

Fall 2006

## Silverwire

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# Silverwire

Vol. 4, No. 3 Fall/Winter 2006/2007

NEWSLETTER OF THE UMAINE CENTER ON AGING

## Center Issues Findings from Year Long Substance Abuse Study Assessment

Older adult substance abuse is a little known and often misunderstood issue. Older adults experience substance abuse for various reasons; some struggle with it all their lives while others begin later on in life. To better understand this issue and its impact on Maine's older adults, the Center has recently completed a year long study, made possible by funding from the Maine Office of Substance Abuse, on alcohol abuse among older adults statewide (with a special focus on Hancock County). For this needs and resources assessment study, various sources of information were examined: existing drug and alcohol treatment data sets, arrest statistics, health data, information collected via a statewide survey of professionals, transcripts from interviews with professionals statewide, and data from 12 local focus groups administered throughout Hancock County. The study revealed several findings of interest including the need for more age-appropriate services for older adults in the region and the need for more education of healthcare staff, professionals and the public.

In general, older adults are exposed to a number of risk factors that can elevate the potential for developing

problems with alcohol, including an increased incidence of chronic illness and disease, multiple loss and grief experiences, isolation and segregation

*Continued on page 7...*

## CENTER HOSTS SUCCESSFUL MEDICATION USE AND DISPOSAL CONFERENCE

Portland, Maine was the convening point for many of the most concerned and dedicated in the fields of medication use, misuse, and alternatives and pharmaceutical waste containment. Representing organizations from throughout the US and locations in Canada and Europe, 113 attendees participated in sessions offered by over 50 speakers.

The Fourth Annual Maine Benzodiazepine Study Group International Conference and Third Annual Unused Drug Return International Conference were held jointly on October 23 and 24, 2006 drawing the largest attendance to date. Designed for health care professionals, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, environmentalists, substance abuse professionals, and others concerned with the human and environmental impact of benzodiazepines and

other prescription drugs, the conference offered two tracks.

One track addressed issues surrounding the uses, misuse, and alternatives to benzodiazepines, a class of medications used to treat anxiety, stress and insomnia. A second focused on the environmental and societal impact of unused prescription drugs stored in homes and discarded into the environment. This



*Conference attendees look on during an opening session of the 2006 MBSG and Drug Return Conferences*

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# From the Director

## Silverwire

Vol. 4., No. 3

Fall/Winter 2006/2007

Lenard W. Kaye, Director

Jennifer Crittenden, Editor

*Silverwire*, is published three times a year.

The Center on Aging is an interdisciplinary research center reporting to the Vice President for Research and associated with the University of Maine's School of Social Work and the College of Business, Public Policy, and Health. Our mission is to promote and facilitate activities on aging in the areas of education, research and evaluation, and community service, in order to maximize the quality of life of older citizens and their families in Maine and beyond.

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This fall, the Center has witnessed a whirlwind of activity in the areas of conference planning, training curriculum development, grants writing, workshop and special event offerings, and report writing. All these activities have reflected large doses of community partnering with our colleagues.

Our efforts this fall have served to remind me that addressing issues of aging at least at the Center requires a willingness to be responsive to rapidly changing and often times unanticipated challenges. It has meant gearing up to focus on new priorities that might not have even been on the Center's radar screen several years and even several months ago. I include here to name just a few: the important policy research work we engaged in preparing for Maine's Blaine House Conference on Aging; the intense conference planning and proposal development work for which we provided leadership in on issues of prescription drug use, abuse, return, and disposal; elder abuse prevention and education conference programming performed for the Greater Bangor Coalition to End Elder Abuse; and our development of staff training curricula in the areas of geriatric mental health and elder suicide for the Joint Advisory Committee on Select Services for Older Persons.



Lenard W. Kaye

The projects referred to above and others highlighted in this issue of the *Silverwire* reaffirm in no uncertain terms our close working relationships with long-standing community partners and newly established organizational colleagues. I refer here to increased levels of mutual planning and programming with a wide range of state agencies including, of course, Maine's Office of Elder Services of DHHS, the state's Area Agencies on Aging, and Community Action Programs. In addition, productive relationships are being rapidly established or expanded with the state's Department of Environmental Protection, Drug Enforcement Agency, Office of Substance Abuse, Office of the Attorney General, Department of Health, and Department of Public Safety.

At the same time, our ties to other institutions of higher education in the state are being enhanced as we increase the number of cross-cutting project initiatives with the University of Southern Maine's Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service as well as the University of New England in furthering geriatric education programming associated with the Maine Gerontological Society and Rural Bar Harbor Geriatric Planning Committee.

Periodically, staff at the Center discuss the anticipated benefits that would accrue by focusing our efforts on a more limited number of substantive issues and research and program initiatives. And, it is true that a number of enticing reasons can be offered for doing just that. But, at least for the time being, the realities of an aging Maine do not yet easily situate themselves in such a simply configured package. It would seem that the Center on Aging remains destined, for the foreseeable future, to be open and responsive to the multitude of challenges and requests that come to our attention as we continue to serve as Maine's only public university interdisciplinary research center devoted exclusively to issues of aging.

# Partnerships and Programs.....

## CENTER ON AGING STUDENT LEARNING TEAM CONTINUES TO GROW!

This year the Center welcomes fourteen new students. Mary Kellogg, Michele Garrity, Ken Gates, and Dyan Villeneuve are joining the Center in the capacity of Practicum Partnership Interns, all in the UMaine MSW program. Work-study students at the Center include Kevin Symanietz majoring in studio art, Haley Holden a student in the BSW program, Chantal Hindman pursuing a career in radiology, and Susanne Mallon who is placed at RSVP. Joining the Center as MSW field interns are Pamela Nixon and Anne Donovan-Fortier. Serving as Graduate Research Assistants are Kate DeHaven, Melissa Adle and Jason Charland all of whom are enrolled in the MSW program. The Center welcomes another Graduate Research Assistant, Anna Mortensen, who is majoring in communication sciences and disorders. Center on Aging staff look forward to working with all our students and recognize the important contributions they will make.

## GPPP EXPANDS SCOPE AND WELCOMES NEW STUDENTS



2006 GPPP students: Mary Kellogg (left), Ken Gates, Michele Garrity, Dyan Villeneuve (right).

As it enters its second year, the Geriatric Practicum Partnership Program at the Center on Aging welcomes 4 students to the program. For the first time, a student from the Belfast MSW program is participating which is allowing us to expand our partnership to include agencies in the Midcoast area of Maine. The GPPP primary practica this year

include Waldo County Home Health and Hospice, Community Health and Counseling Services, Maine State Office of Elder Services in Augusta, and Brewer Rehab and Living Center. Once again, students rotate through a wide variety of agencies in addition to their primary practica. The number and scope of these has expanded this year and cover agencies as far south as Portland.

A consortium of field instructors and rotation mentors have begun meeting regularly to network with each other and help advise the GPPP on programming and other matters. A spring colloquium is being planned focusing on the mental health issues of older adults.

The number of MSW candidates with an interest in aging has increased noticeably in recent years, and the Center on Aging and the GPPP are providing valuable training for these future geriatric social workers.

## FIRST GRANDFAMILIES E-CONVERSATION A SUCCESS

On October 4th and 5th, more than 25 grandparents and social service providers from across Maine and the U.S., "met" online to discuss topics important to relative caregivers. The discussion focused on policies affecting grandfamilies and resources available to support relative caregivers. Participants enjoyed learning from each other and sharing experiences.

Barbara Kates, Director of Maine Kids-Kin, presented information and facilitated the discussion. Dr. Lauren Storck served as the Online Education Consultant. This online event was the first in a series of interactive educational forums for grandfamilies, particularly those living in rural areas, as part of the Brookdale Foundation-funded Relatives as Parents Program. The next online event for grandfamilies will take place in spring of 2007. There is no charge for these events. Upcoming e-conversation events will be posted on our Online Continuing Education webpage: [www.mainecenteronaging/onlineeducation.htm](http://www.mainecenteronaging/onlineeducation.htm).

## SENIOR COLLEGE WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR

The UMaine Center on Aging is pleased to welcome Judy Hanscom as Executive Director of the Penobscot Valley Senior College. A member of the steering committee that established PVSC in 2002, she served on the initial board of directors and then as president from 2004 to 2006. For much of her career, Judy developed, delivered, and managed educational services for corporate and non-profit entities, including nearly a decade as educational services director for an electric utility. Judy brings with her an enthusiasm for "learning for the fun of it" and we look forward to a great year of PVSC classes!

## SENIOR SENSE VISTA: KERRY KENNEY

AmeriCorps\*VISTA members are a special group of people. Each A\*VISTA member has committed to serving 40 hours a week for one year at a non-profit agency. In return they receive limited financial assistance. But A\*VISTA members aren't focused on the material rewards; they



Senior Sense VISTA Kerry Kenney

are focused on making a difference in their communities. Kerry Kenney is one of these exceptional individuals.

Kerry had reached the point of looking for a change after successful careers as a pharmacist and as a sales rep for Bristol Myers Squibb. She had never heard about A\*VISTA until a cousin signed up. Then in June 2005 Kerry saw our ad in her local paper. The phrases "making a difference" and "time for a change" caught her attention.

Kerry has been successful in her assignment with York Hospital. While most of her time and effort is focused on Medicare Part D she has also been working on job opportunities and training as a secondary project. Her successes include: building a web of Medicare D help sessions that helped 192 seniors get help and organizing a Senior Employment Seminar at York County Community College in

September.

Kerry reports that her greatest challenge thus far has been "coming out of both a medical background and a corporate model and landing in a strange new world. I was used to quick decisions and a right answer. Non-profits don't necessarily ascribe to this model!" But she took the time to ask questions, pay attention and learn how to get the work done. She learned "there is more than one way to do things. You can't have direct ownership of anything you do as an A\*VISTA. If you do your part well, there are many people and volunteers on your team (you are not a party of one!) and you must let go of your work, so that it can continue on in your absence. Communities are complex entities, but wondrous things can happen when you marshal peoples' efforts and work together on behalf of older citizens."

Kerry has gotten so much out of this year she will be serving a second year with us as an A\*VISTA Leader. In her words "I've also learned that I want to do more to get the word out about A\*VISTA, and to help others to have a great experience during their service year."

## RAPP NOW SERVING THE LINCOLN AREA

The Relatives as Parents Program, currently funded by the Brookdale Foundation, is beginning its fifth year of support for grandparents raising grandchildren and other relative caregivers. Since September, a new support group has been meeting in Lincoln on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 pm. Highlights include discussions about topics

affecting grandfamilies, such as available resources, as well as guest speakers and updates of upcoming special events. Limited childcare is available at no charge for grandparents interested in attending the meetings.

Please contact Tracey Cousineau at the Health Access Network at 794-6700 for more information about the new Lincoln group. For information about other ongoing support groups and services throughout the state, please contact Maine Kids-Kin at (866) 298-0896.

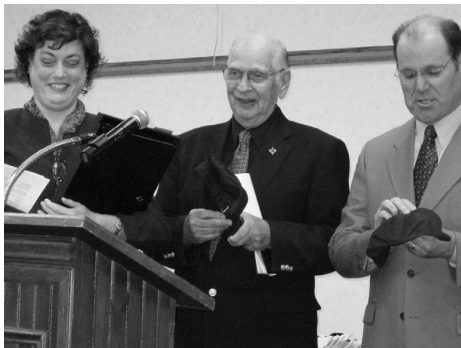
## FOURTH ANNUAL RSVP RECOGNITION EVENT BRINGS FUN, LAUGHTER, AND STORIES

Each year the UMaine Center on Aging RSVP honors its dedicated volunteers with a celebratory recognition event. RSVP currently serves Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis and Washington Counties with over 500 members. In 2005, our members (age 55 years and older) provided more than 88,000 hours of service to over 90 non-profits, government agencies and public schools. As you can tell from these numbers alone, RSVP volunteers play significant roles in making their communities better places to live and are models for the civic engagement of others as they age.

On October 25 at Jeff's Catering and Convention Center in Brewer, The UMaine RSVP Program hosted its fourth Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon and Awards Program. The theme for this year was *RSVP Volunteers: An All-Star Team*. With each year, the number of volunteers attending this special event has increased and this year was no excep-

tion! RSVP recognized the largest number of volunteers to receive years of service awards. Seventy-eight men and women of our 500 plus volunteers were recipients of five, ten, fifteen and twenty years of service awards. Entertainment was provided by Stevie Cee and door prizes were awarded to volunteers, their guests and volunteer supervisors from our many partnering agencies.

This year's keynote George Hale kept the crowd in stitches while Ric Tyler our returning Master of Ceremonies worked the crowd. Also, both George Hale and Ric Tyler were presented with Honorary Memberships in RSVP because of their dedication to community service. A good time was had by all! Events like this represent an opportunity for the Center on Aging to not only give the volunteers the big "Thank You" they deserve, but to also provide what has come to be viewed as a major social event filled with stories, laughter and sheer fun for all.



*RSVP Director, Paula Burnett, presents honorary RSVP memberships to George Hale (left) and Ric Tyler (right)*



*Pamela Nixon (center), CoA Intern, enjoys the opportunity to chat with RSVPers Kay Lebowitz (left) and Helene Staples (right)*



*Master of Ceremonies Ric Tyler entertains the crowd during the 2006 RSVP recognition event*

## SPOTLIGHT ON PRODUCTIVE AGING: ANDRE PIED ON STAYING ACTIVE AND STAYING INVOLVED

Andre Pied, at age 63, has a philosophy on life many of us wish we had. "One of the best ways to feel good about yourself is to feel valued. One of the best ways to be valued is for others to ask us for help. Having something to



*Andre Pied enjoys a cup of coffee during a recent trip to France*

offer others is extremely gratifying. Though we do not always realize it we all have something to offer. We are all important." Andre has served as a key figure in the development of new programs in the Skowhegan area during his tenure as administrator of the Skowhegan area Adult and Community Education Program for 18 years. He has a deep interest in community building. He believes, "We need to try to understand the needs and resources of a community. When we see needs without resources this is where we need to create programs or resources."

Though currently retired and living in Jackman, he continues his connection to the Skowhegan area by making time to visit friends and former students. Andre maintains a busy and active lifestyle through his many hobbies and interests including nature, travel, kayaking,

hiking, fishing, hunting and especially being social and meeting new people. His advice to younger generations is to "explore new things, be open and continue to be curious, and make sure you have a network of friends to help you through the tough times." Andre talks about aging as a process that begins at birth and continues until death. Our society too often measures the value of a person by their ability to be productive. It is important to realize that everyone has value. We all contribute to our society regardless of age or ability. "There is so much to see and learn."

## NEW SILVERWIRE RESEARCH RESOURCES FEATURE COLUMN

We are starting a new Silverwire column devoted to helping our readers locate high quality information resources on aging issues. We would like to tailor this column to your needs; please help us by emailing Mary Kellogg, social work student and former CoA intern, at [mary.kellogg@umit.maine.edu](mailto:mary.kellogg@umit.maine.edu) with your suggestions for good books, websites, and other resources, or by letting us know about the information resource issues you face. We plan to include information about Maine and resources of national interest. Each column will be devoted to one or two resources.

To start out, we would like to let you know about a website that CoA has found useful in grant writing. It's called "Trends in Health and Aging," maintained by the federal government's National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/agingact.htm>.

The CDC describes this site as a collection of tables on trends in the health of the older population in the U.S. The tables cover trends in health status, health care use and costs, health insurance, health risk factors and disease prevention, and many other topics. Even though this is a CDC site, there is a wealth of information that goes far beyond statistics about diseases. For example, you can create a table showing living arrangements of older people, or a table showing insurance coverage of Medicare beneficiaries who reside in long-term care facilities.

Selecting a table is like choosing a chapter in a book – each table is about one topic, and the topic titles are easy to review. When you open a table, you see all the information available, but you may tailor what you see and print out by selecting for specific sub-groups by age, gender, race, and/or other factors.

There are instructions on the website about how to view and customize tables. It takes about an hour to learn what is available and how to create customized tables – probably less time if you are adept with the technology. Tables can be converted into charts with one click of the mouse.

## CENTER ON AGING CONDUCTING RESEARCH TO CREATE GERIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH CURRICULUM

Graduate Research Assistant Jason Charland is participating in a unique second year MSW field placement at the Center on Aging this year. Jason is working on a project designed to guide both policy and education in the area of geriatric mental health issues for the Joint Advisory Committee on Select Services for Older Persons (JAC) and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services's Office of Elder Services.

The main objectives of the project are to investigate national best practices related to elder suicide prevention and to enhance geriatric mental health training for direct care workers. Some of the specifics of the elder suicide prevention project include: surveying elder suicide prevention, treatment and education programs currently being carried out nationwide; reviewing the status of the elder suicide research literature on risk factors; and locating potential funding sources through which future elder suicide prevention programs can be supported.

The geriatric mental health training project will entail developing a one day (8 hour) geriatric mental health module to add to the existing training for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's), Mental Health Support Specialists (MHSS), and Personal Support Specialists (PSS) throughout the state. The curriculum module will be designed to build skills for direct support personnel working in older adults' private homes as well as in long term care settings to help address geriatric mental health challenges that these workers encounter in performing their daily job functions.

# Previews and Preludes.....

(*FINDINGS*, continued from cover...)

within the community, and limited income and financial resources. It is often difficult to estimate the incidence of alcohol abuse among this population given the stigma that surrounds this issue and the hesitancy to seek help by Maine's "pull yourself up by your boot straps" elders. Older adults remain largely absent from treatment and arrest data that would otherwise underscore the social and health consequences of this disease.

There are, however, some worrisome red flags that indicate the severity of this issue. Hospital data suggest an increasing trend in alcohol-related healthcare treatment. Among those surveyed, thirty-seven percent of professionals statewide and 23% in Hancock County reported at least monthly contact with an older adult who is experiencing alcohol-related health problems. Focus group members were also able to readily identify people in their lives or acquaintances who have struggled with alcohol abuse. Study findings further point to a growing drug and alcohol problem among the state's baby boomers (adults ages 40-60).

The explicit needs uncovered through this study include the need for more public awareness of this issue and the need to educate Maine's professionals. Specifically, older adults and their caregivers identified primary care physicians as the first stop for finding out more about alcohol abuse. However, the healthcare providers contacted knew little about this issue and how to address it in their offices. The need for more age-appropriate support services for older adults experiencing alcohol abuse issues was also identified in Maine as well as Hancock County. Community members who took part

in this project, further emphasize the need for informal support services and prevention efforts locally.

Barriers to addressing and treating this problem including denial by the community that a problem exists, a lack of awareness that a problem exists, and a general lack of knowledge about available treatment options were raised by all project stakeholder groups (older adults, healthcare providers, caregivers and other community members). In addition, pervasive myths allow substance abuse to continue and may keep people from seeking out the treatment and help they need: (i.e., Why bother treating the older adult?; Older adults won't change).

With a growing drug and alcohol abuse problem evidenced among Maine's Boomers and the invisibility of older adults within formal treatment systems, the current climate is ripe for change within the state. Maine has many resources that can be brought to bear on this issue including a wealth of knowledgeable substance abuse treatment professionals, counseling professionals, other stakeholders throughout the state, as well as community groups and organizations such as the Healthy Hancock Collaborative and other Healthy Maine Partnership organizations.

The University of Maine is currently working closely with the Healthy Hancock Collaborative to plan local community forums which will provide an opportunity for community members to learn more about project findings as well as engage in a dialogue about essential next steps in moving these recommendations forward.

Project information tip sheets and the full report are available at <http://www.umaine.edu/mainecenteronaging/pubandrep.htm#OSApubs>.

(*CONFERENCE*, continued from cover...)

conference represented an unprecedented venue for discussion of innovative return and disposal policies and pro-



Christopher Williamson presents at the 2006 MBSG conference

grams among key players from across the US and beyond.

Among the many noteworthy presenters was Christopher Williamson, PhD, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy, Policy Analyst, Office of Supply Reduction, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Office of the President. Williamson underscored the national agenda responding to the presence of controlled substances in groundwater and the larger environment. Given the fact that the state of Maine ranks among the highest of states in terms of illegal access to prescription drugs, it was appropriate that this significant speech be delivered in Maine.

More information on the conference and links to presentations can be found at [www.mainebenzo.org](http://www.mainebenzo.org).







## LEARNING FOR THE FUN OF IT: PENOBSCOT VALLEY SENIOR COLLEGE KICKS OFF FALL 2006 COURSES



*Senior College students enjoying a Friday morning seminar*



*Senior College instructor Dee Virtue teaches a DNA course for Senior College*



*Senior College student takes notes during a class meeting*