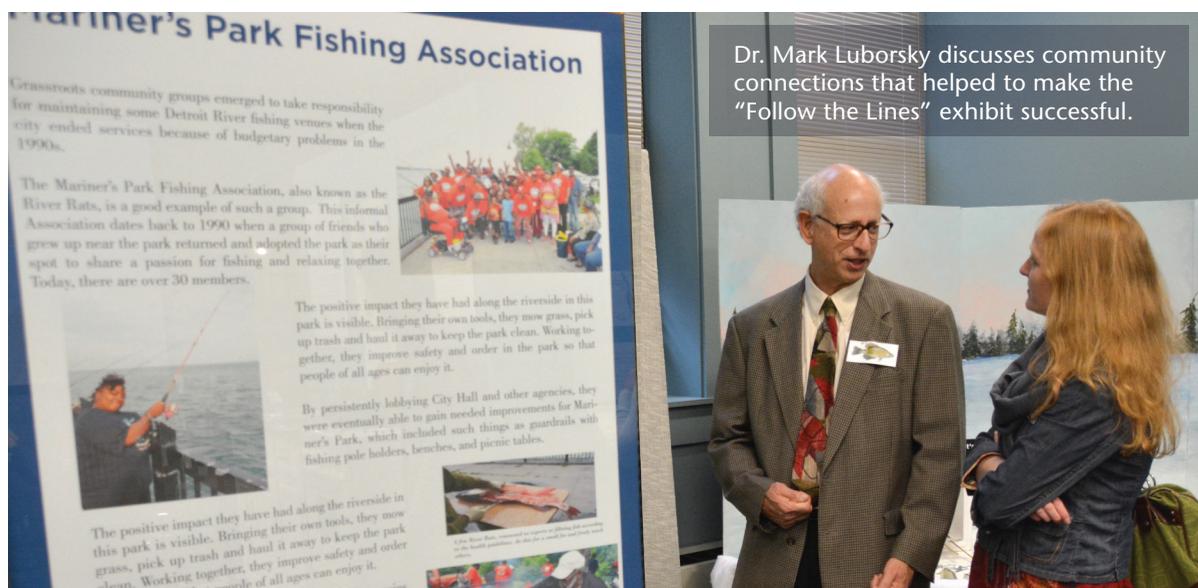


# Transitions



## Shifting the Current in Environmental Outreach

A river runs through it, Detroit that is, and most days of the year, hundreds of local fishermen and women cast poles into a favorite spot along the 28 miles of available river bank. They catch silver bass, blue gill, carp and walleye among many others. Their families enjoy a low-fat, high protein dinner full of essential vitamins and minerals. But they also ingest toxic chemicals hitchhiking in the fat of those fish. Once consumed, most of these health hazards never leave.

Detroit's long history of manufacturing achievement and innovation brought with it a dark side of toxic chemical byproducts spilled into our waterways. Though great progress has been made to stop the pollution and clean the river, toxins that settled into the river bed or atomized into the air continue to contaminate fish and other wildlife. The three biggest culprits for Detroit fish are dioxins, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and mercury. All cause serious health problems

for humans, especially children and older adults.

Fishing, though, is America's quiet pastime. Who doesn't envy the casual angler, with time to teach his children and grandchildren about secret fishing spots and can't-fail lures, while patiently waiting for a tug on the line? "Our challenge was to protect health while respecting the importance of fishing to Detroit's residents," said Dr. Mark Luborsky, director of aging and health disparities research at the IOG, professor of anthropology and gerontology, and a co-investigator of the project to help the local fishing community better understand river fishing advisories.

"Fishing is a deep historical tradition. It is a skill passed from parent to child to grandchild as an important way to sustain family values," Dr. Luborsky said. "We don't want to scare people or tell them to stop fishing in the river. We just want to make the fish they eat safer for them."

see page 2



"Spin a yarn" with Deborah Vinson, the IOG's assistant coordinator for the Art of Aging Successfully Conference on April 16 (details on back page). Deborah creates stunning hats, scarves, sweaters, blankets and more with her spools of yarn, some she will display at Art of Aging.

research  
education  
outreach  
partnerships



*Promoting Successful Aging  
in Detroit and Beyond*

Current from page 1

## Walking the Walk to Talk the Talk

Formally titled, *Improving Community Awareness for Detroit River Fish Consumption Advisories*, the point is to get Detroiters to *Eat Safe Fish*, the name of the initiative at the state level. By any name, it took a village to make it a success. Dr. Luborsky's co-investigators Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences Dr. Donna Kashian, and Professor of Anthropology Dr. Andrea Sankar, partnered with local foundations, grassroots agencies, artists, volunteers, the Belle Isle Conservancy, the State of Michigan Department of Community Health, several federal agencies, and others to make it a success. The River Walkers portion of the project, in which older urban adults walked the shoreline to informally discuss safe fishing practice with anglers, was a key component of the outreach.

"Putting up posters doesn't work," Dr. Luborsky said. "You have to talk to folks. And meet them where they are." River Walkers promoted the 3Cs to Safer Fish: **Choose** fish lower in chemicals; **Clean** the fat, skin and organs where many of the chemicals are stored; and **Cook** the fish on a grill so fat drips away. Simple, illustrated brochures that show the average chemical content of popular sport fish were also distributed. Equally, the research at this grassroots riverside level, is

designed to evaluate current scientific theories and examine hypotheses about how to improve health and reduce environmental harms. Findings are presented at scientific meetings in the USA and internationally.

## Museum Quality

To fully submerge in the Eat Safe Fish project, visit WSU's Anthropology Department Grosscup Museum, where a 6 foot, 200 pound model sturgeon greets you at the door to the multimedia exhibit. More than 2,000 visitors have toured *Follow the Lines: Environmental Legacy, Health & Fishing the Detroit River* since it opened in October, leaving comments like, "I love fish," "Beautiful. Reminds me of fishing with my dad as a kid," and, "Great exhibit. I love the artifacts," on the Drop Us a Line wall as they exit.

Future plans include a website with in-depth

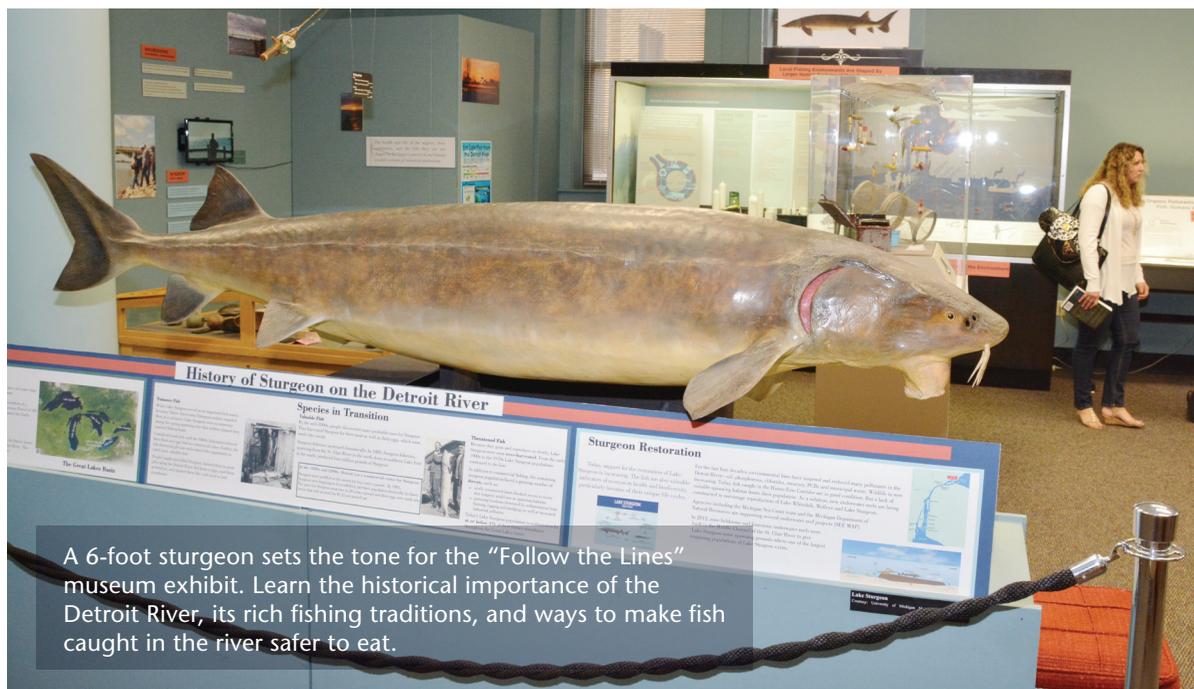
A particularly compelling display explains the surprising and inarguable value of fishing in Detroit, through the following themes supported by quotes from the fishermen themselves:

**Building:** Character & Life Skills

**Connecting:** Lives across Generations

**Nourishing:** Community & Environment

**Wisdom:** Life & Aging



information, and a traveling exhibit to the City Municipal Building near the riverfront, then to Lansing and beyond. The project has earned extra attention because it works. The engaged, interactive approach to making Detroit residents more aware of how to make fish safe has changed behavior. Ninety-eight percent of anglers surveyed after a visit from the River Walkers said they altered the type of fish they eat and how they clean and cook them to improve safety.

## The Role of Elders

Eat Safe Fish was a big job. Securing funding, create an accurate population-based random sample, gaining the trust of anglers to understand their traditions and concerns, partnering with grassroots organization, training students and River Walkers, creating effective education materials, and constructing an entire museum exhibit took massive amounts of time and effort. After years of working on this initiative, what gives Dr. Luborsky the most satisfaction? "Many things," he said smiling. "We advance the basic science, we solve puzzles, we engage the community, and we share the results to improve future science. We were able to preserve what's good about our urban fishing culture, while improving what's needed for the health of generations."

Dr. Luborsky especially likes the important role older adults played in the project. Many volunteered to be River Walkers, others helped set-up the museum, and the older members of fishing families felt valued as the conduit for passing safe fishing techniques to the next generation. "The elders' job is to keep the family safe," Dr. Luborsky said. "We offer tools to help them do this."

## Visit

*Follow the Lines: Environmental Legacy, Health & Fishing the Detroit River*  
Free of charge now through March 20  
at the Grosscup Museum of  
Anthropology on the first floor of  
Old Main at WSU, 4841 Cass Avenue.  
Hours are 10 am – 4 pm on Thursdays.  
For other viewing hours, call  
313-577-2935.

## American House Partnership Profile

### Brain Health Training

Sculpting a Play-doh alligator with the non-dominant hand. Deciphering words spelled backwards. Playing a song on a handmade kazoo. Breaking the ice with strangers.

These are a few of the unusual activities that filled a recent training day for about 30 American House Life Enrichment Directors. Presenters Donna MacDonald and Cheryl Deep from the IOG showed the group how to teach a year's worth of brain health lessons to American House residents. Designed to be fun, activity based, and interactive, the lessons cover brain basics, memory problems and solutions, creative stimulation, stress, and brain neurobics as simple ways to help keep the brain toned and functioning. The train-the-trainer session is part of the partnership between the IOG and American House.

"We created this curriculum to be easy to teach and easy to learn," Donna said. "We've tested it on dozens of senior groups and they've really enjoyed it." The training will kick off at American House residences over the next few months. As we get older, one of our biggest fears is memory loss. "We want folks to know the positive changes they can make to try to keep their brain healthy," Donna said. "American House residents will have a good time at the sessions, too."

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### Hope during the Holidays

December was brighter for hundreds of area seniors thanks to the Holiday Hope for Seniors program and the American House Foundation. Since 2008, the yearly fund-raiser has provided needed gifts to older adults who have few resources. In early December, special ornaments are placed on festive trees at each American House Senior Living Community. Each ornament requests a donation of \$5 to \$20. A tree lighting ceremony kicks-off the season of giving.

The 2014 campaign raised over \$22,000 and provided more than 850 seniors with hand-delivered bags of personal and household items. "As many as one-third of senior citizens in our area live in poverty," said COO Rob Gillette. "We are excited to give a little holiday hope to older adults who struggle outside our American House walls."



## SOAR to Explore

*by Barbara Spreitzer-Berent*

As a child at school, Esther Bornstein enjoyed her lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic. Decades later, she's still learning, but her interests have expanded.

As a member of the Society of Active Retirees (SOAR), Esther experiences an array of learning opportunities each year. "I especially love SOAR's classes in art, film, history, literature, legal issues, opera, politics and travel," she says. "They take me out of myself and broaden my view."

SOAR is a non-profit, lifelong learning program affiliated with Wayne State University and the Road Scholar Institute Network. The program is among more than 400 linked with Road Scholar across the country. Billed as "health clubs for the brain," these programs serve audiences who want to keep their minds sharp, learn and grow.

The idea for SOAR was first explored in 1992 by WSU faculty members seeking to serve local retirees. Today the organization is led by a group of dedicated volunteers. It offers as many as 75 low-cost classes each fall and spring serving more than 850 members. Most classes convene at the WSU Oakland campus in Farmington Hills or nearby.

In addition to Esther's favorite topics, SOAR also provides programs in health, natural science, photography, psychology, sports and more. The organization also offers field trips, a film festival, a book club and special events. Course leaders include faculty members from WSU and other area colleges and universities, as well as other qualified subject experts. Experts from the IOG, including Drs. Peter Lichtenberg and John Woodard, are among SOAR faculty members.

While the average age of participants at SOAR is 70, and many members are retired, SOAR membership is open to adults of any age and role in life whose common interest is lifelong learning. "Come to SOAR," says Esther. "You'll love the classes and instructors. You'll make new friends. And you never have to take a test!"

**For more on Lifelong Learning call 248-489-0005 or visit <http://soarexplore.com>**

You can also find SOAR on Facebook at SOAREXPLORE. Spring Course Catalogs are distributed in March.

# Better Early Identification of Alzheimer's?

Mild cognitive impairment, or MCI, may be one of Alzheimer's earliest signs. The subtle changes of MCI include problems with memory, language, thinking and judgment and a subjective sense that mental function is getting worse. MCI is seldom severe enough to impair day-to-day activities and is sometimes ignored as "normal aging." Though it doesn't always progress to Alzheimer's or another dementia, it should always be investigated further.

This may be especially important for older African Americans. These elders are twice as likely to develop MCI and Alzheimer's as their Caucasian counterparts, but far less likely to be diagnosed or treated in the early stages. IOG researcher Dr. Voyko Kavcic thinks access and convenience may be part of the reason. "We want to develop affordable, comfortable ways to test for evidence of these disorders, so it is easier for older African Americans," Dr. Kavcic said. "People with transportation or mobility problems shouldn't have to navigate large, confusing medical centers to get answers. Why not take the test to them?"

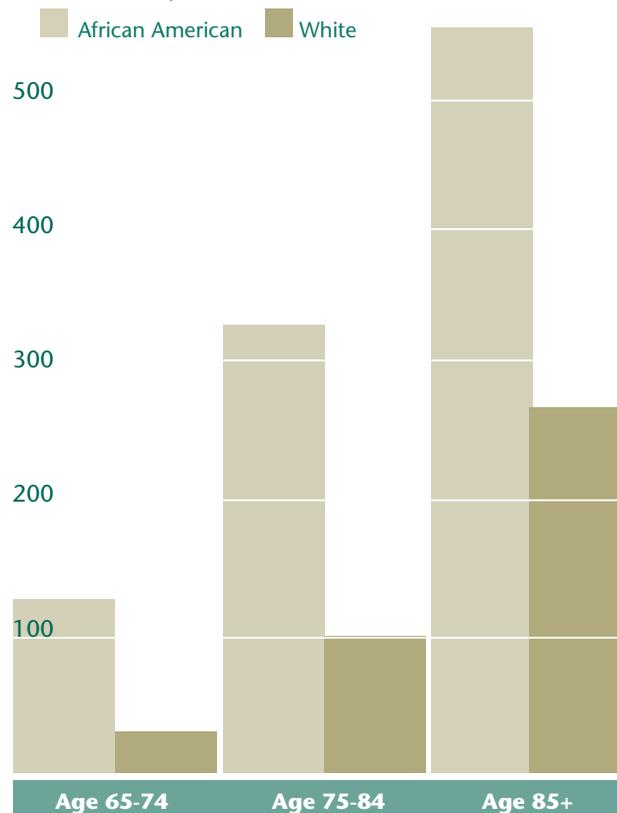
Current testing usually requires a brain scan in an MRI machine the size of a school bus. Dr. Kavcic and colleagues from the University of Michigan are looking at a more portable diagnostic method that is easier to administer and may better predict who needs the more complicated and expensive tests for a more definitive diagnosis. The National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, has granted \$201,000 to see whether an electroencephalograph (EEG) plus cognitive tests on a computer could be the answer – or even the EEG alone.

"This is a community based approach. If we want more people to be diagnosed and treated, testing must be easy, fast, cheap, and readily accepted. The tests we propose can be conducted in a church basement or a senior center," Dr. Kavcic said. "Older African Americans are at highest risk to develop Alzheimer's from MCI, so they are the priority."

How does it work? Dr. Kavcic, Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center (MADC) Associate Di-

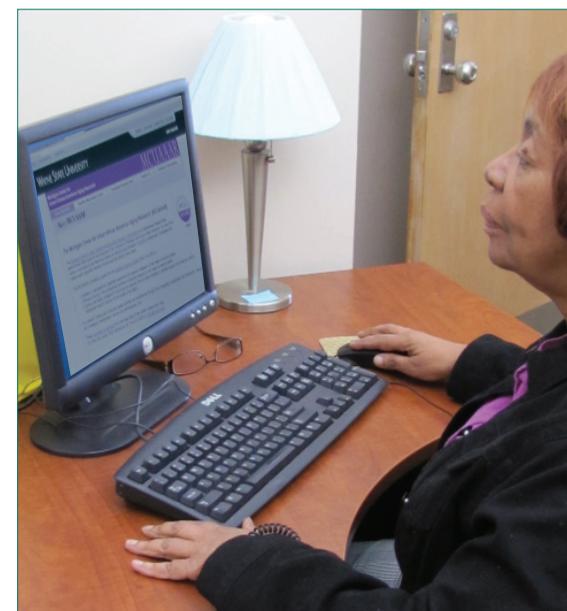
## Cognitive Impairment In Americans (per 1,000 population) by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2006 Health Retirement Study

SOURCE: Adapted from Alzheimer's Association, 2010



rector Dr. Bruno Giordani, and Dr. Edna Rose, the MADC minority recruitment specialist and a nurse and social worker, will team up for recruitment. The project will need 200 older African Americans with no diagnosed cognitive impairment, but who feel their memory may be worsening. Fortunately, the database of volunteers compiled through the Participant Resource Pool (PRP) of the Healthier Black Elders Center will be instrumental in recruiting these people.

Drs. Peter Lichtenberg and James Jackson of U-M, oversee the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research grant that funds the database. The PRP list of older African Americans willing to help with research makes projects like Dr. Kavcic's possible. "Ten years ago it would have been extremely difficult to find larger numbers of African American elders in Detroit willing to participate," Dr.



## Interested in volunteering for this study?

Learn the details from **Dr. Voyko** at 313-664-2626 or [voyko@wayne.edu](mailto:voyko@wayne.edu), or Study Coordinator **Stephen Campbell** at 734-763-2361 or [stepcamp@umich.edu](mailto:stepcamp@umich.edu).

Lichtenberg said. Through trust-building, outreach and education, more than 1,200 volunteers now fill the database.

Participants will take computer-based tests of cognitive function and perform easy computer tasks while wearing an EEG cap. The cap consists of 64 electrodes gently adhered to the scalp to record electrical activity within specific areas of the brain. The electrodes are similar to those used in an EKG to monitor the heart. The EEG is not invasive, painful or uncomfortable. No hair is shaved to apply the electrodes. The entire research appointment takes only a few hours.

Data from the EEG is then analyzed through sophisticated software for clues of abnormal activity. The participants also will be enrolled into the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center for a brief re-assessment every year to see

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## NEWS & HONORS



About 70 visitors braved the cold to view the latest research from students at the IOG and Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Research Day.

It may have been Friday the 13th but only good things happened on *Lifespan Alliance Research Day* this February. More than 30 graduate and undergraduate students presented research split about equally between the IOG and its sister center the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child & Family Development. Lifespan Day spotlights the birth-to-death continuum of scientific issues and research to address them. Eight students gave brief oral presentations; all research was juried. IOG winners were **Sheria Robinson** for her presentation on *The Experiences of Black Elders Managing Chronic Pain*, and **Muzamil Arshad** for his translational neuroscience poster, *Characterizing Age Related Differences in White Matter Microstructure*. Students praised the annual event for providing real-world experience on how to present research to a diverse audience.



Sheria Robinson (rt) receives research award from board member Carol Edwards.



Poster winner Muzamil Arshad explains his work to a MPSI faculty member.

### Better Early Detection from page 4

whether identified difficulties have progressed. “We want to know if the simple EEG is as effective as more expensive, time consuming and far less available approaches in identifying the mild cognitive changes that lead to Alzheimer’s,” said Dr. Kavcic. Why use a jumbo jet when a bicycle can get you where you need

to go? “With this approach, we could easily reach thousands more of the high-risk minorities who often go undiagnosed,” he said.

No cure yet exists for Alzheimer’s, but medications given early in the disease can slow its progress. Newer medications now under development may actually cure or stop the progress of the disease. Non-pharmaceutical treatments might also help if started early. At a minimum,

Former IOG post-doctoral trainee **Dr. Andrea Nevedal** (2005 – 2012) published a paper in *The Gerontologist* based on her dissertation work while at the IOG. *The Significance of Sexuality and Intimacy in the Lives of Older African Americans with HIV/AIDS* appears in the Feb. 3 issue. Dr. Nevedal is a research health scientist at the Center for Innovation to Implementation at the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System.

Welcome **LaToya Hall**, the IOG’s new community outreach specialist for its *Healthier Black Elders Center*. LaToya earned her masters of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis a few years ago. Since then, she has been a financial coach in asset building for Wayne Metro Community Action Agency and also a Family and Economic Advocate for Redevelopment Opportunities for Women in St. Louis. LaToya now oversees the Participant Resource Pool or PRP, a database of older African Americans in the Detroit area interested in volunteering for research projects. She will also help create educational programs for urban African American seniors.



LaToya Hall (left) explains the research database to new volunteer Sandra Jackson.

Pre-Doctoral trainee **Andria Norman** won a \$300 travel scholarship to present at the International Neuropsychological Society Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, this February. Andria’s research team measured brain volumes by structural MRI and neuropsychological performance in cognitively healthy older adults at baseline and again five years later. The baseline volumes accurately predicted the level of much of the later cognitive functioning.

IOG trainee alum (2004) **Dr. LaShawn Wordlaw-Stinson** is now a tenured associate professor in Public Health Education at North Carolina Central University. Her research aims to improve public health through improved screenings and follow-up care after abnormal test results for cancer. Dr. Wordlaw-Stinson has recently published in the *American Journal of Health Education* and the *Open Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

with the earliest possible identification, patients and caregivers could receive resources to plan finances and future care. “It is crucial to be able to predict who will develop mild cognitive impairment and later Alzheimer’s, especially in high-risk, minority populations,” Dr. Kavcic said. “Only then can we work to maintain quality of life and test new, promising treatments. Until then, people will suffer in the dark.”



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Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond

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## EVENTS

### *Art of Aging Successfully Conference*

**Thursday, April 16**  
8:30 am - 2 pm

**LOCATION:**

**Greater Grace Conference Center,  
23500 W 7 Mile Rd, Detroit**

Display art, choose special sessions to attend, meet old friends, enjoy a great lunch. All for only \$18.

Workshops include "How to Use Your Cell Phone" and "Tai Chi for Pain."

To register or for more information call **Deborah** at 313-664-2610

### **Healthier Black Elder Center Lunch 'n' Learns**

Register for any Lunch 'n' Learn by calling Donna MacDonald at 313-664-2605.

**Tuesday, March 24**

*Be Active, Eat Healthy*

**LOCATION: Butzel Family Center, 7737 Kercheval Ave., Detroit 48214**

12:30 pm: Lunch and free health screenings

1:15 – 3:15 pm: Learn how exercise and nutrition impact many aspects of our health, from controlling diabetes to keeping our mind sharp. We will also conduct a gentle physical activity.

**Thursday, April 23**

*Making the Most of Your Doctor's Appointment and Joint Health: Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes*

**LOCATION: Boulevard Temple Care Center, 2567 W. Grand Boulevard, Detroit 48208**

9 am: Free health screenings

10 am – Noon: Learn tips and tricks for getting your questions answered and understanding what your physician is saying during appointments. Joint pain is a common problem as we get older. Find out how to cope. Lunch follows.

**Tuesday, May 19**

*Memory and Brain Changes as We Age*

**LOCATION: U-M Detroit Campus, 3663 Woodward Ave., Detroit 48201**

9 am: Free health screenings

10 am – Noon: Discuss lifestyle choices and environmental changes we can make to keep our brain working at an optimal level. Lunch follows.

**Tuesday, June 9**

*The Science behind Aging*

**DETROIT LOCATION AND TIME TO BE DETERMINED.**

Highly respected researchers explain how to incorporate changes to our environments and lifestyle for better health in our golden years.

Editor/Writer - CHERYL DEEP  
Graphic Designer - CATHERINE BLASIO

Outreach