

SENIOR CONNECTION

Information for Seniors & Caregivers

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The Endless Summer

by **Robert P. Dwyer, Ph.D.,**
Executive Director

I always anticipate the summer movie season. Memories of the summers of my younger days often include thoughts of the movies I saw: True Grit, The Godfather, Jaws, and Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope. All were blockbusters, and all point to the fact that the summer season is a time when we anticipate life slowing down, relaxing on the deck with some iced tea, going to the drive-in, or enjoying a cool evening breeze. In other words, people often look at summer as a time when life takes a breather.

Yet, as most of us know, it simply doesn't work that way.

While summer is a time for vacations and other time off, these now happen year round as well. The consequence is that summer, while perhaps somewhat more relaxed, finds many of us working our jobs, caring for our kids and grandchildren and pets, and perhaps caring for an older person in need of some extra help.

In other words, life goes on, no matter the season, the weather, the date or the time. This is not to say that life is monotonous.



It is to say that life generally doesn't pay attention to a calendar. Not for you, not for me, not for any one of the 128,000 older Americans in Central Massachusetts, nor for the upwards of 50,000 caregivers in the region.

At Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, staff works daily to respond to the needs of elders and caregivers, through the services we fund in 30 programs, and through SeniorConnection, our Information and Referral department that provides

help in person, over the telephone, and online through our website, www.SeniorConnection.org.

So our work with seniors and caregivers continues, even during this season of "rest and relaxation." Hopefully, your partnership with us will continue as well. Your gifts of time, talent and money are truly needed. Federal funding is simply not increasing, but our needs and the needs of all those we serve are growing.

However you help, know that we at Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging are grateful for all you do. We ask you to continue in helping us to help you, and others, "at the crossroads of eldercare."

In the meantime, see you at the movies!

¿Se hablan Español? We Do!

We are trying to open another door to the approximately 2,000 Central Massachusetts Hispanic elders and their caregivers by providing community education materials translated into Spanish.



For the past several weeks, our Holy Cross Intern, Laura Dodd, has been translating some of the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging publications into Spanish. She has translated our agency brochure titled "Helping you at the Crossroads of Elder Care" and our "Connections for Caregivers" brochure. Her biggest project, the 130-page resource publication called "The Caregiver's Guide" contains valuable information on Central Massachusetts programs and opportunities for seniors and caregivers. It will be available online at our website www.seniorconnection.org, upon completion.

CMAA has translator services available for phone calls in several languages. Additionally, interpreters can be arranged for meetings in person.

Laura has studied Spanish for 7 years, and credits her language ability to having lived with a host family in Mexico for several months. She is heading back to Holy Cross in the fall for her senior year earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in both Psychology and Sociology. After graduating in May, 2006, Laura hopes to pursue a Master's degree in Counseling.

Neddy Latimer of the Leominster Spanish American Center commented about the project: "The Caregivers Guide translated into Spanish will enable our Latino elders to receive and learn more about information, support and resources available. Our Latino elders is one of the fastest growing target groups in the North Central Worcester County."

Orlando Rodriguez from Centro Las Americas was quoted as saying: "If you care for or support an elder in your life or know someone who does, the Caregiver's guide is the ultimate resource guide. Translated in Spanish, the Caregiver's Guide takes on a new set of challenges while improving its ability to serve the CM community. It breaks the language barrier and connects bridges that otherwise may not be traveled by Latino's who are in need of this information. Thank you CMAA, Elder Services, MHCC, and TVES for your support and commitment to the Latino community."

On The Horizon: Medicare Part D

Perhaps you have received a letter from Social Security concerning the new Medicare Part D prescription plan. Or, you have received a letter from the State of Massachusetts about Prescription Advantage, and how it might change when Medicare reform takes deeper root. All things considered, if you've paid ANY attention to news around Medicare changes starting January 1, 2006, you are concerned about what you and all seniors and caregivers will be faced with next year.

The fact is that, currently, there aren't too many facts about the future. Medicare Part D will drastically change the way drug benefits are accessed, no matter how you access them now.

It is never too late to learn more, and never too late to advocate for change.

Begin by reading any and all material sent to you from Social Security (don't throw anything away!), the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Speak to SHINE (Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders) counselors and information and referral specialists here at Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, your local aging services access point, or Council on Aging/Senior Center about the materials you receive in the mail. Know your current medications, know your current plan if you belong to an HMO or retirement plan, and keep all of your information handy.

Most importantly, advocate for yourself and all older Americans. Call your elected officials, both at the State and Federal levels, particularly your senators and representatives on Capital Hill in Washington, D.C.

If you have Internet access, you can also check various websites, such as www.medicarerights.org, or www.aarp.org. Internet sites such as these will help you better understand the issues we all face in the coming months, and who to contact in order to make your voice heard.

JUST REMEMBER: MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD! Only you can let your thoughts, feelings and beliefs known to those who make policy in Washington, D.C. You may contact Senators Charles Grassley, Republican of Iowa and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, and others, telling them how you feel about the creation of a true drug benefit that harnesses the purchasing power of Medicare through a Medicare-operated drug program.

Help yourself and others. Learn and advocate.

Federal Government Brings Attention to Medicare Changes

As a part of the President's outreach program to promote upcoming changes in the Medicare program, officials of Federal agencies have taken to "the road" to raise awareness. In Worcester, officials from the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institute of Health and the Office of the Surgeon General joined Dr. Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) at the Mass College of Pharmacy on Foster Street.

Pictured at right, Dr. McClellan greets Dr. Bob Dwyer, Executive Director of Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, who was invited to a special meeting before the public event.



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Spring 2005

White House Conference on Aging "Aging Agenda Listening Event"

On May 2, 2005, around 200 area elders, caregivers, and several elder service agency professionals gathered to voice their concerns about the future of elder care and the delivery of services. The following issues dominated the event:

- Social Security, fear of privatization/future implications
- Prescription drugs, high costs and substandard access
- Health Insurance, affordability/ limited preventative care options
- Medicare Part D/Medicaid
- Expanding community based care options

These issues and others will be brought forth to the White House Conference on Aging event in Washington D.C. this December. The official write-up of the event will be made available for viewing @ www.SeniorConnection.org. For more information, call CMAA. Thanks to all who attended the event!

BREAKING NEWS: Bob Dwyer, Executive Director of Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, has been appointed by Rep. Richard Neal, Democrat representing the 2nd Congressional District of Massachusetts as a Delegate to the White House Conference on Aging in Washington, D.C. The Conference, scheduled for mid-December, will gather delegates from around the nation to discuss matters of importance to seniors and caregivers. The needs and concerns expressed at the May 2nd event, will be carried by Dr. Dwyer to the conference. Watch for more on "Dr. Dwyer Goes to Washington" in the next SeniorConnection newsletter!