

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

June - July 2001

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. Lynda Freeman, the Alaska Commission on Aging's Executive Director Elect.

Commission Names New Executive Director

Lynda Welton Freeman, Ph.D. has accepted the position of Executive Director of the Alaska Commission on Aging. She will replace Jane Pollard Demmert, who is retiring from the position (please see page 2). The Commission selected Dr. Freeman from a field of 11 applicants.

Dr. Freeman is an advocate, specialist, educator, and author in psychological and health interventions that support optimal health and quality of life.

Currently, Dr. Freeman is the owner of Mind Matters Health Systems in Anchorage, a teaching, writing, research and educational practice that specializes in psychological and health education and interventions. She has served as superintendent of Community Works Services for the Municipality of Anchorage, and worked for the State of Alaska as Director of Training, and a counselor at the McLaughlin Youth Center. She has also directed a community-based residential treatment program and a suicide prevention center in Alabama.

Dr. Freeman holds a Doctorate in Psychology with an emphasis on psychoneuroimmunology and behavioral health management, and a Masters in Human Sciences with an emphasis on critical thinking, creative problem solving, and planning. Both degrees are from the Saybrook Institute in California.

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Jane Pollard Demmert Retires

Editor's note: Until now, each issue of Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger has been reviewed and edited by Jane Demmert. Her writing talents and considerable diplomatic skills have been the key factor in making this newsletter a valuable tool for Alaska's senior advocates. As Director, she preferred to keep a low profile, working behind the scenes and often crediting others for her accomplishments. She would not have approved this article, as it focuses on her. Now that she has retired, we can give her a little of the credit the Commission staff feels she so richly deserves.

Jane Pollard Demmert has retired as Executive Director of the Alaska Commission Aging. Her last day in the Commission office was June 22nd.

Ms. Demmert became Executive Director of the Commission March 8, 1995. At that time the Division of Senior Services was forming, and the Mental Health Trust Authority was enacted. Former Commissioner Don Hoover, who served as Commission Chair for six years, said that Jane was quick to grasp the many complex facets of Commission business, and recalls that she was always cheerful and cooperative. Her real concern for all Alaskans and her focus on the interconnectedness of all age groups made her a particularly strong advocate for senior issues.

Ms. Demmert was a leader in forming the *Common Ground* conference series, the purpose of which is to expand participants' knowledge of aging issues, build upon their leadership skills, and nurture a statewide community of informed Alaskan seniors. She is also remembered for building networks with other senior organizations. Among others, these include partnerships developed with AARP, connections with municipal advisory commissions, the Older Persons Action Group (OPAG) and the Senior Advocacy Coalition.

When asked to name her most satisfying achievement with the Commission, Ms. Demmert sited moving the Commission from what was essentially a policing agency into a more collaborative role with grantees.

Ms. Demmert plans to spend more time with her husband, Dennis, and their family. She intends to travel, relax, and work in her garden. She has also mentioned that she and her husband will continue their work with Alaska Native artists. She will no doubt continue to advocate for the needs of aging Alaskans in her retirement as she did as Executive Director of the Commission.

The Alaska Commission on Aging's Annual Report Goes High-Tech

The Commission's FY 00 Annual Report, outlining the Commission's work from July 1999 to June 2000, has been released. For the first time, the report is Internet-based. This innovation allows a wider distribution at a greatly reduced cost, and considerable savings of resources.

The report can be viewed on the Commission Web site, www.AlaskaAging.org. Click on the "Annual Report" button on the left-hand side of the screen. The button bar is also available on all of the Commission's sub-pages, such as the Nutrition, Transportation, and Support page.

The report is designed to be viewed on-line, and will not print well from the Internet. A hard copy abstract of the report is being published on a limited basis for anyone needing one, and for those without Internet access. These hard copies should be available in a few weeks. You can reserve your copy by calling the Commission office at (907) 465-3250.



Raven Tree Court Senior Housing in Wasilla.

New Senior Facilities Dedicated in Wasilla and Chugiak

Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc. (WASI) dedicated the new senior housing unit, Raven Tree Court on Thursday, June 14. The dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held at noon at the Wasilla Senior Center as part of WASI's 20th anniversary celebration. Speakers included Dan Fauske, Director of the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Tim Anderson, Wasilla Borough Mayor, Sarah Palin, Wasilla City Mayor, Marjorie Hays, Chair of the Alaska Commission on Aging, and members of the WASI board. After the ribbon cutting, the board members unveiled a plaque at Raven Tree Court, and hosted an open house in the unit.

WASI began as "The Drop In Center" in 1978, housed in a room of the Wasilla Museum. It has since grown to a multi-building complex, of which Raven Tree Court is the newest addition. The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and the city and borough of Wasilla supported the new project through funds and land donations.

Raven Tree Court adds 70 new units to the WASI complex. WASI's challenge is to keep pace with the growth of the area's senior population. Raven Tree Court is already full, and there are about 100 people on the waiting list for senior housing currently. The organization's future plans call for four more housing projects and an assisted living center, for a total of 200 more living units to be added in the years to come.

Also on June 14th, Chugiak Senior Citizens, Inc. held the grand opening of their newly constructed Adult Day Service. The new facility at the Chugiak Senior Center offers more than 4,000 square feet of space and will provide day services for Alaskans with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders. Chugiak Senior Citizens, Inc. is a non-profit organization that began as a grass roots effort in the late 1940s. Chugiak Adult Day Services opened Alaska's first adult day services program in 1984.

Speakers at the grand opening included Nelson Page of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and members of the Chugiak Senior Center Board of Directors. Anchorage Mayor George Wuerch helped cut the ribbon. Members of the Anchorage Assembly, members of the Alaska Commission on Aging, and the Mental Health Board attended.

Construction of the new adult day facility was funded by the Mental Health Trust Authority, with State and Municipal support.

