

**Vital Aging Network Forum  
Wellington Assisted Living  
2235 Rockwood Avenue, St. Paul, MN  
May 13, 2008**

**Common Ground, Common Good**

Speaker: Sean Kershaw, Citizen's League  
Host: Bonnie Esposito

**INTRODUCTION:** Bonnie Esposito

Bonnie Esposito began with the question of the day: "What does civic engagement mean to you." A partial list of responses included:

- Vital living
- Getting involved
- Contributing to your community
- Volunteering
- Active participation in your community
- Opportunities to continue learning
- Being engaged in service and volunteerism

**PROGRAM**

Sean Kershaw, President of the Citizens League and founding member of the Active Citizens School for Young Adults, spoke to Forum attendees about the role of the Citizens League. He noted that most areas require natural amenities to attract people to an area. Between the mid-1920's and the mid-1970's there was no significant migration to MN. In the 1970's immigrants came to MN resulting in the globalization of the state. Minnesota is successful, despite not having natural amenities, because it is populated by people who are good at civic engagement and problem-solving.

In 2006 a random phone survey was conducted with over 800 people to assess where Minnesota stood in terms of taxes, healthcare, civic engagement and other issues. There was a 96.5% complete rate and 70% scheduled time to complete the survey which took 40 minutes to complete. The survey confirmed that Minnesotans are paying attention.

The Citizens League is looking at new methods to get citizens involved, ways to reinvent civic engagement to engage the population, and rebuild Minnesota's capacity to solve problems. The lessons learned by the Citizens League is that if you change the ways you approach civic engagement people will get involved.

The Citizens League, a multi-issue organization, is working to create a series of pilot projects. One project is to set up a website to include useful information, a non-partisan response to questions and evaluation measures. Another is to find ways to improve public education by asking students for their input. The Citizen's League is also starting to work on Long-Term Care and other aging issues.

Sean told the attendees how to become involved with the Citizens League. Over ½ of new Citizens League members are under age 35, and the median age of those attending policy discussions is 28.5 years. Sean noted that the role and input of everyone is important in determining policy, but input from those the policy would affect is especially important. It is also important to define the problems in a way that also offers a process for correcting the problems. To make an issue important to someone when they don't think it is, is to present them with a plan of action or have an answer for them; or figure out ways to talk about the problem and define the desired end result. Also think about issues in a positive way by starting with the desired result and work backwards to determine the best way to solve the problem. As much public policy is based on an assumption that citizens are stupid or don't care, it is important to for each citizen to get involved by increasing the spectrum of ways to engage them, especially now when Minnesota faces fiscal crises because of poor public policy and financial mismanagement in the past.

### **Close**

Tom Hyder gave a brief history of the ALVA program, and Bonnie Esposito asked for donations to continue having the VAN Forums.

The Forum adjourned at 12:00 noon.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Gail Hernandez*