



# The Source

*"Your Community Resource on Aging"*

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WINTER 2007

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### SAVE THE DATE!

**February 26, 2007**

*The Council on Aging presents the:*  
**2007 Annual Legislative Breakfast**

Location:  
**Tyvola Senior Center**  
**2225 Tyvola Road**

A light breakfast will be served, sponsored by *The Place at South Park*

To RSVP: please call  
**704-527-8807**

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*Our Mission is...  
"to address, advocate and support the rights and needs of adults on issues that affect them."*

Editor: Kellie Visker

Design Layout: Martha Threatt

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Council on Aging Announces New Executive Director

The Board of Directors of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Council on Aging (CoA) is pleased to announce that it has confirmed the selection of Debora Mitchell Sparks as its new Executive Director. Marie Shook, who has guided the organization since September 2005, turned over the reins November 27, 2006.

Ms. Sparks brings a depth of experience in change management, communications, government relations, association management and consulting to the organization that advocates for the interests of the ever-growing senior population in Charlotte. "This is a very exciting time for the Council. We

plan to build upon the great work that has been done here and advance the Council's mission of providing a voice for seniors and a resource for the community by reaching out to our constituents, prospective funders and the community-at-large, said Sparks. We want to raise awareness of the CoA and issues affecting seniors so that we can expand our partnerships and broaden our base of support."



The next year promises to be extremely challenging and fast-paced. The planned consolidation between CoA and the Status on Senior Initiatives will bring added resources under the auspices of a reconstituted organization.

### Director's Corner

Dear Friends and Readers,

Kellie Visker stopped in and asked me to contribute to *The Source*. I was delighted! This is a perfect opportunity for me to ask for your ideas, kudos or concerns about our evolving organization and about the experience of seniors in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Important decisions lie ahead that will help determine the quality of life available to seniors here in Charlotte over the next few years and decades. It is my privilege to serve as your advocate in these critical matters. Your regular input will help guide my work and the agenda of our agency.

During this Holiday Season, please accept my heartfelt wishes for Peace and Joy. From all of us at the Council, we hope you have a wonderful New Year. In the meantime, I'll be here in the corner, listening and answering.

*Debora*

**New Column!**



## Keep Us Cooking!

Friendship Trays is a not-for-profit organization that provides nutritious meals and a friendly face, enabling our homebound neighbors to remain comfortable in their homes. Each day we deliver over 700 meals throughout our community.

Friendship Trays' success over the past 30 years is a direct result of the hard work and dedication of supporters, volunteers and friends. As a private, non-profit, Friendship Trays relies solely on the generosity of our supporters.

### WE'RE HUNGRY FOR YOUR HELP! Looking for Volunteer Drivers

Friendship Trays is in need of volunteer drivers. Our organization delivers over 700 meals per day and we need approximately 85 drivers each day to make these vital deliveries. Are you interested in a meaningful volunteer opportunity that you can accomplish during your lunch hour? Contact us!

**FRIENDSHIP TRAYS**  
2401 A Distribution St.  
Charlotte, NC 28203  
704-333-9229  
[www.friendshiptrays.org](http://www.friendshiptrays.org)

## With the Caregiver In Mind By LuAnne Nelson

### Upcoming National Crisis Possible, Yet Hope Flourishes

The fall, 2006 issue of "Case in Point," a professional periodical for geriatric care managers, states that early onset of Alzheimer's Disease is affecting a hidden generation of younger adults. As many as 640,000 Americans have inherited a form of the disease that strikes between ages 30 and 60. This is unusually early. Recent studies of the Alzheimer's Association and the Health and Retirement Survey indicate that a national crisis in healthcare may be the end result.

It is extremely alarming that most of the cases of early onset Alzheimer's Disease is commonly overlooked because memory loss and AD is routinely considered an elderly issue and disease. Workers may leave careers that become too difficult. Confidence is lost and instead of looking for work in their field, workers may apply for manual jobs. Irritability and lack of patience may follow. Paranoia, at once common situations, may set in. They may not have medical insurance when the disease is finally diagnosed.

Testing and examination by a neurologist will include an MRI, a comprehensive series of cognitive and motor tests and puzzles that can result in a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease with 90% certainty (the highest percentage of feasibility while a person is living.) Currently, only after death and an au-

opsy is the diagnosis 100% certain.

A common medication for Alzheimer's disease is Aricept (a cholinesterase inhibitor). This prescription medication is used to maintain overall function, including memory and behavior. Progression of the disease is impossible to predict. Flurizan is a new medication that is in its third stage of testing...a select few persons who are closely monitored are using it. Essentially, Flurizan helps destroy the toxins that harm brain cells. In studies, it has successfully lowered the levels of Abeta-42, the primary component of senile plaque that accumulates in the brain of patients with Alzheimer's disease.

Researchers at the Blanchette Rockefeller Neurosciences Institute (BRNI) have developed a new skin test that may lead to an earlier Alzheimer's diagnosis. They have identified a biomarker in skin cells that can accurately distinguish between Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia within the first two years of progression. Daniel L. Alkon, MD, scientific director of BRNI states, "When it begins, Alzheimer's disease is often difficult to

distinguish from other dementias. Yet potential treatments are likely to have the greatest efficacy before widespread impairment of brain function after four or five years."

Hope abounds that there is a cure on the horizon. Rumors of a vaccine have run rampant in the past. However, optimism is justified. Last year, a research team led by Dr. Howard Weiner, Director of MS Program at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston have showed overwhelming results in mice. Plaque in the brains of vaccinated mice was reduced by 73% with no detrimental side effects. A human vaccine is, at best, still a few years away. Maybe *this* is the one that will work.

### Early onset of Alzheimer's Disease is affecting a hidden generation of younger adults.

## Aging and Dying is a Very Personal Experience! by Maarten Pennink

The title may not strike the reader as new, but aging and dying is an experience difficult for our society to understand. The older I get the more I realize how many around me struggle dealing with the end of life phase. Because of a conversation I recently had with an elegant older lady I need to further reflect on the subject.

From an intellectual point of view, we seem to become more aware of what aging and dying exactly entails, but I think we need to find out not what business and profit-driven individuals think and want, but what the aging person desires and expects. We need to start a dialogue so we, the virtual outsiders, can better deal with the last months and years alive, benefiting the old folks and ourselves, when the inevitable time comes.

The other day, I tuned in to a program on elder care on the PBS program "FrontLine," and I became saddened by

what I saw. I do not want to be rolled around in a wheelchair and I do not want to be spoon-fed at life's end. Without exception that's what all my aging friends want, but we still place our elders in homes for the aged and institutions. We seem compelled to decide for them. That very fact means to me that we are on the wrong track.

A close friend of mine, who is working on a formula for creating an elder community, chimed in on a discussion on the subject and said, "Connection to others! It is all about connections." Being with friends and neighbors, the people we care about, is very important indeed. If we can accomplish that then the sense of loneliness may diminish. What this idea does not address is a humane and graceful way of dying. I know that euthanasia and palliative care are difficult subjects to bring to the fore in this state, but the aging and dying the way the very old are experiencing on the "FrontLine" program can hardly be

seen as the solution.

Do animals die "humanely"? When our pet is extremely and terminally ill, we, may it be reluctantly, put the creature to sleep. When I look outside and check the bushes and the woods, I never see a bird or land animal struggling with death. Animals are just allowed to die. And that is the difference: Society does not permit us to do so! There is something profoundly wrong with that picture.

Aging and dying is a very personal experience indeed. It is a struggle. Life is tough, and I think we are only making it tougher by excluding the desires and wishes of the very old. So, let's start a dialogue between the young and older folks and find out what it is that works better. Not an easy task, and I am certain that together we can improve the end of life experience for all of us. Aging and dying needs to remain a personal experience.

## Program for Senior Advocates By Katie Kutcher

The Program for Senior Advocates is a free educational program provided by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Council on Aging for senior citizens within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. In keeping with the mission of the Council on Aging, to address, support, and advocate the rights and needs of aging adults on issues that affect them, the Program for Senior Advocates helps to empower the senior participants to advocate on their own behalf and/or on the behalf of their community

On November 30, 2006, the Program for Senior Advocates celebrated the graduation of its fall participating class at the Steele Creek Senior Nutrition Site. The graduates completed the seven week course with flying colors. Topics covered in the class included: assertiveness, advocacy,

legal issues, transportation, legal services, and city and county government. The graduates were fortunate to have effective guest speakers from businesses and

Palmer, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Senior Centers; County Commissioner Norman Mitchell; City Council Member Warren Turner; The Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department – Steele Creek Division; LuAnne Nelson, Silver Oak Care Management; Zettie Chunn Phillips, CATS; and Legal Services for the Elderly.

The Program for Senior Advocates will be starting up two new courses in January of 2007. The upcoming Program will be held at The Ada Jenkins Center, and the Dowd-YMCA of Greater Charlotte. For more information or updates on the Program, please visit: <http://www.charmeckcoa.org/AdvocacyAlert.htm>.



**Joe Broughton, Geraldine Norman and Evelyn McAllister proudly display their certificates following the graduation ceremony.**

organizations within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Thank you to all the speakers who volunteered to facilitate the classes, including Becky Williams, Disability Rights & Referral; Trena

**Congratulations to the Program for Senior Advocates Steele Creek Graduates!**

## Are You Prepared? By Martha Threatt

No one expected the deadly terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the devastation brought on by Hurricane Katrina – but whether it's a natural disaster, deadly terrorist attack or another emergency crisis; we've all learned these instances can strike at any time.

Local, state and federal agencies were working to implement effective strategies for deterring, preventing and responding to emergency and disaster occurrences of all types long before 9/11. However, lessons learned from these disasters has improved and strengthened the need to develop and maintain systems to prevent acts of terrorism and enable our local Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Preparedness Team to respond in the most effective manner possible. Various organizations in Charlotte-Mecklenburg are working together to establish a United Response.

Although the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Preparedness Team is prepared

to address the county-wide need for emergency management; it is important that we as individuals work to prepare ourselves in case of an emergency. We can not always predict or prevent disasters from occurring but we all can better prepare ourselves.

You can take action so that you are better equipped for an emergency where you live by creating:

1. Create a Personal Support Network – Create a network made up of friends, relatives, neighbors and others you trust who could check to see if you need assistance. Supply members of your network with copies of your emergency information list, medical information list, necessary supplies and special equipment list, evacuation plans, relevant emergency documents and personal disaster plan. It is also good to give copies of keys to your home, car, etc. to your network members.
2. Advocate for Yourself – Practice how to quickly explain to people the best way to assist you. Be ready to

provide brief, clear, and specific instructions and directions to rescue personnel either orally or in writing. If you prefer, you can always include specific instructions as part of your Personal Emergency Plan.

3. Make Lists of Emergency and Medical Information – Make an emergency list that your network can use. Develop an Emergency Plan – After following steps 1-3; your Emergency Plan is almost complete. We can never plan for the unexpected but we can take extra precautions by attempting to be a little better prepared ahead of time.

If you would like to learn more about Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Management for our area, please join us for our May Conference scheduled for **May 24, 2007 at the Hilton Charlotte University Place**. The conference will highlight many important issues such as Nursing Home and Health Facility evacuations.



By Jean Leier

### Charlotte Seniors Learn Light Rail Safety

Charlotte, N.C., November 30, 2006 ¾Seniors along the Charlotte Area Transit System's (CATS) future LYNX Blue Line are getting a lesson in rail safety. Participants at several senior nutrition sites and other senior facilities near CATS' first-ever rapid transit line are receiving valuable information about being safe around railroad crossings from CATS employees certified as Operation Lifesaver (OLI) Associates.

"With a large number of the senior population living and traveling in the area near the LYNX Blue Line, it is extremely important to reach out with rail safety information," said Zettie Phillips, CATS Marketing and Senior Transit Coordinator. "CATS wants to ensure we give the public as much information possible to help residents make the best decisions when near rail crossings and stations."

During the OLI presentations, seniors are reminded of several important facts about rail crossings including:

- 1) Trains don't swerve; they can only follow the track.
- 2) It is the pedestrian's or vehicle operator's prerogative to get out of the way of a train.
- 3) Never pass another vehicle, shift gears or stop on a railroad track.
- 4) Trains may appear at any time.
- 5) Railroad tracks, bridges and the immediate area surrounding are private property.
- 6) Take heed of rail signs and always practice caution when approaching a rail crossing.



Included with the OLI instruction is information on how to use CATS services. Seniors 62 and older ride CATS for half price and have priority seating at the front of CATS buses and the future LYNX Blue Line, which are all wheelchair accessible.

CATS is making rail safety presentations to seniors, neighborhoods, businesses, schools and organizations across Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Twenty CATS staff are now certified OLI presenters.

To learn more about CATS LYNX Blue Line and the rules of light rail safety, visit us on the web at [www.ridetransit.org](http://www.ridetransit.org) or call 703-336-RIDE.