

transitions

INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond Spring 2006



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Aging Successfully with Humor and Heart



(TOP) KAY FLAVIN AND ESTHER HOWELL.
(BOTTOM) THE STEPPERS MAKE AN ART OF
MODERATE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

“We laugh when we are happy but we are happy because we laugh.” This was one of the myriad insights seniors like Barbara Simons offered one another at the Seventh Annual Art of Aging Successfully Conference, held on March 29 at the Greater Grace Temple in Detroit.

Artwork filled the soaring halls and laughter filled the air as 400 Michigan seniors gathered to share their wisdom, wit, and creative work. Exploring the theme of “learning, laughing, and caring” over workshops, gallery walks,

and lasagna, this diverse group of artists, grandparents, retirees, and professionals had something to say about aging and more to say about life.

Louise Mormon started off the day with a heartfelt tribute to caregiving. Mormon, a senior executive in New York, assisted her parents during their last years by leveraging technology and simple acts of caring. She described her experience, which involved setting up a home hospital system for her parents on their farm in Ohio, as “the ultimate learning experience of my life.”

One technique she found useful was incorporating her parents’ own knowledge and interests into their therapy. Her mother, for example, recovered a great deal of dexterity by typing on her beloved iMac. She stayed mentally acute by teaching her aides to cook special dishes and giving them romantic advice.

The “Creativity in Aging Successfully” session took Mormon’s message—that by sharing our stories, others will receive the benefit of our journey—and ran with it. Craig Roney regaled the audience with anecdotes from his

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childhood while introducing easy storytelling motifs such as innocence, mischief, firsts, mosts, quirks, lost fortunes, celebrations, accidents, and family feuds. Alice Belfie talked about embarking on her fourth career and wondering what her fifth one will be. She credited creativity with enhancing her coping skills, including learning to appreciate her later years. "Aging is not a calamity," she declared, "but what we deserve."

The Art of Aging Successfully Conference is organized by the Elder Advisors to Research under the leadership of Dr. Jenny Mendez, the director of education. This year's chairperson was Janet Whitaker.

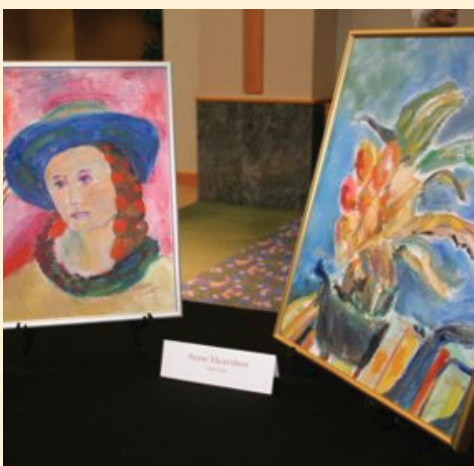
Find out more about community education and outreach, including senior groups and events, by visiting www.iog.wayne.edu/outreach



"Active for Life" presenter Mary Cocanougher emphasized the role of community in staying healthy for life. The senior men and women of the Northwest Neighborhood Health Empowerment Center's aerobic performance group, "The Steppers," invited participants to make an art of moderate physical activity.

Truman Surbrook took this sensible approach to health and threw in a *cha cha cha*. "Don't let anybody keep you off the dance floor!" he yelled, as he

"Don't let anybody keep you off the dance floor!" –Truman Surbrook



showed the crowd dance steps...and how to fake them when you're tired. Couples danced to "Brown-Eyed Girl" and people flooded the dance

floor amid the *Whoop dee do! Whoop dee do! I hear a polka and I'm through!* refrain of "The Too Fat Polka." Surbrook, an engineering professor at Michigan State University, played hooky to come to the conference.



González Broadens Scope of Minority Health Research

The IOG has been at the forefront of health disparities research for over a decade. With the addition of Hector González to the faculty, the IOG is poised to expand its research agenda in important new directions.

The public health issues confronting Latinos overlap those of other minorities, but have several distinctive features. Limited income and health insurance coverage may impede access to healthcare. Once in a healthcare setting, limited English proficiency can hamper effective communication with healthcare providers.

principal investigator of a five-year grant, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, that studies vascular depression and function in older Latinos, and the co-investigator of two projects that research the roles of diabetes and stress on cognitive and functional changes among aging Mexican Americans.

Formerly an epidemiologist at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health, González holds joint appointments at the IOG and the medical school's Department of Family Medicine. He is thrilled to join Wayne State University, seeing in its

"Many Mexican American patients who were suspected of having dementia did not ... They were immigrants. They were poor."

—Hector González

Accurate physician-patient communication is particularly critical when diagnosing neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia. In his work as a clinical neuropsychologist, González "discovered that many Mexican American patients who were suspected of having dementia did not. Instead, they were highly stressed, depressed, diabetic, or hypertensive. They often had low levels of education, English fluency, and income. They were immigrants. They were poor."

González harnesses the power of epidemiology to trace the origins and expressions of psychiatric disorders in underserved populations. He is the

outpatient clinics and Southwest Detroit's Latino population "great opportunities to do multi-ethnic health work."

To learn more about lifespan health research, visit www.iog.wayne.edu/research. See complete profiles of González, Luborsky, and other IOG faculty at www.iog.wayne.edu/people

research

Public Awareness Campaign Targets Memory Loss



PETER LICHTENBERG BUILDS DEMENTIA AWARENESS THROUGH PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS.

Nearly one quarter-million Michigan residents currently suffer from some form of dementia.

Dementia can severely impair a person's memory, mood, and daily functioning, and often catch people off-guard.

The Michigan Dementia Coalition has launched a statewide campaign to raise public awareness about Alzheimer's

disease and dementia. Using a series of striking billboards that advertise the

campaign's Web site, www.WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com, the Coalition hopes to target individuals who could benefit from early detection and treatment.

IOG director Peter Lichtenberg, who also chairs the Michigan Dementia Coalition, counsels people to be alert to the warning signs. "Repeated questions, forgetting whole events, and getting lost in familiar places are just a few of the common signs of memory loss that suggest a health concern."

Learn more at www.iog.wayne.edu/agingand-healthresources

education



CO-EDITORS MARK LUBORSKY AND ANDREA SANKAR

Luborsky, Sankar Increase International Profile of IOG, WSU

Anthropology professors Mark Luborsky and Andrea Sankar were selected to co-edit the international, peer-reviewed journal *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* for the next four years. Luborsky, director of the IOG's Aging and Health Disparities Research Program, and Sankar, director of Medical Anthropology and IOG Faculty Fellow, welcome this opportunity to advance the quality and scope of medical anthropology scholarship and to promote its impact on public health and public policy.

"We have much to learn from developing nations about the nature of disease and illness," said Luborsky. Evaluation research on issues relating to tuberculosis and cancer, as well as women's health and pediatrics, characterizes the field of medical anthropology. "We want to train a critical eye on the national and international policy dimensions which affect health."

research

Save the Date!

19TH ANNUAL ISSUES IN AGING CONFERENCE

May 15—Cognitive Impairments: Clinical and Community Impacts

May 16—Optimizing Physical and Mental Health Functioning in Older Adults: Emerging Tools and Programs

Registration is limited. Contact Talmage Crossley at (313) 577-1180.

TOGETHER WE CAN HEAL: A JOURNEY TO ELIMINATING HEALTHCARE DISPARITIES

May 25—8:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m., at Sacred Heart Seminary. The Interfaith Health & Hope Coalition invites faith leaders, parish and congregational nurses, healthcare ministers, patient advocates and other lay leaders to participate in this teach-in.

Contact The National Conference for Community and Justice at (313) 567-6225.

MARGARET CLARK AWARD

June 1—Submissions are due for student papers in anthropology and gerontology. Learn more at: www.iog.wayne.edu/margaretclark

THE HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER 4TH ANNUAL HEALTH RECEPTION

June 6—10:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m., at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. Detroit seniors are invited to this **free** event, which will feature live jazz, a gourmet lunch, a seated exercise session, and health screenings.

For more information, contact Karen L. Daniels-Tucker at (313) 871-0735.

Check out our new Web site! Visit www.iog.wayne.edu for up-to-date IOG news and events, plus complete information on IOG programs, people, and resources.

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On the Cover . . . *Louis Fox of Farmington presented an intricate woodcut of the Art of Aging Successfully conference.*

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