

# **An innovative program that promotes Successful Aging in the Community.**

## **Initial Problem to be addressed**

Buffalo, NY is the largest city in Erie County. There were no fitness programs for senior citizens in Erie County New York. According to recent statistics Erie County, N.Y. has the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) highest percentage of people over age 60 in the nation and Buffalo, N.Y. is the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) poorest city in the nation.

**Problem – To design, develop and implement a meaningful, sustainable senior fitness program despite the fact that there was no budgeted allocation.**

**Background:** The Older Americans Act was passed on July 14, 1965 to provide comprehensive services for older adults including nutrition, disease prevention and health promotion services. This legislation generated Congregate Dining and Meals on Wheels programs found in most communities. The disease prevention component was facilitated by the various County and City Departments of Health throughout the state...

**Amazingly, today; 45 years after the passing of the Older Americans Act there is no real, concerted, ongoing Health Promotion, senior fitness or wellness programs implemented in, or by, the state of New York.** (Despite any pronouncements made to the contrary --this is a fact)

**Comment:** The preceding statement is validated by the fact that every year I attend the annual conference hosted by NYSANASP (the New York State Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs). Attendees at this conference include Nutrition, Health and Community Services professionals from all parts of the state. Each year I ask the attendees about any ongoing senior fitness and/or wellness programs implemented in their geographic area - the majority answer is – “there are none”.

## **An innovative program that promotes a Nutritious Diet, Fitness, Health and Wellness.**

The Congregate Dining Program in Erie County (STAY FIT DINING) is part of the Erie County Department of Senior Services. It is mandated that congregate dining meals provide a minimum 1/3 RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance).

Diet and exercise are two major components of being healthy and staying healthy.

I designed and developed a group exercise program utilizing latex resistance exercise stretch bands. This program was implemented at two (2) congregate dining sites as a pilot project. Participation and enthusiasm for the group exercise sessions immediately exceeded our most optimistic projections.

Prior to expanding the group exercise sessions to include more dining sites a decision was made to re-brand the program image. The program name, given in 1967 NUTRITION FOR THE ELDERLY was changed to STAY FIT DINING. The rationale for the name change was that seniors in the community would be more inclined to attend and participate because most did not consider themselves elderly and aspired to stay fit...

## **Why this program is is innovative?**

Reviewing this submission up to this point the question may be asked “what makes this senior group exercise program innovative?”

This program is innovative because

1. Over the past 11 years it has sustained itself and grown from a registration of 42 participants to the current level exceeding 2000.

2. The scope of the program has an expanded curriculum that now includes exercises for strength, flexibility and preventing falls.
3. The cost of implementing this program in other counties or municipalities is negligible because over the years we have developed a ‘turnkey’ system that does not require any additional personnel or related costs.

### **Replication**

Ease of replication is illustrated by virtue of the fact that this program has been successfully replicated in Niagara County, Oswego County and Tompkins County. It has also been implemented in The Charlotte/Hickory NC area in partnership between the state of North Carolina and Lenoir Rhyne College.

### **Awards**

**2005** – National Association of Area Agencies on Aging Achievement in Aging Award.

**2006** – Lenoir Rhyne College – State of North Carolina Dept of Senior Services.

**2005** – National Association of Area Agencies on Aging National Directory of Best Practices

**2009** – State of New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services. Directory – Promising Practices for Diverse Populations.

**2010** – Replication of the program (turnkey) by 3 counties in New York State.

### **Helping people remain independent, in the community and age in place.**

The combination of a healthy diet and regular exercise is a lifestyle proven to make people stronger and healthier. This is even more important for the aging population helping to keep them physically independent, allowing them to remain in the community and age in place.

### **Total Program Cost \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ ( I Saved the best for last)**

If the proven implementation formula is followed the cost of starting, sustaining and expanding this program is ZERO.

The person responsible for administering the congregate program assumes the duty of also administrating the senior fitness program.

- Initially the only **material cost** associated with implementation of the program is for the latex exercise stretch bands (about \$1.35 each). Funding for purchasing the bands can often be obtained from health insurance companies or local merchants.
- **Personnel Cost** - Erie County has developed this program utilizing fitness trainer volunteers found within the senior community, we then utilize the “train the trainer” concept. We have 27 senior fitness trainers - the result has been outstanding benefiting the trainer, the participants and the community.

**I respectfully suggest that the ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY consider recommending this turnkey program to other counties and municipalities in New York State. The cost is virtually non-existent and successful outcomes are proven.**

**I can provide an illustrated training course that can be copied and will provide telephone assistance during the implementation phase.**

**Richard J. Derwald – Senior Fitness Coordinator – Erie County NY**