



Active Aging Week 2008 celebrates life

Spearheaded by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), this year's event was educational and a whole lot of fun

The last week of September was filled with a mix of laughter and intense concentration, small steps and long strides as Active Aging Week, ICAA's annual health promotion event, launched. Just as many more organizations offered events, so did the creative hosts expand the options for this year's activities.

When industry professionals decide to host Active Aging Week, they can choose to offer one or more activities during the week. Many of the hosts registered their



1

events with ICAA, which allowed the association to post their contact information on the consumer section of the ICAA website and to ask them to share stories of the events.

This year's hosts took the theme "Choose an active life" to heart. Working with colleagues and committees of older adults, these hosts offered events that embodied the dimensions of wellness. Among the many interesting activities offered, themes emerged in the hosts' reports:

- Exercise classes saw peaks in attendance and many newcomers either observing or participating. Hosts did an outstanding job of explaining how the exercises impacted functional ability

during daily life. There were several reports, for example, of an increase in participation in strength-training classes following presentations on osteoporosis and renewed interest in classes for people with arthritis.

- Tai chi and yoga appeared frequently among the activities, with a special reference to Laughter Yoga. Other activities with a mind/body influence included meditation and pilates.
- Hosts frequently reported practice in cognitive skills, both in games and using computer-based approaches. This included puzzles, nostalgia memory games, and brain fitness activities plus computer-based systems. There was even a presentation on optical illusions, demonstrating the link between the brain and eyes.
- Wii games proved popular. There were introductions to the Wii software, games, tournaments between residents, traveling to tournaments in other locations, and Wii cheerleaders to urge on the players.
- Competitions were favored throughout the week, both friendly and highly competitive. Retirement community

staff played against residents (most reports said the residents beat the heck out of staff), seniors centers played against seniors centers, and many prizes were awarded.

- Healthy eating and the enjoyment of eating were a focus, with the traditional lectures on nutrition and heart-healthy eating coupled with meals and snacks. With a range of offerings from pancake breakfasts through wine tasting with chocolate, chefs went out of their way to show how dining impacts active aging. Of special note was the presentation by a personal chef who demonstrated how to cook foods fresh from the garden.
- Music was everywhere. Music filled the air at mealtimes and for evening balls and dances. Classical, Latin, folk, gospel, rock and roll, and piano recitals were joined by the melodious sounds of a kazoo dance troupe. A bell choir, several disc jockeys and favorite

Continued on page 38



local performers kept the week in rhythm.

- Dancing was sure to accompany the music. In the daylight hours, dancercise and Zumba (the exercise class paced to Latin rhythms) livened up fitness centers. Evening shed a softer light on dinner dances with old favorites—and did we mention rock and roll?
- Walking is becoming a signature event of Active Aging Week. There are many variations, from strolls to mountain hikes. Walks took place indoors in malls and hallways, and outdoors in nature preserves, parks and recreation areas. There were urban hikes through cities, a march following a high school band, and walkers pushing off with Nordic poles.

Lastly, showing that there is no limit to the opportunities in active aging, special recognition goes to the Elvis impersonators. Yes, Elvis was in at least three buildings!

A list of all the activities reported by Active Aging Week hosts will be posted on the ICAA website in January (see the end of this article for website information).

Participation continues to grow

Over the past few years, support for Active Aging Week has grown among professionals. Hosting an event has many benefits. First is fulfilling the mission of aging services providers to support the health and well-being of older adults. Current participants are reenergized and try different activities, while newcomers are introduced to information and resources that support their everyday lives. Often staff members and residents/clients pull together as a team to plan and conduct the event—a relationship that remains throughout the year.

One reason for the growth of Active Aging Week is the participation of organizations that have multiple locations. For example, the Land of Sky Regional Council Area Agency on Aging mobilizes events at seniors centers, churches, malls, parks, trails and health clubs in four counties in western North Carolina.

Holiday Retirement organized nearly all of its 300-plus communities to participate in Active Aging Week following a successful pilot program last year. To support local enrichment coordinators, explained Fitness Development Coordinator Karen Smith, Holiday gathered requests for flyers and collateral and made a large group purchase, which provided professional quality marketing materials. Holiday's individual hosts brought in many local community groups, hospitals, colleges and pharmacies to join in health fairs and make presentations.

CRSA, which manages more than 20 retirement communities, held a contest to see which community could have the most unique activities and the most participants. "While the staff got caught up in the competition, it was really the residents in every participating community who were the winners," emphasized Gaye Tidwell in Corporate Resident Services when congratulating all the communities. The winner? Capstone Village in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, with 48 new activities/programs and an average of 21.8 participants per event.

SilverSneakers, the program of fitness classes offered at fitness centers and supported by health plans, encouraged their local instructors to join the week's events. There are numerous SilverSneakers classes listed in the reports from the hosts, many as part of a free health fair or open house at the health clubs and studios that offer the program.

The ambitious goal of Millennium Development in the Brooklyn, New

York, area was 101 activities in one week. And the agency did it! Millennium operates four multigenerational centers and a variety of programs through the New York City Department for the Aging. Events were held in a number of locations throughout the area, with "Official Active Aging Week Activity Sites" in lobbies, and under red and white banners on sidewalks, lawns and parks. There was everything from canoeing to walking, knitting and dancing. An estimated 1,000 people visited during the week, with 300 new participants.

"Our organization had close to 400 participants during the Active Aging Exposition in the Kings Plaza Shopping Center," reported Marianna Hernandez, Millennium's Director of Media Relations. "We found that so many older adults want to be active, but many do not know where to go to find activities." One participant expressed how excited he was to learn country western line dancing and ballroom dancing right in the middle of a crowded mall. "I was dancing with my partner while being surrounded by numerous stores. People were passing by and just staring at us; we were turning heads."

No location? No worries

The residents at Royal Oaks Lifecare Community in Sun City, Arizona, took to the streets for the week's events. Since construction was starting on a new well-



ness center, the community's fitness facility had disappeared. So, with Health and Fitness Coordinator Linda Schmidt and an energetic staff directing traffic, participants headed for the chapel, the health center, a community pool and the sidewalks. Building on Royal Oaks' theme of "Getting Your Life in Balance," the chaplain launched Active Aging Week with a talk on Standing Firm (one of the largest attended Sunday vesper services she has had), before days filled with line dancing, balance training in the pool, and a falls prevention presentation.

"The residents, some up to 88 years old, put on their aquatic belts and learned how to align their bodies in the deep water," Schmidt reported, "[for] better body mechanics in aiding balance." New participants visited the regularly

scheduled Bone Builders exercise class—held in the courtyard—and signed up once they had a chance to observe. Over 350 residents participated. As Schmidt said, "Even if you do not have a building or facilities to have your regular health and fitness programs, you can always look around your adjunct community and find a place."

Rain didn't stop the action at Bishop Gadsden in Charleston, South Carolina. A walk in the park was quickly relocated to an indoor scavenger hunt and picnic, explained Wellness Coordinator Jennifer Hartig. The indoor picnic on Friday closed a week that kicked off a new

Continued on page 40

What is Active Aging Week?

Active Aging Week is an annual health promotion event held the last full week of September (prior to October 1, International Day of Older Persons). The event was initiated by the International Council on Active Aging® to give as many older adults as possible the means to experience activities and exercise in a safe, friendly and fun atmosphere. During the week, host organizations provide a variety of free activities, such as classes, educational seminars, health fairs, dances, community walks, and access to fitness facilities. More Active Aging Week information is available year-round at www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm.



Active Aging Week trivia

How many words can you find in the phrase *Healthy Active Aging*?

As part of Wednesday's theme of cognitive skills, this challenge was sent to the residents of Brandermill Woods Retirement Community in Midlothian, Virginia. "The most words we got from 'Healthy Active Aging' was 467," answered an impressed Lisa Keppler, Foundation and Public Relations Manager. "We had many residents turn in answers with 200 or more words."

health education course and brain fitness program, along with strolls, bocce ball, water volleyball and yoga.

This year, Melanie Allen in Northport, Alabama, moved Active Aging Week events into a mall because "September in Alabama is still *hot!*" The mall proved to be a great location, with 106 people walking at least half-a-mile around the air-conditioned building, and visiting booths to try resistance band exercises, line dancing, chair aerobics, balance and stretching, and to learn basic self-defense. Allen, the Alabama Senior Rx Wellness Coordinator for the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging, spotlighted the booth featuring a hula hoop contest. "Everyone really enjoyed the group exercise and Chicken Dance at the main stage," she said. "When the seniors were dismissed, we played the song 'Hit the Road, Jack,' and everyone laughed!"

Try something new

One of the advantages of Active Aging Week is that it provides a venue to test program ideas, or introduce new offerings.

Cyndy Grinde, Staffing and Program Coordinator at Peak Health and Wellness Center in Great Falls, Montana, found

that the scheduled Scrabble and chess competitions turned into bridge games. "For next year, they just want bridge, pinochle and cribbage." While the center's travel presentations (Nepal and Italy) were well attended, other health-oriented topics brought in smaller numbers. As Grinde observed, "We have realized that these Active Agers like to have fun, and maybe aren't so hip on learning more stuff." Health didn't take a back seat, however. Due to demand, Peak Health and Wellness will place seated pilates on its schedule.

"The most popular event was definitely the Cake Walk," Grinde continued. "We had 14 employees put on their baker hats and enter their decorated cakes in the competition for a massage. The Active Agers voted for their favorite, and 14 of them went home with their own special cake. Thirty-five people competed for the cakes during the Cake Walk," she added. "So, we have learned that *sugar* is what makes an event successful!"

Sue Maggetti, Senior Aide at the Ferndale Recreation Department in Michigan, offered demonstration classes. "Our pickleball demonstration was very successful," reported Maggetti. "We have a core group who are interested, and we are currently seeking to purchase equipment so we can offer that as a weekly activity. It was fun for all who came." The department's Zumba Gold demonstration class "was also a lot of fun, challenging the group, physically and mentally," she noted. "We have enough interest that we are beginning a class this November." According to Maggetti, the events "were successful because we had solid instructors that were qualified to demonstrate and because the activities were fun."

Offering activities in the wellness dimensions was the goal at Sterling Park at The Osborn, a retirement community in Rye, New York. Organized by Social Coordinator Daniela Marini, the flyer

invited participants to "a week of complimentary events to stimulate your refined social, cultural and intellectual palette. Celebrate your innate cultural explorer with a variety of events." Celebrate they did, with a wine tasting, fashion show, drama/improvisation and meditation, cooking lesson and art exhibit. As Sterling Park Manager Janet Malang said, "The week achieved its goal of opening new vistas, actively engaging seniors in programs rich in variety and appeal."

New activities may be available to the residents of Riverplace Retirement Residence in Columbus, Georgia, as a result of Active Aging Week. "Putt-Putt [miniature golf course] opened just for our group of 10, and we had a terrific time," reported Enrichment Coordinator Alexis van Brero-Belman. "Our residents who were golf players took the game seriously and kept score. Then there were those who made up their own rules and the score was never thought about. We will probably schedule more trips to play miniature golf from now on." Another event featured hula dancers, which generated sufficient interest that van Brero-Belman is looking into starting lessons.

In Cary, North Carolina, Heather Lowry set up a balloon volleyball game. "We never did this before," said Lowry, Enrichment Coordinator at Jordan Oaks community. "It was a big hit—we used a beach ball and it was easy for our residents to hit. We now have balloon volleyball on the calendar weekly."

Teamwork makes the difference

Taking to heart the saying that many hands make light work, residents and staff worked together at Collington Episcopal Life Care Community in Mitchellville, Maryland. "Since combining our efforts with our Health Services Committee, I saw an increase of new participants as well as our regulars," said Danielle Celdran, Aquatic and Fitness Coordinator. "More residents took part

in the planning and implementing of our programs, [and] more staff participated this year, especially in the scavenger hunt.” During a week of lectures, introductions to the fitness center and presentations on balance and nutrition, residents led the scavenger hunt and a hand dexterity class, and staff provided hand massages. Next year, Celdran plans to involve residents and staff even more in planning and delivering Active Aging Week.

“What we believe made our events the most successful was planning them together as a team,” said Susan Berretta, Director of Resident Services at The Village at Germantown, Tennessee. According to Beretta, that involved

“always using each of our strengths and unique understanding of our residents’ needs to create events that would be novel and out of the ordinary routine enough to draw them in, but at the same time not so unfamiliar as to make them too nervous to give something new (or even just a new way of doing it) a try.” A week filled with events from a luau-themed health fair to bocce ball to hula dancing attracted 1,449 attendees. “The majority were mostly regulars,” observed Beretta, “though we were thrilled to see many of our more reclusive residents join

in, even if just to see what all the activity was about.”

In southwest Georgia, teamwork was credited for the success of the week at Spring Harbor at Green Island, said Allison Grainger, Resident Services Communications Coordinator. “Active Aging Week was an exciting and eventful week for our residents, as well as our employees who helped with ideas and

Continued on page 42



13



14



17



15



12



16

Active Aging Week 2008 celebrates life Continued from page 41

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making this week the most special for our residents,” commented Grainger. “All of us had such a great time coming up with new activities, and being able to include healthcare residents in activities where all could participate was the most rewarding. We had many of our employees participate together in hosting each of these events. In all of our activities we had exciting moments, but there is one that stands out among others,” she advised, “and that is the attendance we had for our 100-person chair class. Without the help of all the residents pulling together and getting as many

people to come, we would not have had [this record-breaking participation],” Grainger concluded.

Worth the effort

The Active Aging Week hosts reported that planning the week took time and effort, and challenged their creativity. The week itself could challenge their endurance. Yet, after the week was over, hosts were already planning for the next year.

For Catherine Fairweather, Fitness Programmer at the Courtice Commu-

nity Complex in Clarington, Ontario, Canada, the week was a success because “we had a few new members sign up as a result and got some of our current members involved in some new activities. I feel it’s a success if even one person is moved to action,” she said, “which certainly was the case.”

As hosts recounted their successes, increased participation was a goal. Many were rewarded by seeing new faces. The warm welcome from volunteers and regular participants set the stage.

“The best part of the week was seeing how involved and excited the participants were,” enthused the staff at S.I.M Gym in Dundas, Ontario. “They were all there to have a good time and motivate each other. There were new friendships formed, and lasting impressions made on the staff. All of the gym members welcomed the new seniors with open arms, and went out of their way to listen to their stories and support them through the classes. It was truly inspirational.”

As the events during Active Aging Week 2008 confirm, industry professionals are vital leaders in Changing the Way We Age®. ICAA is inspired by those who have embraced this weeklong health promotion event as a highlight of autumn. The stories from all the hosts are, unfortunately, too numerous to cover in a single article, but more reports from Active Aging Week will appear in upcoming issues of the *Journal on Active Aging*® and *ICAA Functional U*®. Congratulations to this year’s host sites on their efforts to promote active aging. ☺

Next year’s Active Aging Week will take place Monday, September 21, to Sunday, September 27, 2009. For resources and materials to help in planning events, visit ICAA’s Active Aging Week website at www.icaa.cclaa.wt.ca.

See page 44 for photo information.

21



19



20



18



Key to Active Aging Week photos

Picture 1

The residents of Montgomery Park in East Amherst, New York, were ready for action for a week that included guest speakers, a kazoo band performance and massage.

Picture 2

Screenings were offered at one of the busy booths at the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging's fitness walk and health fair.

Picture 3

In an air-conditioned mall, exercise felt good to some of the 106 participants at the fitness walk and health fair in Northport, Alabama.

Picture 4

Among the many activities at Parc Communities, the Senior Prom—with a 17-piece orchestra and elegantly set cabaret tables—was a highlight at Parc Buckhead in Atlanta. About 150 people attended.

Picture 5

Chef Patrick at Windlands East community in Madison, Tennessee, impressed happy diners with the fruit duck, which was featured among other healthy snacks.

Picture 6

There was no rest for the busy residents at Brandermill Woods Retirement Community in Midlothian, Virginia, who attended chair yoga among many other activities throughout the week.

Picture 7

The hula dancers included residents and staff at The Village at Germantown in Tennessee.

Picture 8

To maintain a Hawaiian theme, residents at The Village at Germantown in Tennessee donned leis for their health fair and dinner, along with serene smiles.

Picture 9

The competition was serious when the residents of Westminster Towers in Orlando, Florida, played shuffleboard against players from a sister community.

Picture 10

There was plenty of action during the Wii games at Westminster Towers in Orlando, Florida.

Picture 11

At the Clarence, New York, Senior Center, exercisers announced Active Aging Week. The Erie County Department of Senior Services hosted a second exercise class and led 125 people in a group walk at a local park.

Picture 12

A trip to Wildwood Lake enabled residents of Essex House in Lemoyne, Pennsylvania, to enjoy a beautiful autumn day.

Picture 13

Spelling Bee champion Virginia Aldendifer correctly spelled the word "differentiate" at Grasslands Estates in Wichita, Kansas.

Picture 14

Brain games were investigated at Bishop Gadsden, part of a two-phase introduction of a comprehensive brain fitness program in the Charleston, South Carolina, community.

Picture 15

The Deep Water Aqua group at Royal Oaks in Sun City, Arizona, practiced balance techniques.

Picture 16

Almost 500 older adults got into the swing of the 1950s theme at the annual Harvest Hop in El Paso, Texas.

Picture 17

It was hard to move onto the costume contest at the Harvest Hop in El Paso, Texas, because the enthusiastic dancers didn't want to stop.

Picture 18

Elvis stopped by the Harvest Hop in El Paso, Texas, and stayed to pose for photos with dancers after his performance.

Picture 19

Participants in the yoga class at S.I.M Gym in Dundas, Ontario, Canada, received informational handouts.

Picture 20

The flying disc at Wescourt community in Saginaw, Michigan, encouraged players to raise their arms high and use their minds to anticipate where it would land.

Picture 21

A fishing trip started the week at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community in Harrisonburg, Virginia.