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ElderFriends Picnic Highlights Friendships

Picture a perfect late summer day: cloudless sky, deep blue water, and a cool sea-breeze to balance the sun. Add some mellow jazz music, burgers on the grill and 61 happy people and you have the ElderFriends End of Summer Picnic Celebration at Lincoln Park.

Seattle City Councilmembers Jean Godden and David Della were guests of honor; they had recently advocated for ElderFriends to receive city funds and were warmly greeted by the crowd. Addressing the group, Godden commended ElderFriends' philosophy that the simple pleasures in life (like fresh flowers and close friends) can be just as important to a person's health and well-being as nursing care and medicines. Nora Gibson, ElderHealth Northwest Executive Director, thanked volunteers for their personal commitments

to decrease isolation among elders who too often become invisible in our society.

"It was great to see so many people whose lives have been touched by ElderFriends," said Program Director Ginger Seybold. "Some of the folks who were out here today have been involved in the program for more than five years; others have only just begun to build a friendship. The wonderful thing about ElderFriends is the mutual benefit in the lives of our volunteers and the elders they visit. These are not one-sided relationships—everyone has something to give."



Photo: RyAnn Morris

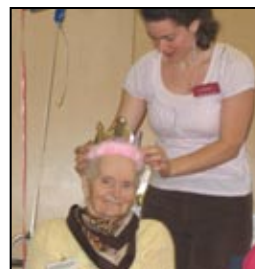
ElderFriends Joe, Andrea & Keith at the summer picnic.

ElderFriends mission is to relieve isolation and loneliness among older adults in Seattle and King County through friendly visits from caring volunteers. Volunteers are most needed in South King County. To volunteer, donate, or refer a participant, visit www.elderfriends.org.



ELDERHEALTH

N O R T H W E S T



CELEBRATING
100 YEARS!
—See page 3

FALL 2007

South King County Adult Day Health Center Moves to Kent

For a period, it was bittersweet moving out of ElderHealth Northwest's adult day health center location on the Valley Medical Center campus in Renton.

"We had been there for over 10 years," Site Manager Patti Dahlman says, "so we have many wonderful memories of our participants at that site."

On September 17, Patti welcomed the chance to create new memories at a spacious, newly-remodeled building at 7829 S 180th Street in Kent (near IKEA). As the first group of frail elders and disabled adults arrived she announced, "This is the kind of building that you guys deserve!" and received a vigorous round of applause.

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Grace salutes opening day!

On any given day, over 100 participants come to the adult day health center. The morning group is comprised mainly of frail elders; the afternoon session is for developmentally-disabled adults. The two programs strive to meet the needs of an underserved South King County population and both have grown dramatically over the last few years.

"There is so much we can do here that we couldn't do at our old site," Patti says, surveying one of the largest rooms. "Fiddlers and other entertainers perform for us regularly, and they'll finally be able to play for everyone all at once!"

The center is almost a third bigger than the previous location and has a well-designed layout, including space devoted to participants with memory loss, an office for the nurses, and rooms for occupational therapy equipment and art supplies.

The center's growth has created an increased need for volunteers for both the morning and afternoon programs. The Kent location is also open on weekends, which provides volunteer opportunities for high school students needing community service hours, college students in services learning classes, and people who are at their jobs during the traditional work week.

To learn more about enrolling (or volunteering) at ElderHealth Northwest, see the contact list inside this newsletter.



Joan, Joann, and Irene enjoy their first cup of coffee at ElderHealth's new South King County adult day health center.

Making the Invisible Visible

by Nora Gibson, Executive Director

My son Will called me yesterday to tell me about something that happened on his job. He just graduated from college (Honors in Sociology, pardon my small bragging moment) and is working as a security person on Portland's light rail system. The other night he was checking the cars of



Photo: Lani O'Conner & Kristina Goudey

the train when he came upon a man who had apparently passed out while drinking. He recognized the man as a transient he'd seen on the downtown streets. Unable to rouse the man, Will called the police, who checked the man's pockets and opened his backpack, which seemed to contain all of his life's possessions. At this point in the story, my son became so choked up that he could hardly speak; he said they pulled out a number of toy stuffed animals that the man carried with him.

Will told me he felt overwhelmingly sad: for the man, his life, his current situation. That these stuffed animals were so important to him just broke his heart. Seeing the stuffed animals brought someone's humanity to life, allowing Will to glimpse the complexity of a man's life and feel for him as another human being. We all sometimes distance ourselves from the transients on the streets, and that sometimes means not seeing them as human like us. We make them "invisible" and we overlook them. As I spoke to Will, I realized that even the "transient" label is a way of distancing.

When we see a very frail old person slumped in a wheelchair, particularly if they can't speak or suffer from a dementia, we also tend to distance ourselves. We can't easily experience who they are and we sometimes overlook their humanity. Labels, like "demented" and even the word I used, "frail," are quick to come to mind.

People in other cultures can become similarly marginalized. This crystallized in a conversation I had with Rajiv Nagaich, a wonderful man who is also an elder law attorney. Rajiv emigrated from India to the United States, where he was educated and started a

successful career. He married a woman from Spokane and after a wedding here they journeyed to India for a wedding there. His bride responded with shock and horror at the beggars living on the streets: children, adults and elders. Rajiv realized that these people had become "invisible" to him; he no longer saw them.

Many years later, living back in Washington, his wife's father developed Alzheimer's disease. It reached the point where his mother-in-law could no longer handle her husband and he was placed in a nursing home. When Rajiv visited for the first time, he walked through the doors, looked down the hallways at very frail people stacked in wheelchairs and hidden from view and thought, "Oh, here they are, the *invisible*."

I was really struck by his assessment. The frail elderly and significantly disabled are the only group that we still wholesale institutionalize when their needs for care escalate. Thanks to revolutions in the worlds of developmental disabilities and mental health this is no longer the case: institutional placement is the last resort.

Perhaps these institutional settings exist only because we can distance ourselves from elders and their predicaments. We ourselves don't want to become one of the "invisible," but have we taken strong enough action to make the "invisible" visible?

ElderHealth tries to prevent people from disappearing in this way: Our first objective is to keep people in the community—in their homes and with their families. Adult day health and in-home care are two ways that we support their right to stay visible. Should their need for care extend beyond what can be handled in the community—when shifts of workers are needed—then we offer neighborhood-based homes. Buchanan Place and Gaffney House are in environments where it's simple to visit the farmers market or walk (or roll) around the block on Capitol Hill. Our elders are still visible, and they live in a setting that feels comfortable to them.

One of our Buchanan Place residents is a very frail centenarian who is growing more inward as she moves toward the end of her life. She was dozing in her wheelchair at the kitchen table and I was behind her, completely unnoticed. Suddenly she woke up, looked around and said in a loud voice, "I like this place!" I don't think that's something you often hear in places inhabited by the "invisible."

ElderHealth Participant Celebrates 100th Birthday

by Vicki Olsen

My mother, Monica Hahn, was born June 4, 1907 in Georgetown, Washington (now part of Seattle). Her father and mother were both born in Germany and her father was a brewmaster for the Rainier Brewery. She was the second oldest in a family with seven kids.

The five oldest were girls; the two youngest were boys. Monica has two surviving siblings: her sister Laura who I believe is 96 and her sister Andrea who I believe is 94. Both live in their own homes and still drive. Monica was living in her own home with her husband Werner and driving until January 2000 when she had a stroke.

Monica's father lost his job as a brewmaster as a result of Prohibition and the family bought a 160 acre homestead on the Olympic Peninsula. They moved there by barge across the Sound and then by horse drawn carriage. The family survived on fruit and vegetables they grew themselves and on dairy products from their beloved cow. They raised chickens for food. The family was very poor and Monica left home at 13 to be a mother's helper for another family. As a result, she missed a couple of years of school and had to return to public school at an older than usual age.

She graduated from Cleveland High School in the first graduating class and was the joint speaker at graduation because of her academic excellence. She was an art major at the University of Washington but had to drop out because she developed osteomyelitis in her ankle bone and was hospitalized for an extended period of time. The doctor wanted to amputate her leg but could not reach her parents for permission. Penicillin had not yet been discovered. She fortunately recovered.



Daughter Vicki, Granddaughter Cammy & Monica.

She spent her life raising three children: Werner, Mona and Vicki who live respectively in Herndon, Virginia, Butler, Pennsylvania, and Seattle.

Monica has lived in Home Sweet Home, an excellent group home in Lake City since April of 2000 where she moved with her husband after her stroke. Her husband, Werner passed away at age 103½ in September of 2001.

Monica was very talented and was very well known even internationally for her tatting which is a lace making technique. She won so many ribbons at the Puyallup Fair that she was asked to be a judge to give others an opportunity for ribbons. She wrote and published several books on tatting which still appear on the Internet. She was taught to tat by a young Polish girl while the two of them tended cows at pasture in Georgetown, Washington. The only thread they had to use was butcher's string from the local butcher shop. Tatting became a lifetime passion for Monica and she made a part time career out of her talent later in life.

Monica was very active in her church, University Presbyterian Church, and was a deacon there. She has really enjoyed going to ElderHealth (North Seattle branch) for six or so years and has made many friends there—both staff and clients. She is very proud of any projects she brings home from there and she absolutely loved her birthday party.

CONTACT ELDERHEALTH

**DAY CENTERS &
RESIDENCES
King County**

(206) 528-5315

ADULT DAY HEALTH CENTERS

North Seattle (Ravenna)
South Seattle (Rainier Valley)
Downtown Seattle
(First Hill)
Kent (near IKEA)

SUPPORTED LIVING HOMES

Gaffney House
(Capitol Hill)
Buchanan Place
(South Seattle)

ELDERHEALTH AT HOME

(206) 224-3752

DAY CENTERS Snohomish County

(425) 355-1313

ADULT DAY HEALTH CENTERS

Snohomish County (Everett)

DAYBREAK SENIOR RESPIRE PROGRAM

Snohomish, Marysville,
Mill Creek and Edmonds

VOLUNTEERS

(206) 224-3790

DONATE

(206) 224-3772

OUR E-NEWSLETTER

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