

# Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

October 2003

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). It is produced by Mark Zeiger, Publications Specialist II, Senior and Disabilities Services.

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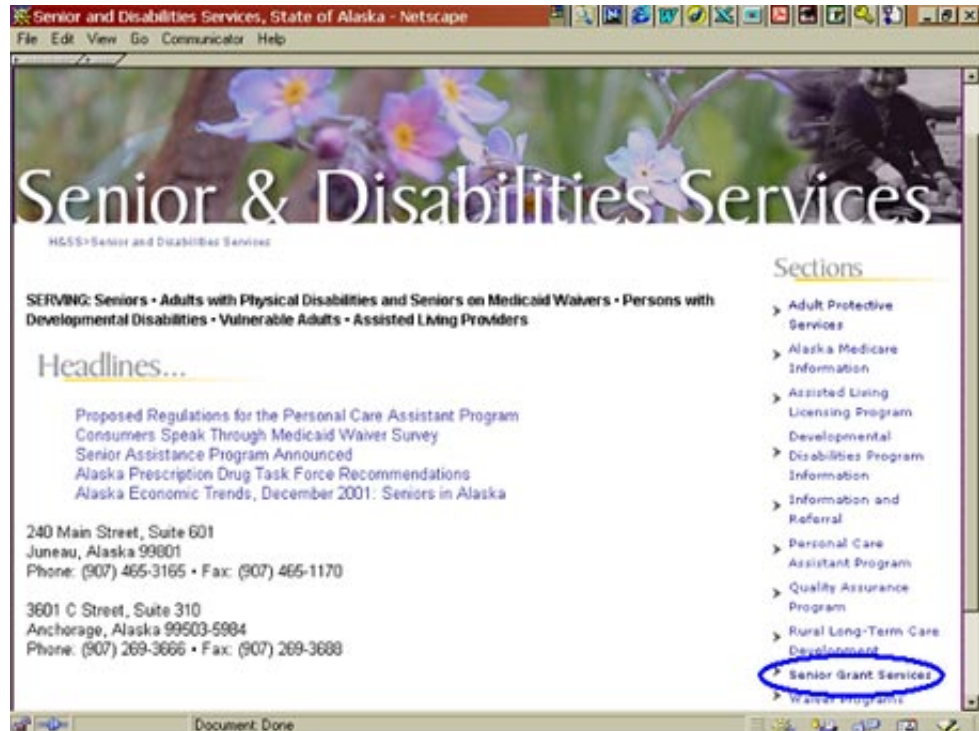
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Web pages for Senior Grant Services, formerly associated with the Alaska Commission on Aging, are found on the Senior and Disabilities Services Web page ([www.hss.state.ak.us/dsds](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dsds)) through the link on the right side of the page, circled above.

## Grant Management Transfers to Senior and Disabilities Services

The process of transferring the Alaska Commission on Aging from the Alaska Department of Administration to the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services continued in October with responsibility for granting and administering senior grant services transferring to Health and Social Services under the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services (NTS) grants, Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST), Home and Community Based Care (HCB), Mental Health Trust Authority Projects (MHTAAR) and Senior Residential Services (SRS) grants are now the responsibility of DSDS staff. All of the program coordinators of these grants have transferred to DSDS, except Paula Recchia, Planner II. The nature of the relationship between the Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Commission on Aging makes it preferable that Ms. Recchia stay in the ACoA office, under H&SS Boards and Commissions. The ACoA will continue their advocacy and planning functions under the new plan, but will no longer evaluate grant applications or make grant decisions. The grants formerly under Commission oversight are now called Senior Grant Services in DSDS, and the program offices are on the (Continued on Page 4.)

# 11th Annual Care of the Elderly Conference Held in Sitka

The Eleventh Annual Care of the Elderly Conference: “Focusing on Wellness” was held in Sitka September 18-20. The two-day conference focused on health care solutions for the whole person, helping us maintain good physical and mental health as we age.

Sponsors of the event included the Alaska Commission on Aging, Endo Pharmaceuticals, Alaska Geriatric Education Center, University of Alaska, Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center, Keck School of Medicine, Center for Community, and Community Education and Professional Development, University of Alaska Southeast, Sitka Campus.

The annual conference’s target audience is medical professionals, caregivers and the elderly. Although much of the conference focused on educating professional caregivers, several of the presentations offered information that many of us may find useful as we age. In this and future issues of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* we will share this with you in summaries and specific highlights from the presentations.

## **Diana Waugh: How to Make a Long-Term Care Facility Feel More Like Home**

Diana Waugh, BSN, RN, owns Waugh Consulting in Waterville, Ohio, advising nursing homes around the U.S. since 1999. She gave several presentations at the Care of the Elderly Conference, including *Losin’ and Lovin’ It*, in which she provided insight into what it feels like for an older person to leave everything they know and love to enter a new place to live, such as a long-term care facility, and advised participants on how to make this new situation more like home.

Ms. Waugh observed that in the U.S., the social aspect has been missing in long-term care. She asserted that it is possible to look at the social elements of a person’s life, and preserve or duplicate these elements in order to keep the person’s life as whole as possible when moving into an assisted living home. Ms. Waugh recommends that caregivers ask a short series of questions in an in-home interview before admission. If you or a loved one are about to enter the Pioneers’ Home or other long-term care situation, it would be wise to consider these questions yourself:

### **What two things do your loved one like to see, smell, touch, hear, and taste?**

Ms. Waugh stressed the senses as the key to creating a familiar, comforting atmosphere away from one’s home. This is especially important if one is slipping into dementia. By focusing on the two things in each category that would be most meaningful, this makes the list of things to bring into the long-term care situation more manageable, and ultimately more possible to accomplish.

Ms. Waugh warned about the type of family photos that should be brought along, particularly if there is dementia involved. The photos must make sense to the person, so photos of new babies or recent marriages, for instance, may not be the best choice. Photos should be displayed where the resident can see them—if your loved one is wheelchair-bound, hang the photos lower on the wall. Be sure to remove glass from the frames for safety’s sake.

Smell is a particularly important trigger of memory. In fact, many researchers believe our sense of smell is the most evocative of memory of all the senses. One’s favorite fragrance can come in a variety of mediums, some safer than others. Scented candles are the obvious choice, but these could be dangerous to burn in one’s room. Ms. Waugh

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## **Diana Waugh (continued from page 2)**

points out that candles need not be lit to smell good, and that candles can be burned while visitors or staff are there to supervise them.

Favorite items to touch can include blankets, pillows, or other bedding that often times can be brought into a long-term care situation. Since we don't often discuss with others things that we particularly like to touch, this could be harder to determine. If you're not sure, spend some time with your loved one, and notice anything around them that they might touch or stroke unconsciously, such as the arm of a chair, a pet, or a favorite piece of clothing. When possible, bring these things into the long-term care setting and keep them accessible.

### **What is their favorite chair?**

As we age, we often become more sedentary. It only makes sense to bring your favorite place to sit to the long-term care facility if at all possible. Don't be put off if the chair is old, perhaps ratty, or unsanitary appearing. Furniture can be repaired, cleaned and sanitized to bring it up to long-term care facility standards if necessary.

### **Where has your loved one been sleeping?**

Ms. Waugh points to this as a particularly important clue to a person's wellbeing. Many long-term care facilities allow clients to bring in their own beds. However, you or your loved one may actually find that you're spending more time sleeping in a favorite chair or on a couch than in bed. If this is the case, it's better to focus on getting that piece of furniture into the home than the bed. Ms. Waugh cited research that indicates that most seniors sleep four to six hours at a stretch maximum—this may be done more comfortably in a chair than a bed, depending on the person.

### **If you wanted to make him/her extremely angry, what would you say or do?/If you wanted to make him/her extremely happy, what would you say or do?**

These are good things for staff to know, to avoid or use respectively.

Ms. Waugh says that once the answers to the above questions are found, work hard to match them to laws and regulations governing the long-term care facility. The key, she says, is "to figure out what is most important to people and try to get there." In other words, focus on the possible, finding compromises and alternatives when necessary, rather than giving up because "the rules don't allow it."

Ms. Waugh praised Alaska's Pioneers' Home system, saying that the Eden Alternative, which emphasizes creating a homelike atmosphere for nursing homes, wouldn't have started without the Alaska Pioneers' Home's philosophy. She said that in order for the Eden Alternative to be successful, a long-term care facility needs to have the base belief that residents must continue to live as much as they did before, which she says appears to be the Pioneers' Home's philosophy.

### **Senior Advocacy Coalition Monthly Teleconferences**

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska's seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Brenda Brown, 338-6492, or 261-4848 in Anchorage; Fred Lau, 235-7655 in Homer; or Lisa Morley, 465-4798 in Juneau.

