

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger



Frank H. Murkowski
Governor

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

August 2006



Karleen K. Jackson
Commissioner



Denise Daniello Appointed ACOA Executive Director

The Alaska Commission on Aging has appointed Denise Daniello of Fairbanks as its new executive director. Denise formerly served as program manager for the Alaska Geriatric Education Center, Northern Region. She has also worked as executive director for the North Star Council on Aging Senior Center and associate director of Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing Services. A native of Chicago, she has lived in Fairbanks for the past 30 years. She holds an M.A. degree in anthropology.

“Denise Daniello’s skills in management,

communications, program development and building community partnerships will help facilitate the Commission’s goals,” said Frank Appel, chair of the Alaska Commission on Aging. “She will be a great asset in accomplishing our goals for advocacy, planning, and educating the public on the issues facing our senior population.”

“I am very honored to have been selected for this position,” commented Daniello. “I look forward to working with the Commission and communities around the state to develop the state

plan for senior services and to advocate for programs and services that promote dignity, independence, and a meaningful quality of life for older Alaskans. I plan to continue the work initiated by Linda Gohl to promote development of a strategic plan for long term care.”

Linda Gohl, the ACOA’s former executive director, retired on July 31st (see accompanying story).

Denise Daniello and her family own the Original Alaska Birch Syrup Company and Alaska Wilderness
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Linda Gohl Retires from Helm of ACOA

Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger a bimonthly 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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Executive Director

Denise Daniello

Contact Us

Phone: (907) 465-3250
Fax: (907) 465-1398
Web site: www.AlaskaAging.org
Mail: P.O. Box 110693
Juneau, AK 99811-0693

You can read issues on line at www.AlaskaAging.org/publications.htm. To be added to the mailing list, contact: MaryAnn_VandeCastle@health.state.ak.us



Former Alaska Commission on Aging Executive Director Linda Gohl retired from State service on July 31st. After working for the ACOA for two years as its NTS (Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services) program coordinator, Gohl led the agency for the past two and a half years, during a period of reorganization after the ACOA was moved from the Dept. of Administration to the Dept. of Health and Social Services, and its grant-making functions transferred to the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. The Commission on Aging and its remaining staff now focus primarily on the functions of planning and advocacy for senior needs.

Newsletter staff interviewed Linda Gohl on her last day

with the Commission.

What do you see as your greatest accomplishments during your tenure at the helm of the ACOA?

In conjunction with the members of the Alaska Commission on Aging, I believe we have raised the level of awareness of the role and responsibilities of the Commission, with a particular emphasis on advocacy. My management style was to act as a facilitator and make recommendations to the Commission; they then were able to act as the decision-makers.

What did you learn while in this job that you hadn't been aware of before?

I became aware of the great complexity of the federal and **(Continued on page 8.)**

Denise Daniello (continued from page 1)

Gourmet. With their two daughters in college, Daniello and her husband Jeff Weltzin will be moving to Juneau. She expects to begin the position at ACOA sometime in August.

In an interview during a July visit to Juneau, the new ACOA executive director shared some of her thoughts.

What have you learned from the seniors you've worked with?

The older adults I have worked with and cared for have been my teachers preparing me to work in senior services. In addition to professional employment, I was also a caregiver for both of my parents who suffered from Alzheimer's disease and related dementia conditions. I believe that I am more sensitive to the needs of older adults because of these experiences. Older adults today are the most culturally and economically diversified population in Alaska and in the U.S. seniors play major roles as caregivers, grandparents raising grandchildren, members of the workforce and community volunteers. I believe that as a society we have much to gain from older adults and need to actively pursue development of new opportunities for intergenerational projects and programs, civic engagement and healthy aging.

Do you see ways that non-Native Alaskans can learn from the Alaska Native

cultures how to better honor our elders and integrate them into our communities?

Yes. We can look to traditional Alaska Native cultures as a model for successful aging. Because their cultures are based on an oral tradition, elders as the community's knowledge keepers are respected, revered, and relied upon to transfer their knowledge from one generation to the next through story, song and modeling appropriate behavior. Elders' esteemed status and valued role as teachers of their culture's ways assist them in aging well. Having to remember and retell one's culture's legacy, vital to a people's survival, goes a long way to keeping one's mind intact.

In your experience, what are some of the major issues facing Alaskan seniors, now and in the next decade?

Based on current research conducted in Alaska and nationally, the ability to live independently, stay healthy and function well are top concerns for many older adults. People want to remain in their homes for as long as possible. Health promotion and disease prevention are critical to minimizing the kinds of problems that can make staying at home difficult. Seniors also need enough income to support themselves. Many older Alaskans fall through the cracks, surviving on very low incomes, and lack the

financial resources to pay for health care and daily living needs. Financial security is a worry for many.

Does Alaska have sufficient services in place for seniors? If not, what do we need to do to increase our capacity?

There is a lack of long-term care and supportive housing options available throughout Alaska, which is even more acute in rural and remote areas. We need to ensure assisted living and supportive housing facilities are appropriate for each community, reflecting local culture and tradition, and that there are sufficient home- and community-based services to allow the older person to remain at home surrounded by family and friends. In addition, older adults are often cared for by an understaffed geriatric workforce. In light of the projected increase of the older adult population (expected to triple in the next 20 to 25 years), it is imperative that we take steps now toward preparing our workforce for this population explosion through enhanced educational and training opportunities for health care professionals, direct service providers, and students. More training opportunities for family caregivers are needed as well.

You're a member of the baby boomer generation. What happens now that the first (Concluded on page 6.)

Scenes from the ACOA's Recent Advocacy Conference



Dr. Stephen Bezruchka of the University of Washington School of Public Health addresses participants. The slide behind Dr. Bezruchka depicts the top 30 countries in the "Health Olympics." Many participants were surprised to learn that the United States, while responsible for fully half of the entire world's health care expenditures, comes in 29th in life expectancy, behind such countries as Singapore, Cyprus, Malta, United Arab Emirates, and Chile. (DSDS Staff photo.)

Conference participants Jim and Alatheia Clymer of Fritz Creek, at left, check in with conference registrar Sherrie Stears, second from right, as Alaska Commission on Aging member Sharon Howerton-Clark, right, helps answer questions. Approximately 180 people attended the conference, including over 80 from Alaskan communities other than Anchorage. (ACOA Staff photo.)



Speaker Stephanie Vance on day one (June 27th) explains which advocacy techniques draw the attention of lawmakers to see an issue in a positive light, and which commonly-used techniques are likely to be ineffective or worse. Ms. Vance, of Washington, D.C., is the author of *How to Communicate with Congress*. (DSDS Staff photo.)

The Alaska Commission on Aging's "Future of Aging in Alaska" aging advocacy conference, June 28th at the Anchorage Senior Center.

Several elders from the community of Barrow took part in the conference, offering a number of insightful comments on the various topics presented. Several speakers commented on the joy of interacting with a truly diverse audience. Left to right are Nanauq Thorp (with back to camera), George Itta, Dr. Kenneth Toovik, Sr., and Harriet Muller. (ACOA Staff photo.)



Governor Frank Murkowski addresses conference participants on day 2. Members of the audience had an array of questions for the governor, who spent an hour speaking to the group of seniors and senior advocates. (ACOA Staff photo.)

During a break, Alaska Commission on Aging executive director Linda Gohl discusses an advocacy issue with Pat Luby, Advocacy Director with AARP's Alaska State Office, while Bob Dreyer, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman for the State of Alaska, makes note of an important detail. (DSDS Staff photo.)



A happy group of participants enjoys the summer day at a window table in the ballroom of the Anchorage Senior Center. From left to right, Dreana Brown, Leona Santiago, Sally Dybdahl, Rosa Miller, and Helen Watkins (mostly hidden) share a light moment while awaiting the next speaker. (ACOA Staff photo.)

Consumer News



An emergency care guide for consumers who use personal care

attendant (PCA) services and

Emergency Care Guide Helps PCA Consumers Plan for the Unexpected

who manage their own care is available from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing. The guide contains checklists, forms for the consumer to complete to have

key information available for emergencies, and detailed suggestions for planning ahead for PCA support during a community-wide disaster. It can be accessed at www.hcbs.org/files/95/4744/Emergency_Booklet.pdf.

Denise Daniello (continued from page 3)

members of this generation are turning 60, and many millions more will do so in the next 20 years? Do you expect to see changes in how we handle housing, health care, services, and so on?

Yes, I believe we will see significant changes in the way services have been traditionally delivered and I see evidence that we are moving forward in a new direction. The Baby Boom generation is the largest older adult population in history. Many boomers, including myself, have high expectations for the types of services that we want to receive. We share a common desire of wanting to age successfully with more emphasis on living well, not just living more years. You could say that successful aging is in the eye of the beholder because it is personally defined. Successful aging is measured by life satisfaction, happiness, and perceived quality of life. It is my hope that services will become more individualized,

taking into account different delivery models to address the diverse needs of the healthy older adult, as well as the frail elderly, and of people from various socio-economic backgrounds. I also believe that we need to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, exercise, and participating in social activities and mentally stimulating pursuits.

Will there be “elder communes” ten years down the road?

The Eden Alternative and Greenhouse philosophies of creating person-centered assisted living home environments that emphasize communal kitchens and living areas and facilitate personal preferences with respect to meals, activities, visitors and the like in some ways resemble the communal lifestyle. It's also likely that healthy groups of aging boomers may be more comfortable with a variety of shared housing arrangements.

How can seniors themselves as well as the soon-to-be-senior baby boomers participate in advocating for senior needs?

First and foremost, everyone should take an interest and become educated on the issues, which can be accomplished by reading the newspaper, listening to the news, and through contact with senior organizations, including the Alaska Commission on Aging, and participating in ACOA's legislative teleconference sessions. As citizens, we need to be willing to contact our policymakers regarding our concerns and what solutions we favor. During campaign season, individuals can question candidates about their positions on important senior needs. Most importantly, everyone should exercise their right to vote.

Thank you, Denise. We look forward to working with you!

Ageing Advocacy Conference Revs Up Advocates

A Washington, D.C.-based advocacy consultant explained why a five-minute message — personal, passionate, and positive — is one of the best ways to influence a state legislator or Congressperson. A physician broke the news that our country comes in 29th in the “health care Olympics,” and that the poor performance of the U.S. is related to lack of socio-economic equality rather than to lack of spending on medical care (the U.S. is already responsible for half the world’s health-care expenditures). A senior advocate reminded the group to keep their eyes on their advocacy goal, rather than becoming preoccupied with particular tactics, even though tactics are the most fun.

Participants in “The Future of Aging in Alaska,” an

aging advocacy conference sponsored by the Alaska Commission on Aging, gave the event’s speakers high ratings. (See the photo spread on pages 4–5 for glimpses of the conference activities.) The conference was held June 27th and 28th at the Anchorage Senior Center. About 180 seniors and senior advocates from all over Alaska attended the event, which was designed to provide useful information on advocacy, the long-term care system, and other issues for those who regularly advocate on behalf of the needs of seniors.

Conference presenters included Stephanie Vance, “the Advocacy Guru,” a consultant on legislative and Congressional communication and author of the book *Government by the People: How to Communicate with Congress*; Steven Lutzky,

a long-term care consultant familiar with Medicaid and Medicare issues; Dr. Stephen Bezruchka, a population health expert who says that, rather than focusing on personal habits like smoking or overeating, developing a more equal society is the best approach to creating better health for seniors and others in our country; and Pat Luby, advocacy director for AARP in Alaska, who presented a summary of Direct Action Organizing, a structured approach to issue advocacy used by AARP and other organizations.

Governor Frank Murkowski also addressed the conference and responded to numerous questions on senior issues.

(Continued on page 8.)

Conference Kicks Off Alaska Aging Advocacy Network

Many of those in attendance at the ACOA’s “The Future of Aging in Alaska” advocacy conference signed up to participate in the new Alaska Aging Advocacy Network, an effort to build a more coordinated force for change on issues that matter to seniors. Formation of the network was announced at the conference.

Members of the network are put on a list that will be used by the ACOA to send out action alerts on pending legislation and surveys to find out member priorities regarding senior issues. Membership does not entail any specific commitments.

Seniors and senior advocates interested in joining the Alaska Aging Advocacy Network should visit the ACOA’s Website at www.alaskaaging.org/network.html.

Aging Advocacy Conference (continued from page 7)

Many participants praised the Anchorage Senior Center's bright, spacious facilities. The Center's staff provided delicious lunches on both days, and the Prime-Time Dancers — an awesome ensemble of senior women — entertained the group during Wednesday's lunch period. Evaluations completed by the

event's participants indicated that the majority were pleased with the information presented and the networking opportunities made possible by the conference. A number of them offered suggestions for future conferences. Some 99% of the participants said they would attend another such conference and would

recommend it to others. The slide shows of several of the presenters, along with audio files of Dr. Bezruchka's presentations, can be found at the ACOA's Website, www.alaskaaging.org/events.htm, which also provides a link to Dr. Bezruchka's Population Health Forum Website.

Linda Gohl (continued from page 2)

state long-term care system and its funding sources.

What have you learned from seniors themselves?

Never make an assumption about an older person's capabilities.

What are the most significant issues facing seniors in Alaska right now?

Financial security; access to appropriate health care services; and rising health care costs.

Do you believe our system fails seniors in substantial ways? If so, what can we do to address the problems?

Yes. In the area of financial security, programs to help low-income seniors, such as Medicaid and senior services, have unstable funding. There are too many unknowns about what supports will be available for seniors from year to year. Also with respect to finding information about services, the system is chaotic. We need a single point of entry for information

and referrals for seniors.

What can Alaska do to ensure that it's ready for the onslaught of retiring baby boomers during the next two decades?

We need a long-range fiscal plan for the state, and a long-term care strategic plan that includes funding for services our seniors will need.

Do you feel that public officials here are sufficiently aware of seniors' needs? If not, how can we raise their awareness?

We need to educate them on the differences between services available to the very low-income population via programs like Medicaid versus what services are available for the lower- and middle-income group which does not qualify for those programs yet cannot afford the high cost of the services they need. Officials need to be more educated on home- and community-based services and programs — they need to know that

people don't go directly to nursing homes or assisted living facilities, and that it is not only more cost-effective to provide care and services at home, but that this is what people want — to remain at home for as long as possible. Structuring the system to provide more home- and community-based care is a win/win situation.

What are your plans for retirement? Will you be staying in Alaska? Will you continue to advocate for seniors?

I'll be staying in Alaska, and I do plan to continue to advocate for seniors. Specifically, I want to advocate for caregiver rights and increased funding for senior grant programs. I'd like to help raise awareness of what home- and community-based services are all about.

Thank you, Linda. We'll miss you, and we wish you the best of luck.

Info Bytes and Web Sites



Hospital Compare (www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov/) is an online resource provided by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services as a tool for consumers, including people with Medicare, to learn more about the hospitals in their area, allowing them to compare the quality of care offered by each facility.

Health News



An article from *Medscape Medical News* reports that researchers at the

Aging Research Center at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, have developed a dementia risk factor score that is able to significantly predict future dementia.

The longitudinal population-based Cardiovascular Risk Factors, Aging and Dementia (CAIDE) study assessed individuals at middle age and then again 20 years later for signs of dementia. The aim of the study was to develop a simple technique to predict

Online Hospital Information Can Guide Health Care Choices

Visitors can learn how often each hospital of interest provided several recommended treatments for heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia, and surgery. The treatments tracked by Hospital Compare are those known to get the best results for most adult patients.

The Website also contains information about the rights of hospital patients and includes a hospital checklist, listing additional factors to consider before going to the hospital.

Best Hospitals 2006 (www.usnews.com/usnews/health/best-hospitals/tophosp.htm) lists the 176 best hospitals in the country, according to U.S. News & World Report. Only three percent of the country's five thousand plus hospitals are ranked among the best in one or more of 16 medical specialties. Of those, only fourteen hospitals qualified for the elite "honor roll" of hospitals by ranking at or near the top in at least six specialties, considered a demonstration of broad expertise.

Researchers Develop Dementia Prediction Tool

the risk of late-age dementia based on risk-factor profiles present in middle age.

Study participants completed a detailed questionnaire on their health behavior, health status, and medical history, and had their cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and body mass index measured. Cognitive status was assessed and, during the final phase of the study, other tests were administered, including brain magnetic resonance imaging, cerebrospinal fluid analysis, and electrocardiogram.

Increased age, an education level of 10 years or fewer, and the presence of hypertension, high cholesterol, and obesity significantly predicted dementia. Researchers

developed a risk factor score based on these risks, which effectively predicted the risk of a middle-aged person's development of dementia later in life.

Researchers draw attention to the role of vascular factors in the development of dementia, and suggest that the risk factor scoring system could help identify people who might benefit from lifestyle changes and pharmaceutical interventions.

The study's findings were published in the August 3, 2006 online issue of *The Lancet Neurology*.

Events Calendar



Older Alaskans Day, Wed., September 13th. The second Wednesday of September each year is set aside by law to honor residents of Alaska who are 60 years of age or older for their many contributions to the state. Check with local senior centers and other organizations for celebration details.

The Annual Care of the Elderly Conference presented by the Alaska Geriatric Education Center at UAS Sitka will be held at Sitka's Harrigan Centennial Hall on September 15th and 16th, 2006. This year's theme is "It Takes a Village: Traditional Values and Contemporary Tools for

Aging." Further information about the conference can be found at www.uas.alaska.edu/sitka/careofelderly.html or by calling Marilyn Durocher at 1-800-478-6653, ext. 7728.

Alaska Commission on Aging Annual Rural Outreach Meeting, Tuesday through Thursday, September 26th through September 28th, 2006. Commission members' site visits to senior programs in Sitka and Ketchikan will be done on Sept. 26th. The quarterly ACOA meeting will take place at the Landing Best Western Hotel in Ketchikan on Sept. 27th and 28th. Watch the ACOA's Website for meeting agenda and other details.

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Alaska Commission on Aging
P.O. Box 110693
Juneau, AK 99811-0693