

# Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

July 2002

*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**  
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Dr. Lyn Freeman at the June Commission meeting in Anchorage.

## Executive Director, Dr. Lyn Freeman Resigns

Lyn Freeman, Ph.D. resigned her position as Executive Director of the Alaska Commission on Aging effective July 8, 2002. Dr. Freeman made her announcement to the Commission in executive session on the last day of its quarterly meeting in Anchorage June 11-14. Dr. Freeman, who has been living in Juneau although her family resides in Anchorage, cited family reasons for leaving. She will continue to be an advocate for Alaska's seniors as she returns to private business in Anchorage.

Dr. Freeman began work at the Commission July 16, 2001. During her tenure she developed outreach initiatives to increase public awareness of the Commission and increased interaction with related boards and commissions. She streamlined grant procedures, provided training and other guidance for grantees, and implemented behavior-based management and hiring skills within the Commission office.

Dr. Freeman says that the most enjoyable aspect of the job was the time she spent with the staff, whom she says have earned her respect and appreciation. "I will miss them most of all," she said.

Bob Taylor, ACoA Program Coordinator, will be Acting Executive Director through the September quarterly meeting, at which the Commission will plan a strategy for finding Dr. Freeman's permanent replacement.

# Ventura Samaniego Joins Commission



Ventura Samaniego, DCED Deputy Commissioner and ACoA's newest Commissioner.

Ventura Samaniego, the new Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Community and Economic Development, has joined the Alaska Commission on Aging. State statute calls for the Departments of Administration, Health and Social Services, and Community and Economic Development to be represented on the Commission by the department's commissioner or designee. Mr. Samaniego replaces Bernice Joseph, who resigned to become Executive Dean of the College of Rural Alaska at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Mr. Samaniego has worked for a variety of Alaska-based businesses for the past 20 years, including Goldbelt, Inc., Sealaska Timber Corporation, and Fairbanks Sand and Gravel/Alaska Aggregate Corporation. He most recently served as President and CEO of Glacier Bay Tours and Cruises in Seattle.

Mr. Samaniego brings to the Commission his experience on various boards and commissions that required teamwork, obtaining public input, and providing policy direction to assigned staff. In these capacities he developed skills helpful to consensus building while advocating the interests of the particular commission he served.

As an Alaskan resident for nearly 50 years, Mr. Samaniego says he believes that Alaska is a good place to age. However, he cautions that in order to preserve that quality, the growing challenge of advocating the interests of the elderly must be met. He predicts that as the elderly population grows and government revenues decline, the competition for resources could reach a feverish level. Services to the elderly could diminish if advocacy efforts are not properly gauged.

The Commissioners welcomed Mr. Samaniego to their ranks at the June quarterly meeting in Anchorage.

## **Lots to Celebrate at Day Break Adult Day Service Center**

Congratulations are due to Ken Helander and Day Break Adult Day Service Center in Anchorage for their innovative practices and longevity.

The Day Break Adult Day Service Center celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June. It is also one of five programs featured in the National Commission on Aging's publication of "*Together We Care: Helping Caregivers Find Support.*" NCOA recently completed a national survey of 628 reputable, high quality and/or innovative community-based programs in the areas of social support, caregiving, chronic disease self management/health promotion and physical activity. The results of the survey provided a comprehensive look at many important program areas including specific services, clients, funding, partnering, strategies to strengthen quality, as well as barriers to promoting program expansion. Daybreak Adult Day Program was highlighted for their outstanding service to elders and their caregivers, and for their guiding principles of respect for the people they help, teamwork, and a determination to supplement, rather than duplicate existing services.

Day Break recently began their "Care Mentors" service, which connects Day Break family caregivers with each other for the purpose of mutual support around specific questions or issues of caregiving. Day Break staff acts as a "connector" of families willing to be contacted by another family with questions or need to talk. The service is entirely voluntary, and once connected with each other, the families are on their own.

## **Cohens Report to Commission on State of Alaska's Adult Day Centers**

At the June quarterly meeting, Doctors Uriel and Ruth Cohen reported to the Commission on their work with Alaska's Adult Day Centers. Dr. Uriel Cohen is an architect specializing in designing environments for victims of ADRD. Dr. Ruth Cohen has Ph.D. in education. Together they look at ways adult day center programming and environment can optimize the functions of clients with ADRD.

The Cohens held a workshop in January for Adult Day Programs that outlined principles of design, then visited all 12 adult day programs in the state that are funded by ACoA. The Mental Health Trust funded their work. Some funding exists to implement modifications the Cohens recommend.

The Cohens found that Alaska's Adult Day Centers exceed the quality of their counterparts in the lower 48 in the following areas:

- Individual attention to clients
- Intimacy and sense of home
- Staff longevity and stability
- Environmental features
- Tied into local resources
- Client oriented service innovations
- Family-oriented service innovations
- Culture specific group programming
- Programming for "communities of interest"
- Promoting aging in place

They also listed challenges that remain to be addressed. These include a need for more individualized activities for seniors based on individual needs and desires. Currently there is a predominance of large group activities. They also feel that an overriding concern for safety issues limits day centers' clients' independence. The Cohens will make their final recommendations for modifications by the end of July.

