

Alaskan

Seniors

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

April 2000

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



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

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In The New Century...
The Future Is Aging

Nation to Focus on Older Americans in May

May is Older Americans Month in the United States. Next month the U.S. Administration on Aging will be joined by other senior advocacy agencies, including the Alaska Commission on Aging, in calling attention to the fact that our nation is aging. The theme "In the New Century . . . the Future is Aging" focuses on the impact that longevity will have on virtually all aspects

of society in the years to come.

In preparation for Older Americans Month, this issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* highlights the work of the Alaska Commission on Aging and local commissions to advocate for Alaskan Seniors throughout the year.

Governor Knowles Proclaims May Older Alaskans Month

In conjunction with Older Americans Month, Governor Knowles will once again designate May Older Alaskans Month. The proclamation, which was signed April 27, reads as follows:

for new employment, community service, and caregiving.

Increased longevity impacts nearly every aspect of our society. Alaska's statewide senior citizen community will triple by the middle of the 21st century. As Alaskans live longer and increasingly choose to make Alaska their lifelong home, we are challenged to plan for health and long-term care needs, economic security, housing and living arrangements, and retirement plans. Retirement challenges Alaskans to realize long-held goals and interests that become feasible with newly available time. Likewise, this is a time

We should all recognize the valuable and inspirational contributions of the more than 35,000 older Alaskans, their families, and caregivers; and as each of us looks forward to our own longevity, we should plan thoughtfully to make the most of that promise.

Now, therefore, I, Tony Knowles, Governor of the State of Alaska, do hereby proclaim the month of May 2000 as *Older Alaskans Month* in Alaska, and encourage Alaskans of all generations to be purposeful and imaginative in shaping and living their later years. Together, we are building an Alaska in which we are living longer and growing stronger.

Advisory Boards Advocate for Seniors on the Local Level

Several Alaskan communities have established organizations to advise the local mayor and municipal assembly on issues affecting seniors. These include:

The Anchorage Senior Citizens Advisory Commission Cheryl Bowers, Chair, Nancy Merriman, staff (907) 343-4619. The Commission meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 9:30-11:30 at the AnchorAGE Senior Center. Currently the Commission is wrapping up the Anchorage Senior Study, conducted over the last year and a half to assess the needs of seniors in the community.

The Fairbanks Northstar Borough Senior Citizens Advisory Board Katherine Ferguson, Chair (907) 456-7359. The Board meets on the third Wednesday (or as needed) in the Parks and Recreation Conference Room. Currently preparing for Senior Recognition Day, May 18 from 10:30 to 1:30 PM at the Carlson Center. The public is invited to a free lunch with entertainment and awards for senior volunteers in the community. Fairbanks is the only city/borough in Alaska to formally recognize seniors in this way. This year marks the 15th anniversary of the event!

The Juneau Commission on Aging Judy Parrish, President, (907) 463-5814. The Commission meets on the second Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM in the Juneau City/Borough Assembly chambers downtown. Currently, the Commission is a partner in promoting awareness of death and dying (see related article) and is working with the Juneau Assembly to assess the city/borough's transportation needs over the next twenty years.

The Matanuska-Susitna Senior Citizen Advisory Board Cliff Darnell, Chair, Kathy Peterson, contact (907) 745-9684. The Board meets the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00 PM in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Building in Palmer. The Board recently finished revising a senior citizen's resource book listing available public assistance, housing, and senior discounts in the Mat-Su valley.

The Skagway Senior Taskforce Colette Hisman, City Council Liaison, (907) 983-2405. No Chair, currently. The Taskforce meets as needed, usually in the Skagway City Council Office of Economic Development. Current projects include developing senior assisted living housing, and the senior homemaker program, which provides light housework and meal preparation for a sliding fee. The Taskforce is also advocating for increased funding for senior programs in Skagway.

PBS Series to Air on Preparing for the End of Life

In September, the Public Broadcasting System will air *On Our Own Terms: Moyers on Dying*. This four-part series, hosted by veteran broadcaster Bill Moyers, will focus on end-of-life issues, and explore the question: will we die the way we'd like to? Unfortunately, the answer is largely no, based on our society's reluctance to address dying until it becomes a personal issue. Relatively few Americans spell out their wishes in wills or other advance directives, or even discuss their wishes with family members until it's too late. *On Our Own Terms* will explore options and methods for taking a more proactive approach to the end of life.

The series will be accompanied by an extensive community action, education, and Internet campaign to encourage Americans to think about preparing for their final days before it becomes an issue. Across the country, professional service, religious, and advocacy organizations are forming local coalitions to host events in their community to call attention to advance directives and other issues related to dying.

In Alaska, Juneau is beginning to plan activities to coincide with the airing of the series on the local public broadcasting station. A steering committee has been formed that includes representatives from the medical community, AARP, the Juneau Commission on Aging, Tlingit & Haida, the Widowed Persons' Support Group, (Continued on page 4.)

The Alaska Commission on Aging: A Brief History

OVERVIEW:

The Alaska Commission on Aging has been in existence since 1965. Formerly known (and still remembered by many) as the Older Alaskans Commission, it is comprised of eleven Commissioners, appointed by the Governor. The Commissioners meet at least four times a year to discuss and act on senior issues. The Commission staff is housed within the Division of Senior Services, Alaska Department of Administration.

PURPOSE:

The Commission advocates for state policy, public and private partnerships, and citizen involvement that enables each of us to age successfully in our home community, or as close to home as is feasible. This includes tracking and advocating state legislation affecting Alaskans of all generations. The Commission oversees grant making and administration, oversees the state Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, and promotes interagency collaboration on issues affecting older Alaskans. Grant programs the Commission oversees include Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services, Home and Community Based Services, Senior Residential Services, and Senior Community Service Employment.

FUNDING:

The Commission receives substantial funding under the Older Americans Act. The establishment of this Act was instrumental in stimulating creation of the Commission's predecessor, the Alaska Office of Aging. The Older Americans Act of 1965 evolved from public pressure that began in the 1950s. Under the provisions of this Act, Alaska established its State Unit on Aging to conduct advocacy, planning and coordination, and to operate a small 'seed money' grant program funded by the Act. Amendments to the Act over the next thirteen years increased the scope of work and funding to support that work. The Act was reorganized in 1978, authorizing separate funding for specific services including a strong advocacy responsibility, and providing for more focused work on long-term care relating to older Americans.

HISTORY:

The State of Alaska began its aging program in 1967 with passage of AS 47.65, and the creation of the Office on Aging within the Department of Health and Social

Services. In 1981 the Alaska Legislature passed AS 45.21.200, creating the Older Alaskans Commission and transferring the Commission to the Department of Administration. This was intended to increase state coordination on issues and policy affecting older Alaskans, and provide for increased senior citizen participation in shaping programs intended to meet their needs. In 1994 the Legislature amended the Commission statute to rename it the Alaska Commission on Aging. Amendments reduced the number of required meetings from six to four; provided that the Commission would represent Alaskans affected by Alzheimer's and other dementia in relationship with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority; and directed the Commission's state plan to address the needs of such individuals.

COMMISSIONERS:

The current list of Commissioners is in the masthead of each issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*. Recently appointed Commissioners include Bernice Joseph of Anchorage, and Robert Gregovich, Jr. of Juneau. Ms. Joseph was appointed as Deputy Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development in January. She was Assistant Professor in the Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and served as Program Officer for the Doyon Foundation. She has been active in many Native Alaskan and youth advocacy organizations.

Mr. Gregovich served as Administrator for the Alaska State Developmental Disabilities Program, and as an advocate for the Disability Law Center of Alaska. He formerly served as Executive Director of the California State Developmental Disabilities Council. He is currently retired, and active in organizations advocating for seniors and the disabled.

CURRENT EVENTS:

The Commissioners meet twice more this year: June 13-15 in Homer, and October 2-4 in Ketchikan. The Commission is currently developing multiyear funding and policy support to improve and encourage more programs to aid those with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders and their caregivers.

(Continued on page 4.)

