



Vital Aging Network

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Summary, VAN LARGE GROUP MEETING

10 to noon, August 13, 2002, Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN

Introductory Statement and Welcome:

"VAN is a group with mutual interests in vital aging played out in a variety of ways, personally and professionally."

Attending:

Carl Sundin	Jim Engel	Connie Thompson	William Cox
Sue Meyers	Robert Pope	Carry Bassett	Mary Doucette
Renee Fredericksen	Bonnie Esposito	Dawn Lindblom	Grace Ramercy
Harvey Feldman	Thor Carlson	Carol Daly	Amy Carlson
Rosemary Sullivan	Chuck Groebel	Delores Doverstein	Annie Glasgow
Gloria Swanson	Diana DonCarlos	Patsy Kunz	Karen Greer
Brian McAffery	Lynn Schultz	Munna Yasiri	Hal Freshley
Steve Wagner	Barbara Muesing	Mary Maher	Barb Zell
Dan Segura	Barb Satin	Barb LaPort	Susan Hamerski

The Red Hat Society:

Lynn Schultz, a representative from the St Paul Chapter of the Red Hat Society (the Raspberry Reds) presented the purpose and benefits of membership in the Society. This chapter currently has 30 members and is growing. Other chapters noted included: the Red Hot Hattitudes of New Prague, Red Hot Roses and the Vintage Rubies of New Ulm. There are currently about 4,000 chapters across the US. The purpose was one of socialization with others of similar interests with opportunities to creatively spend time with others in self-expression.

Sue Ann Cooper founded the Red Hat Society in California and further information can be found at: www.redhatsociety.com She was inspired to create the Society after reading "When I am old I shall wear purple." People learn about the Society through newspaper articles, as well.

The chapters tend to be small and flexible structured. Members are 50+ and wear red hats and purple clothing to meetings. Members who are less than 50 years old attend in pink hats and lavender clothing to meetings. Annual chapter fees amount to \$35. The next convention of the Red Hat Society Chapters will be held in April in Chicago, Ill.

VAN members discussed the benefits of a loosely structured association of people looking for opportunities to socialize with others.

- Opportunities should be available for self expression for all people



- Opportunities found for women in the Red Hat Society could be replicated for men
- Could possibly pose the question on the VAN website - "Where do retired men or men over 50 go for fun? Are there formal programs set up and what do they offer?"

Discounts and Privileges for Seniors
Should They Be Based on Age Regardless of Economic Need?

Carol Daly presented background material and led a discussion about the privileges offered to seniors.

Background

"The senior discount trend began in the mid-1950s when AARP negotiated deals with health insurance companies and hotel chains. Retailers eagerly signed up because it was a way to entice the frugal Great Depression generation into spending money...Doug Brown, founder of SeniorDiscounts.com, has seen the number of companies that offer senior deals on his Web site grow from 25,000 a year ago to 115,000...While baby boomers may not be as frugal, they are going to demand discounts as their entitlement, Brown says. The question is, will they admit they are "senior citizens" just to save a few dollars."

A Marketing Issue: "Brown also says, 'senior citizens expect discounts, and eliminating them would hurt business in the long run....' Hal Norvell of AARP says, 'discounts are offered when sales are soft. As long as people have the time and money, the offers will be focused on them.' "
The Atlanta Journal - Constitution; April 11, 2002; Don O Briant

Issues

- * Do I need this discount?
- * By accepting/requesting discounts, am I contributing to the widely held belief (the misconception) that all older adults are needy? The 2000 census indicates that the poverty rate among those 65 and older (10.2%) is below that of the general population (11.3%), and the cohort of 55-65 year-olds is the most affluent of all. At the same time, those 85 and older are among the poorest. *Growing Old in America*, Elizabeth Vierck, Author, Published in 2002 by Gale Group, Inc.
- * If I want to be part of the movement to change society's vision of aging, should I continue to take "senior" discounts?
- * Should older adults be ENTITLED (transportation discounts,



banking discounts, special shopping discounts, hotels, etc.)? Are we "Greedy Geezers?"

* Public colleges and universities are mandated to offer credit courses to those 62 and older for \$9. per credit if space is available. Given higher education's current tight budgets, should economic need be considered when granting "scholarships" to older adults, as it is for younger students?

* Per Jan Hively: "How about the legitimate concerns of older adults who are no longer paid employees about the uncertainty of the future (longevity, cost of living increases, volatility in stocks, bonds, health care needs, etc.)...Will I ever meet a retiree who thinks that his financial future is secure?"

* Is it possible to create systems which allow people to request discounts without discomfort or embarrassment? Could/should we encourage retailers to offer discounts only upon request?

* If I refuse discounts, who would benefit? The movie moguls? The airlines? The benefits certainly wouldn't be directed towards single moms who need the dollars far more than I .