perhaps rounding up for reasons of prestige. With that in mind, Vaupel turned to the most reliable data he could find for his demographic studies: written population records from Sweden dating back several hundred years.

For his part, Curtsinger began raising experimental colonies of fruit flies in the laboratory. “To get an accurate picture of mortality at the oldest ages,” he says, “you need to start with an enormous population—50,000 to 100,000 flies for each experiment.” Over time, after most of the flies died off, Curtsinger was able to record the mortality rates of the remaining, longest-lived flies.

Both the laboratory experiments and analysis of the Swedish population records revealed the same unexpected phenomenon: the risk of death increased exponentially with age at first, but at the oldest ages, the risk of death leveled off. There was no “wall of death.” Instead, after a certain age, mortality rates hit a plateau.

What that means for humans, says Curtsinger, is that if you live to be 100, your risk of dying is 50 percent every year thereafter. At age 105 or 110, your risk is still 50 percent—it doesn’t increase. This suggests that the oldest of the old are the most vigorous among us. “They are the survivors,” Curtsinger says. “They’re past the heart attack and cancer years, and they’ve avoided the main causes of death.”

Further research with experimental systems using fruit flies, nematodes, and mice is helping to identify which genetic factors enable these survivors to live so long. In ongoing studies, Curtsinger is examining the genetics of fruit fly populations that have been selected for long life. These flies live twice as long as their normal counterparts and, essentially, Curtsinger is asking the same question about them that he once asked about Christian Mortensen: What makes them so special? So far, he has discovered that at older ages, antioxidant genes and genes related to immunity are more active in the longest-lived flies.

Whatever the secret to his longevity, it turns out that Mortensen was at the leading edge of a trend that affects us all. Overall human life expectancy has increased dramatically over the past 160 years. According to Vaupel, in 1840, Swedish women held the record for longevity with a life expectancy of 45 years; by 2000 Japanese women enjoyed a life expectancy of 85 years. In the United States, life expectancy is expected to rise past 85 by the year 2060, up

from 77 today, says Curtsinger. Worldwide, the rate of increase in human life span shows no sign of slowing.

These data, along with the discovery that there is no “wall of death”—or set age beyond which almost no one can survive—suggest that there is no well-defined upper limit to the human life span. How long can humans live? The likely answer, says Curtsinger, is longer and longer as time goes by.

Reprinted from *Imprint*, the newsletter of the University of Minnesota’s Bell Museum of Natural History

## SUMMIT ON THE AGING WORKPLACE

The National Older Worker Employment Partnership (NOWEP) will present The Aging Workplace: New Ideas and New Directions in Public Policy and Business Management on Tuesday, March 6, 2007 from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers.

Speakers at this summit will address the business environment for baby boomers planning to continue working beyond retirement age, workforce demographics, and the changing nature of pensions and retirement security. Interactive sessions and workshops will discuss questions such as:

- What makes an effective workplace?
- How do businesses plans get the most out of a maturing workforce?
- What structural changes are needed to accommodate mature workers?

There is a \$125 fee and pre-registration is required. For more information, visit <http://www.ncoa.org/attachments/ConfNOWEP.pdf>. To register, call 800-537-9728, ext. 9675.

The summit is a pre-conference event for the 3-day NCOA-ASA joint conference in Chicago. For information about the full conference, including additional pre-conference programs, visit: <http://www.agingconference.org/asav2/conf/jc/jc07/>.

## LONG-TERM CARE PLANNING TOOL ANNOUNCED

Essential Planning Tool to Help Americans Own Their Own Future

The U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Assistant Secretary for Aging, Josefina G. Carbonell, announced a new Web site that will make it easier for consumers to get the information they need to plan for long-term care. The National Clearinghouse for Long-Term Care Information Web site provides comprehensive information about long-term care planning, services and financing options, along with tools to help people begin the planning process.

The clearinghouse Web site is designed to increase public awareness about the risks and costs of long-term care and the potential need for services, and to provide objective information to help people plan for the future. The clearinghouse Web site was designed by HHS' Administration on Aging (AoA), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

The new Web site also supports the "Own Your Future" education campaign, a joint federal-state initiative designed to increase consumer awareness about planning for long-term care. HHS recently announced new federal-state partnerships with several states designed to help Americans take an active role in planning ahead for their future long-term care needs.

For more information about the "Own Your Future" campaign and the National Clearinghouse for Long-Term Care Information, please visit [www.longtermcare.gov](http://www.longtermcare.gov).

## OLDER ADULTS AND ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

In an article for the Christian Science Monitor titled "Eons: 'MySpace' for the Boomer Set," Clayton Collins reports that seniors are discovering the world of online social networking at the Eons.com Web site. Read the full article online at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0922/p11s03-stct.html>.

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR



### February 4

#### **Solutions for Hunger--The Biggest Problem on the Planet**

Speaker Ed Payne has been an active volunteer in hunger work for 25 years at the local, national, and international levels. He currently chairs the Hunger Committee for the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA.

LOCATION: Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 7217 West Broadway, Brooklyn Park

TIME: 11 a.m. - noon

COST: Free

CONTACT: Hazelle Nyberg; 763-561-2762; hnyberg@access4less.net

### February 8

#### **Socrates Café**

Sit back and philosophize with your friends and neighbors. The topic is decided by popular vote at the beginning of the meeting. All are welcome; no experience necessary. The concept of Socrates Café is based on the book of the same name by Christopher Phillips. This program is offered every Thursday at 7 p.m.

LOCATION: Ridgedale Library, 12601 Ridgedale Dr, Minnetonka

TIME: 7 p.m.

CONTACT: Ridgedale Library: 952-847-8875

### **February 12**

#### **Stories of Ripening: Winter**

Come spend a winter day in the spirit of Meridel LeSueur, the late, great activist, poet, journalist, woman of the prairie, archetypal Midwestern woman. Content for the day will include a video of Meridel and opportunities for participants to share their own stories and hopes for aging deeply and creatively. A special treat will be a visit with Molly Culligan, longtime friend of Meridel and creator/performer of the one-woman play, *Ripenings*.

Presenters for this event are Roseann Giguere CSJ, M Div, and Delmarie Gibney FSPA, D Min

COST: \$50 (includes lunch)

LOCATION: Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Ave, St. Paul

TIME: 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

CONTACT: Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality, 651-696-2788;

[www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org)

### **February 13**

#### **Caring for older people: The caregiver challenge**

Most older people who need assistance are cared for by family, neighbors and volunteers. But who is caring for the caregiver. And as the senior population grows, how will the escalating needs for care be met? Learn about the latest research and ideas to address caregiver challenges. Learn more and register at [www.wilder.org/index.php?id=502](http://www.wilder.org/index.php?id=502).

Continuing Education and Conference Center, U of M, St. Paul Campus

TIME: 7:30 -10:15 a.m.

COST: Free but must register

CONTACT: Nancy Hartzler; 651-647-4625; [nqh@wilder.org](mailto:nqh@wilder.org)

### **February 13**

#### **Space Invaders**

Unlimited Learning presents Charles Marohn, President & Planner, Community Growth Institute. Our neighborhood is changing. What services will a “mature” population require? What impacts might we expect upon local government, businesses, housing and the environment?

LOCATION: Hallett Community Center, 470 8th St., NE, Crosby, MN

TIME: 1:30—3:30 p.m.

CONTACT: Larry Foote: 218-678-3034

### **February 16**

#### **Cohousing Informational Meeting**

[Community in the Cities](#) invites all to a meeting to learn more about elder-friendly cohousing in the Twin Cities. In a cohousing living arrangement, private homes are oriented around a common open area and a common building.

Cohousing residents are proactive in creating viable, friendly neighborhoods in which residents cooperate, socialize and thrive. (Cohousing was featured in a recent feature article in Minnesota Good Age:

<http://www.mngoodage.com/articles/2006/12/28/news/feature01.prt>).

LOCATION: St. Matthews Church, 2136 Carter Ave., St. Anthony Park

TIME: 7 p.m.

CONTACT: Susan Hardman: [Sagesusan71@aol.com](mailto:Sagesusan71@aol.com)

### **February 27 & March 5**

#### **60+ Computer Classes: Introduction to Windows**

Roseville Area Senior Program presents 60+ Computer Classes

Learn the basics of Windows XP operating system. Navigate the desktop, run applications and manage files. Learn about using menus, commands and dialog boxes, plus how to change settings for the mouse, keyboard and display. Fee includes manual.

LOCATION: Fairview Community Center, 1910 County Road B W., Roseville

TIME: 9.a.m. – noon

FEE: \$85 for two sessions

CONTACT: Adult Enrichment Office: 651-604-3770

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

