

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging



Sean Parnell
Governor

Fall 2013



William J. Streur
Commissioner

Commission Celebrates Successes, Experiences Loss

Many Alaskans know all too well the pain and hardship of having to watch a loved one struggle with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ARD). Because dementia is largely a disease of old age, the great demographic shifts occurring in Alaska, including a near doubling of the senior population over the next twenty years, will result in increasing numbers of people at risk for developing Alzheimer's disease – extending from nearly 5,400 Alaskans age 65 and older currently to almost 8,000 by 2025 based on population projections by the national Alzheimer's Association. These numbers count only seniors with Alzheimer's disease and do not take into account the numbers of people with related dementia (there are 8 different types) or persons younger than age 65 with early onset Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease burdens an increasing number of older Alaskans and their families, posing a significant challenge to public health, long-term supports, and the personal dignity of older Alaskans.

The Alaska Commission on Aging, in partnership with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services and the Alzheimer's Disease Resource Agency of Alaska, are working to develop a new Alaska State Plan for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia (ARD) to raise public awareness, reduce social stigma, and encourage early diagnosis to help Alaskans affected get connected with services as early as possible. This plan will help identify gaps in services and offer recommendations to enhance services for Alaskans with ARD and their family caregivers, improve safety, and strengthen dementia care. The success of this effort will be of significant importance to Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease, their families, public policy makers, health and social service providers.

In preparation for developing this state plan, the Commission conducted seven ARD community forums of which 161 public members attended statewide; surveyed 52 family caregivers caring for loved

ones with dementia; and is working with the Division of Public Health to gather information about Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease using the Behavioral Health Risk Factor Surveillance survey. In June, the Commission brought together a steering committee to review the data gathered about Alzheimer's disease in our state in order to begin the work of developing recommendations for the Alaska State ARD Plan. Our goal is to complete the ARD State Plan by summer 2014.

On July 10, 2013 the "Silver Alert" Bill (HB59) was signed into law by Governor Parnell at the Anchorage Senior Center. This legislation establishes a rapid response program for vulnerable adults who go missing, such as persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and has been a top priority for the ACoA this past legislative session along with other organizations that represent veterans and the disabled. HB 59 was sponsored by Representative Max Gruenberg and cross-sponsored by Senator Ellis in the Senate.

(Continued on page 2)

Alaskan Seniors:
Living Longer, Growing Stronger
 is a quarterly publication of the
 Alaska Commission on Aging
 (ACoA).

The mission of the Alaska
 Commission on Aging is to advocate
 for policies, programs, and
 services that promote the dignity
 and independence of Alaska's
 seniors and help them maintain a
 meaningful quality of life.

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www.AlaskaAging.org/publications.htm



**Director's
 Corner**

By Denise Daniello

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The Commission has two new board members. Edna Devries, Palmer resident, was recently appointed by Governor Parnell to serve in a public member seat on the Commission. Edna holds a distinguished record in public service and education. She has formerly served as an Alaska state senator, mayor for the Mat-Su Borough, assemblywoman for the MatSu Borough and currently is an instructor for Charter College. In addition, Nancy Dahlstrom has been approved by the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED) to serve in the DCCED designated seat. Nancy is the Executive Director for Serve Alaska, which includes the AmeriCorps programs, that recruits volunteers to do a variety of community work to meet the needs of Alaskans. Nancy is also a former legislator serving on the House of Representatives from 2003 to 2010. We welcome Edna and Nancy to the Commission!

The Commission's Rural Outreach meeting is planned for September 17th-19th when we will be visiting with older Alaskans and provider agencies in Valdez and the Copper River region – including visits to Copper Center, Klutikaah, Tazlina,

Gulkana, and Gakona. The Commission plans to hold its business meeting at the Valdez Senior Citizens Center on September 16th-17th and to meet with Elders and community members living in the Copper River region on September 18th-19th.

Sharon Howerton-Thomas, who served eight years on the Commission three of which as Chair, passed away on July 17th. Sharon was a committed advocate for older Alaskans who tirelessly championed their causes. At the Commission's August 2012 rural outreach meeting in Homer, Representative Paul Seaton presented Sharon with a legislative citation to recognize her outstanding track record for public service and volunteer work. Sharon was all about team work and frequently stated "there is no "I" in the word team." Thank you, Sharon, for your leadership, vision, and passionate advocacy for older Alaskans and especially for your service to the Alaska Commission on Aging.

Until next time...

Denise Daniello
 ACoA Executive Director

**Alaska Commission on Aging's
 Newest Appointees**



Edna DeVries

In June, Governor Parnell appointed Edna DeVries of Palmer to serve in the public member seat on the Alaska Commission on Aging. Edna first came to Ketchikan Alaska in 1967 and then moved to Palmer in 1969. She was elected to the Alaska State Senate in 1985 and served until 1987. While a Senator, Edna served as Chairwoman of the Community and Regional Affairs and Co-chairwoman of the Health and Social Services Committees. Edna also served as the Mat-Su Borough Mayor from 1982 to 1985; Mat-Su Assembly 1980 to 1982; Palmer City Council 1979 to 1982; 1996 to 1999 and currently. Since 2010, she has been employed by Charter College as an instructor teaching courses in business, customer service, logic and accounting. Married to Noel DeVries, Edna and Noel have four children eleven grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

Welcome Edna!



Nancy Dahlstrom

Nancy was been approved by the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED) to serve in the DCCED designated seat on ACoA. Nancy is the Executive Director for Serve Alaska, which includes the AmeriCorps programs, that recruits volunteers to do a variety of community work to meet the needs of Alaskans. Nancy is also a former legislator serving on the House of Representatives from 2003 to 2010. Nancy also served as special assistant on issues pertaining to the Departments of Revenue and Military and Veteran's Affairs. Nancy is experienced in working with a diverse array of constituency groups.

Welcome Nancy!

**Darlin honored
 for volunteer
 service**

In June, Marie Darlin was honored by the Juneau Assembly for her many years of volunteer service. Mayor Merrill Sanford delivered the proclamation, which describes her energy and passion for volunteering. Sanford said Marie's "volunteering in organizations that make Juneau and the entire state of Alaska better places to live make her an exemplary model for all citizens to follow."

Marie was appointed to the Alaska Commission on Aging in 2010 and has lent her expertise to senior issues from around the state. She previously served on the statewide Medicaid Commission and currently volunteers countless hours for other Juneau and statewide causes.



Louise Dawson, Marie Darlin and Elizabeth Lucas celebrate Marie's Proclamation



Alaska Loses Powerful Senior Advocate



On July 16, 2013, the Alaska Commission on Aging (and older Alaskans) lost one of its greatest friends and advocates. With great shock, Commission members and staff learned of the death of Sharon Howerton-Thomas, long-time ACoA member and former chair, after a brief illness. She was 70 years old.

Sharon grew up in California, moving to Alaska in 1966 as a young adult. She worked in a number of civil service positions, including one at the Alaska State Housing Authority where she was proud to provide support for the development of a number of low-income housing projects and senior housing developments. She also worked for the Salvation Army Clitheroe Center and the Alaska Court System.

From 1975 through 1995, Sharon volunteered as a dispatcher with the Chugiak Volunteer Fire Department, making many friends as she kept her fellow volunteers as safe as possible. She also served as an EMT2 with the Department.

Sharon eventually moved to Homer, where she owned and operated a small shop on the Homer Spit, enjoying lively conversation and sharing her love of Alaska with visitors from all over the world.

In her retirement years, Sharon determined to help make Alaska a better place for seniors to live. As a member of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) from 2005 through 2012, including three years as Commission chair (2009 – 2012), she traveled to many communities across the state, always eager to meet local elders and learn about their lives and any needs that they experienced. She also served on the Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board during her three years as ACoA chair.

During her time on the Commission, Sharon regularly drove to every senior center on the Kenai Peninsula, checking in with local seniors to find out if they had any concerns or frustrations she or the Commission might be able to help with. From housing to health

care, finances to fishing licenses, no issue was too large (or too small) for her to tackle.

Never one to be preoccupied with “political correctness,” Sharon was known for her refreshing forthrightness and candor, not to mention her colorful language. Yet as she met with and befriended many individuals working in the senior services system as well as state and local government officials, Sharon was able to spearhead numerous improvements in services for seniors.

Whether it was an epic battle such as the fight to create the Senior Benefits program (which provides a monthly cash supplement for low-income seniors), or a push to pass budget increments for a variety of senior programs, Sharon was always energetic in her support.

In 2012, the Alaska Legislature issued a proclamation honoring Sharon for her “dedication and advocacy for the elderly and all citizens of our state.”

“Sharon is an amazing advocate for elders throughout the state with a clear vision of making Alaska a great place for people to age,” read the legislative proclamation. “Sharon is one of a kind.”

And, while Sharon was greatly honored to be acknowledged by Alaska’s political leaders, the people dearest to her heart were her many friends, both old and new, who in turn will always cherish her loyalty, wit, and high spirits.

Someday, as we each make our own unexpected crossing at the other side of life’s journey, and arrive a bit dismayed and apprehensive on that far shore, we can be certain that a tall angel with a beehive and a booming laugh will shout our name from behind the wheel of a big red truck, ready to give us our first tour of heaven’s highway. And along the way we’ll stop at a senior center for a cup of coffee and a chat with old friends.





Senior Spotlight

By
Senator Johnny Ellis

Recently-signed Silver Alert law will save lives

Too often in today's fractured and partisan political climate it takes a highly publicized tragedy before our elected officials will work together to solve a problem. Alaska is best served by leaders who will plan for the future, rather than scramble to close barn doors after the fact.

That's why Representative Max Gruenberg (D-Anchorage) and I introduced parallel bills during this past legislative session to enact a Silver Alert system in Alaska. This program uses statewide media outlets to engage the public when a vulnerable adult goes missing. Thanks to the hard work of concerned citizens and organizations across Alaska, the Governor signed Silver Alert into law June 12, 2013 after it passed with unanimous legislative support.

Let me explain the value of the Silver Alert system. AARP reports that Alaska's senior population is growing at an accelerated rate and more senior citizens are choosing to retire in Alaska than in previous years. The Alaska Commission on Aging reckons that approximately 12,000 Alaskans experience

developmental disabilities and that nearly half of Alaskans 85 years and older suffer from Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. Additionally, Alaska is home to three major military installations and was one of five states that saw its population of veterans increase over the last decade. Many of these veterans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other combat related disabilities.

We have a large and growing population of vulnerable adults in Alaska and it's our responsibility to ensure they have the care and support they need. Silver Alert mandates unprecedented coordination between the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and the Alaska Department of Public Safety to broadcast information about missing vulnerable adults to the public. This safety net is critical when you take into consideration Alaska's uniquely harsh environment and the fact that 60 percent of those diagnosed with Alzheimer's are likely to wander, even when under care.

We are confident that Silver Alert is both effective and efficient. The 37 other states that already have a Silver Alert style program in place have seen demonstrated improvements in their ability to find and care for vulnerable adults who go missing. Moreover, rather than throwing money at a problem, this program represents a way to use the resources we already have more effectively in times of crisis.

Most importantly, Silver Alert represents the potential of leaders willing to work together. When we focus on the real problems facing Alaskans, we are able to deliver policies that save money and help the most vulnerable among us. With this bill, we have identified a clear problem and come together to achieve a commonsense solution that keeps Alaskans safe.

Senator Johnny Ellis, D-Anchorage, is the Senate Minority Leader and serves downtown, Fairview and Mountain View in the Alaska Senate.

Silver Alert



Signing Ceremony for the Silver Alert Bill, HB 59



On June 12, 2013, Governor Sean Parnell signed legislation at the Anchorage Senior Activity Center to establish a statewide alert system to help in the recovery of missing and vulnerable adults.



Several officials and senior advocates attended the bill signing ceremony. From left to right, they include: Deputy Chief Stephen Smith, Anchorage Police Department; Edna DeVries, ACoA Commissioner; Brigadier General Thomas Kalkus; Rosemary Hagevig, AARP State President and Pioneer Home Advisory Board member; Joseph A. Masters, Commissioner Public Safety; Governor Sean Parnell; Cathy Lee, Executive Director Anchorage Senior Center; Mary Shields, ACoA Commissioner; Paula Pawlowski, ACoA Chair; Representative Max Gruenberg; Senator Johnny Ellis; Representative Lora Reinbold; Representative Bob Lynn.



**ALASKA
LONG TERM CARE
OMBUDSMAN**

Under federal and state law, the Alaska Long Term Care Ombudsman is charged with protecting the rights, safety and welfare of older persons residing in assisted living and nursing homes. The most common complaints include poor medication management in homes, failure to provide access to medical care, failure to monitor residents owing to staff shortages, and disrespectful staff behavior. Other complaints involve problems with insurance or Medicaid, improper acts by legal representatives, or difficulties in senior housing. Sometimes complaints are very serious, involving abuse, neglect, exploitation or the use of undue influence to harm vulnerable seniors. These complaints receive immediate attention and investigation.

The Alaska Long Term Care Ombudsman's office has launched a new and user friendly website at www.akoltco.org. The public can view information on the responsibilities of the Long Term Care Ombudsman office and the rights of seniors living in assisted living or nursing homes. The public may submit a complaint and find out about volunteer opportunities thru the new website.

Employ Older Workers Week

by Rita Bowen,
Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills
Training Program Coordinator

Utilizing Their Wisdom and Experience

Alaska celebrates "Employ Older Workers Week" during September 22nd to 28th, 2013. This week provides us with an opportunity to increase awareness and focus on the development of innovative strategies for tapping into Alaska's underutilized older workers. Employ Older Worker Week aims to increase awareness of the dramatic growth in the number of older citizens who are known as the Silver Tsunami. By 2014, 41% of those 55 or older will be employed, making up over 21% of the U.S. labor force.

Alaskan businesses recognize the value in tapping into this talent pool and leveraging the skills and experiences of older workers as a way to "gain experience the smart way." By employing older workers they gain their unique combinations of knowledge, insights, and qualifications as these workers use technology and skills in adapting to the changing requirements on the job, meet their employers' needs, achieve ongoing career success, and help others in their work and vocations. Older Alaskans have real world experience in multiple industries. Seniors' cross training helps their employers acquire a competitive edge. These older workers

also help Alaska with their wisdom, experience, and energy which enhance local communities and economies.

Employers affirm that, in general, older workers do not experience transportation problems, have few on-the-job accidents, low absentee rates, and low turnover rates. Moreover, they possess up-to-date skills and are flexible, open to change, interested in learning new tasks and willing to take on challenging assignments. Older workers also have a strong work ethic, can work flexible schedules, and mentor workers. These older workers are vital to Alaska's future prosperity by remaining in the workforce or by serving their communities in voluntary roles as their skill sets are needed and appreciated. Employ Older Worker Week encourages all Alaskans to recognize the vital role of older workers in the workforce and to recognize the contributions that older workers make to our communities, workplaces, and economy and to encourage those who are engaged in job placement, training, and related services to recommit in their efforts to employ older Alaskans. Many older workers still need a hand in securing employment due to limited financial resources. If you have an employment opening, please consider hiring an older worker. Employers who develop specific recruitment and retention strategies for these older workers will reap big benefits.



Health Logic

by
Sherice Cole

Gaining Energy and Feeling Better

Keeping active is a good way to beat aches and pains. Such activities as swimming, water aerobics, water Zumba, walking and lifting light weights are just some of the few exercises that can help strengthen muscles and, improve bone density which all helps with lessening pain and feeling better, both physically and emotionally. Exercise provides positive energy that can help you increase daily activities such as chores and errands.

Remember a healthy diet also helps you feel better. Add fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts and whole grains to a full spectrum of vitamins and minerals that play a role in keeping you healthy. "Juicing" is a quick way to incorporate more fruits and vegetables in your diet and provides a quick pick me up or a smart way to start the day full of energy.

Here is a healthy, protein-rich recipe that you can make in the blender. White bean hummus can be made with canned cannellini beans, fresh pressed garlic, a pinch of ground cumin for flavor, lemon juice, and 1/2 cup of extra-virgin olive oil. Top off the hummus with a sprinkle of pesto and a few pine nuts. You can eat hummus with crackers, or sliced bell peppers of any kind (green, orange, red or yellow) and carrots. Hummus, made with beans, provides an excellent source of protein.



Falls Prevention Awareness Day

The 6th annual National Falls Prevention Awareness Day will be observed on Sept. 22, 2013 to promote and increase public awareness about how to prevent and reduce falls among older adults.

This year's theme, Preventing Falls—One Step at a Time, seeks to unite professionals, older adults, caregivers, and family members to play a part in raising awareness and preventing falls.

In 2012, communities in 46 states and Washington, DC participated in Falls Prevention Awareness Day. In Alaska, there were at least 5 communities that observed this day. We would love to see more communities focus on this subject this year!

There are plenty of resources on the Internet to help plan for an excellent community event. Please visit the Alaska Commission on Aging website at www.alaskaaging.org and <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/falls-prevention/>. If you have questions or need assistance, please call Lesley Thompson at the ACoA office at 465-4793.



A Message from Acting Commissioner Colvin, Social Security Administration:

Happy Anniversary Social Security!

As we reflect upon the past 78 years, it is so gratifying to see how we continue to touch the lives of nearly every American. We have made so much progress with our electronic services allowing the public to not only file for benefits online, but also obtain benefit verification statements. It is such an honor to lead this agency as we fulfill President Franklin Roosevelt's vision in providing a measure of economic security to more than 60 million Americans. There is nothing more rewarding than making a difference in the lives of others. Our employees work so hard each and every day to ensure that we meet the needs of the public despite our challenges of increasing workloads, limited staff, and no pay raises. They are the strength of our agency, the heart of Social Security, and they truly care about the public we serve. Their dedication, compassion and commitment make Social Security the agency it is today.

Happy Anniversary Social Security!
Let's make the next 78 years just as great or even better!

For more information, please visit
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/78thanniversary/>.



Summer Fun in the Land of the Midnight Sun



Calling all Green Thumbs! Gardening is a real treat: fresh air, exercise and you can even grow some of your own foods or colorful garden plants.



Enjoying a stroll on a beautiful summer's day is a great way to stay active and spend time with loved ones.

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Save the Date: ACOA Calendar of Events



Alaska Commission on Aging quarterly meeting
December 11th-12th, 2013 (Anchorage)

Alaska Commission on Aging
February 11th-13th, 2014 (Juneau)

Alaska Commission on Aging
May 2nd – 3rd, 2014 (Anchorage)

Alaska's Power of Aging Symposium
May 1st, 2014 (Anchorage)