

Issue No. 2 • Vol. 1 • July 2007



☒ Opportunity

☒ Experience

☒ Ideas

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The Dynamics of Aging and Our Communities

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Mission Statement

CCQ is an electronic and print public policy quarterly dedicated to looking at the aging segment of our society and region as it redefines itself and intersects with a wide cross section of demographic, social, cultural and economic features of society. In this light, we will consider subjects such as city and town planning, environmental advocacy, economic development, housing, work force, education, mobility, regionalism, governance, marketing, recreation, health care, social services, creativity, demographics, emerging technologies and the roles of nonprofit organizations. Our audience is public and private decision makers and all others seeking to understand a changing society. We will offer concise, thoughtful and interesting articles. Comments, including letters to the editor and recommendations from our readers, are welcome.

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Richard Iannello

Let us make it happen NOW in our communities

Welcome to our second issue of CCQ, but to my third Publisher's Column. It's Memorial Day weekend and after completing my second column, I tossed it. Let me explain.

Initial response to CCQ has been very positive and there is an interest in the kind of articles in our first issue. However, when I looked at my second effort, I realized it was not aligned with our focus on community. When discussing "The Dynamics of Aging and Our Communities," it's very easy to go off track because all of us see a facet of aging depending upon what we are involved with at that moment.

When you are dealing with an aging parent who is in the initial stages of dementia, the concept of community is not at the front of your thought process. When you are the primary caregiver to your aging spouse and you find yourself completely and thoroughly exhausted, you are not exactly focused on the theme of community. I wouldn't be either. Yet our individual experiences with aging are realistically influenced by how our communities are responding to ever-growing populations of older people.

"Years of uncoordinated federal and state policies have given us a patchwork of aging services and systems that are anything but integrated."

The May 2007 issue of Wired magazine describes a project in Shanghai on the island of Dongtan. The article highlights an enormous effort underway to develop a new metropolis of 500,000 people where today there are open fields and swamps. The proposed Chinese city is intended to be "green" and is being designed with one of the most eco-friendly infrastructures ever contemplated. You can do things like that when your starting point is a clean piece of paper. But our communities are anything but that. Years of uncoordinated federal and state policies have given us a patchwork of aging services and systems that are anything but integrated. The same could be said for mental health, education and just about any other area you wish to consider.

Agreeing to consider aging as integral to the concept of "community" isn't too difficult. It is something most of us can easily embrace but it becomes more challenging when our energies must be divided between maintaining our current care delivery systems and developing the broader more integrated structures of the future. We can't dismantle what we currently have and put up one of those web site signs that states, "Under construction, please come back later." And we really don't want to do that. We have many fine organizations and motivated

individuals who are currently trying to make positive contributions to our communities. We are a nation of builders. We are a collective force that has always seen the good in taking something created by an earlier generation and putting forth the effort to make it better.

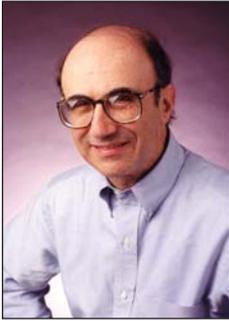
What does this mean to us? It means not starting from scratch is a viable option. In fact, it can be an asset if our hearts and minds are already where they need to be. It also means that we have to work a little harder as we consider “The Dynamics of Aging and Our Communities” because we don’t have time to waste. If you are 85 years old, it is not a great comfort to know that something as basic as day care services will be more widely available in your community over the next 20 years. It would be nice if these beneficial programs were more readily available NOW. Whether you are 16 or 56 or even 86, it would be wonderful if the layout of your neighborhood encouraged you to walk to services. Citizens of all ages will benefit as more communities embrace the concept of walkable neighborhoods. Let’s make it happen NOW.

“We are a collective force that has always seen the good in taking something created by an earlier generation and putting forth the effort to make it better.”

Our successes will surely be measured by statisticians and researchers who will tell us how much more healthy we are or how much more quickly we can access a needed service. Additionally, our successes will be measured by our willingness to adapt. Are we comfortable working outside of our comfort zone? A few years ago, The Wesley Community in Saratoga Springs, New York, did something that demonstrates the creativity that we will need to make our communities better for everyone. Wesley is a large institutional care provider with apartments, assisted living units and a nursing home on its campus. They spent their own money to improve the sidewalks in the surrounding neighborhood. It became easier for the residents of Wesley to safely ambulate through the area and it became easier for the local citizens to walk on their refurbished sidewalks.

The Wesley Community looked outward. Can you? 

*Rick Iannello
Executive Director
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Paul M. Bray

Depending on grandparents

I was spoiled by my grandparents who gave me unconditional love and, in addition, goodies. We had a wonderfully simple relationship. You will learn from reading Gerald Wallace's article on kincare as well as looking at what is happening throughout the world when it comes to the plight of children that grandparents are assuming greater responsibilities when it comes to the welfare of children. Child care is becoming a life long activity.

Greater dependence on grandparents for child care is becoming the order of the day. I've noticed in recent years how many of my friends are taking care of their grandchildren while the children's parents are working or doing other things away from home. While I've noted some frustration from time to time on the grandparents' part, generally they are very happy to be with their grandchildren.

"The phenomena of grandparents being "like the family National Guard" portrayed in the New York Times takes child care to another level."

The phenomena of grandparents being "like the family National Guard" portrayed in the New York Times takes child care to another level. In a May 10, 2007 article entitled "The Incredible Flying Granny Nanny," we learn about "intercity commuting" to baby-sit and generally well-to-do grandparents "taking time off from work, retiring early, moving to the United States from overseas or selling their home to be near grandchildren." According to the Times, the phenomena is being driven by financial burdens of child care, anxiety over the quality of third party child care and grandparents having the time and financial ability to pitch in.

In Gerald Wallace's kincare article we see that "more than 143,000 grandparents are raising children in this state without a parent present in the household" and the number is growing. Overall there are more than 200,000 "kinship caregivers" in New York State when you count other adult relatives providing care. Wallace is in the vanguard of kincare issues in New York State. He is now looking globally as grandparents are enlisted to be advocates for protection of children throughout the world.

The social and economic effects of these trends for children, grandparents and society as a whole are great. They are only beginning to come up on the political radar. Like many of the subjects addressed in CCQ such as regionalism and protecting our environment in this issue, kincare has long term consequences and needs to be continually revisited in CCQ and in other publications and forums.

What is new about issue two

The format of CCQ is a work in progress and I want to point out changes we made in this second issue. I am most delighted by the addition of a Personal Essay feature that allows thoughtful writers like Diane Cameron to share their thoughts on meaningful subjects and experiences that personally inspire them. Diane shares her provocative thoughts about aging in solitude in this issue.

We have also begun to highlight a local organization that helps make our region more beautiful in ways that can be documented through visual images. In this issue the organization is the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy that protects scenic natural areas of our landscape. The organization is described in CCQ and images of landscapes they've protected can be found throughout issue two. The Conservancy depends on help from all age sectors in the protection and management of scenic land for our enjoyment as well as for future generations. 

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Feature Organization

Protecting the natural landscape in our own backyard

By Peggy Sherman, President of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy¹ (the “Conservancy”) is a nonprofit community venture dedicated to saving special places of recreational, scenic, natural, cultural, and agricultural value for the communities of our area to respect, care for and enjoy.

The Conservancy protects some places by owning them outright as preserves. Many of these are open to the public with more to be opened soon. For example, in the town of Bethlehem, the Conservancy’s Tri-Village Greenway Committee manages three preserves on Delaware Avenue that are open to folks of all ages who want to take a short hike, walk the dog, watch for birds or wildflowers, or just enjoy being outdoors. Some of these preserves are surrounded by established neighborhoods and protect areas where kids can look for frogs and salamanders, follow a deer trail, and ice skate on wetland ponds. The kinds of places we often lament the loss of are here in our own backyards.

Just across from Bethlehem Central High School’s athletic fields is our Swift Wetland, with access at the end of Evelyn Drive. This year, science teachers at the high school will bring their students to this

preserve for field studies of wetlands, water quality and topographic mapping. While there is a network of informal trails, the Conservancy plans to upgrade and mark trails for better public access to this Swift Wetland.



Building a kiosk on Bennett Hill

Further out on Delaware Avenue, with access from Fisher Boulevard, the 19.8 acre Phillipinkill Preserve features easy trails through an attractive mix of upland, floodplain and wetland. Hikers enjoy a beautiful stand of beech trees and views of the Phillipinkill, which flows into the Vlomankill and ultimately the Hudson River.

Our Normanskill Preserve is located at the site of the Delaware Avenue landslide of 2000 where the County of Albany transferred 46 acres of tax-foreclosed property to the Conservancy. Today, a trail loops through the woods, skirting the edge of steep slopes, down to the Normanskill across the creek from the City of Albany’s Normanskill Farm. Future

plans are to link the preserve with the farm and its extensive hiking trails and community gardens.

With financial support from a 2006 concert by the Friendship Singers, a local women’s chorus, Conservancy volunteers, including children and grandparents, are building sturdy kiosks at the entrances of these preserves to provide trail maps and other information. More detailed information about the Conservancy and directions to these and our other preserves can be found at www.mohawkhudson.org.

We’re working with the Town of Bethlehem, its Citizens’ Advisory Committee on Conservation, willing landowners, and other partners to develop a “greenway” linking our preserves, existing town parks, the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, and the future rail trail that will extend from the Port of Albany to Voorheesville. Our goal is easier access and greater enjoyment of these and other special places for people of all ages. 🐾

¹The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York.



Hikers on Bennett Hill

Grandparents: From kinship caregivers to global advocates for children

By Gerald Wallace, Esq.

Across the United States, children are living with their grandparents and other relatives because parents are unable or unwilling to parent. In New York, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 143,000 grandparents were raising children without a parent present in the household. Growing at approximately 30% every 10 years, and adding the fact that more than a quarter of these “kinship” families are adult relatives other than grandparents, it is reasonable to assume that more than 200,000 non-parent relative caregivers are caring for close to a half-million children in New York.

These caregivers are predominantly poor, but kinship caregivers are found in every corner of every community. They frequently care for children because of family tragedies, including drugs, alcohol, mental illness, incarceration, debilitation, and death.

Not only are parents often unstable. An estimated 30 percent or more of the children in kinship care have disabilities or are emotionally challenged.

Yet, kinship families succeed. Research conclusively shows that children who live with relatives outside the foster care system do better than children living with relatives who are foster parents, and that both sets of children perform better in all important measured outcomes than do children in foster care with non-relatives.

This success is a testament to the quality of kinship care. However, I believe these families would have better outcomes if they were supported by policies as robust and well-funded as those that underpin the child welfare system. Nationally, that system spends over 15 billion dollars per year on a legion of social workers, legal and professional assistance, and bureaucratic infrastructure. The other child welfare system, grandparents and other relative caregivers, depends upon a fraction of the funding, supportive law and programmatic assistance.



Holt Preserve

States respond to kincare needs

While policies have begun moving towards acceptance of kinship caregivers as the first preference for children at risk, and New York has made significant strides towards the creation of a system of supports, much more must be done. Last year New York joined at least 35 other states in funding a statewide program of assistance.

Yet, in comparison, many states have significantly more comprehensive delivery systems that address many specific issues confronting kinship caregivers. For instance, over 40 states provide special subsidies to keep children out of foster care and many states have special programs for kinship children with incarcerated parents or for kinship children with disabilities.

"From May 6-8, 2007, grandparents from across the world took part in an international summit in New York City to consider what they can do for the world's children."

Advocates for kinship care can describe best practices, best laws and most effective programs. It is up to the stakeholders in New York to decide that they will provide the needed package of assistance, authority and security.

To help stakeholders identify and implement best practices, Albany Law School, together with a coalition of kinship service providers that includes AARP NY and the National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights (NCGCR), is seeking to hold a series of stakeholder meetings beginning in June 2007. So far, preliminary signals from state government indicate that these meetings will receive excellent support.

With the new Spitzer administration's announced commitment to children, advocates are hopeful that these meetings will result in more assistance and more laws that finally complete a package of rights and assistance.

Creating child advocacy role for grandparents

Just as New York is finally poised to embrace its kinship families, the New York based grandparent advocacy group, the NCGCR, with the assistance of AARP NY and Albany Law School's Government Law Center Kincare Support Project, is also seeking to expand the role of grandparents from caregivers for grandchildren to advocates for all children without parental support.

From May 6-8, 2007, grandparents from across the world took part in an international summit in New York City to consider what they can do for the world's children. Central to their concerns is the unimaginable scale of suffering experienced by children.

Despite vast improvements in the well-being of children over the last hundred years, progress has stalled and in many countries actually reversed. Polio is resurgent. Child trafficking is increasing. In Africa, children are trained to commit war crimes. In India hundreds of thousands are forced into prostitution. In Islamic countries, children are terrorists. In the West, sexual abuse is rampant. Across all continents, HIV AIDS, other epidemics, natural disasters, genocides and massive migrations take the harshest toll on those who are most vulnerable.

The scope of the tragedy overwhelms governments and international organizations. A united response is further hampered by nationalism, sectarianism and lawlessness. No force seems powerful enough to stop the onslaught.

“Grandparents are the natural protectors of children. They are the one unifying force that crosses borders, religious sectarianism and all other divisions.”

Into this maelstrom steps that traditional defender of children, their grandparents. The Summit, “Grandparents Caring for Children: The Global Challenge,” sought to begin a large-scale effort, similar to the responses that began after earlier pronouncements about human rights. Such declarations usually accompany a large-scale disaster or a new, often revolutionary, idea. The disaster for children is absolutely real. Yet, children are not capable of responding on their own. Perhaps the success of kinship care points to a new unifying idea that can energize a motivated surrogate to act for children?

For children without parents, their families are the universal first line of defense. This is both a natural and traditional fact, as evidenced by the success of kinship care in New York. It is also one policymakers in the United States and across the world have duly noted. At the 2005 U.N. Conference on Children Without Parents, this fact of life was acknowledged as providing the best hope for children without parents.

Parentless children are found in every country. The result is the same, only the causes differ. The children of illegal Mexican immigrants stay home with their grandmothers. The 13 million children in Africa or Asia, who have lost one or both parents to AIDS, often live with their grandparents, if they are living. As reflected in New York’s kinship community, in the United States, because of alcohol/drug abuse, incarceration, abuse, neglect and abandonment, more than 5 million children live with their relatives, mostly grandparents.

As declared at the international grandparent summit, our traditions clearly provide one common answer. Grandparents are the natural protectors of children. They are the one unifying force that crosses borders, religious sectarianism and all other divisions. The world’s grandparents love their grandchildren. If that common love of grandchildren could

become a common love of children, then the power of every grandparent—unconditional love—becomes the unifying power for the benefit of all children.

Today, in many countries grandparents live longer and have greater wealth and leisure than ever before. In their ranks are many of the world’s government and business leaders. Grandparents have the power, the resources and the skills to lead a united effort. If grandparents want a normal world for their grandchildren, then they must assume responsibility for the world’s children because if so many children are denied normalcy, a normal world will cease to exist. With such high stakes, the role of grandparents as advocates ceases to be whimsical and hardens into a concrete necessity. We can all hope that the National Committee succeeds, just as New York’s stakeholders succeed, in awakening policymakers to the invaluable natural resource that is universally abundant—New York’s and the world’s grandparents. 🌿



*Trail in the
Phillipinkill Preserve*

🌿 *Gerald Wallace, Esq. is the Director of the Kincare Support Project at Albany Law School and the NYS Kinship Navigator Program at Catholic Family Center in Rochester. See www.nysnavigator.org for information about New York’s kinship laws. E-mail gwall@albanylaw.edu for more information about New York’s efforts to assist kinship families. For information on the recent international summit, see www.grandparentsforchildren.org.*

What goes into regionalism

By Rocco Ferraro

Yesterday...Today...Tomorrow. Yesterday it was the “Collar City,” “Electric City,” “Capital City” and the “Spa City.” Today it is the “Capital Region” and “Tech Valley.” What about Tomorrow? Will tomorrow bring the elimination of our individual cities, towns and villages by consolidation into one regional governmental structure? I think this is unlikely.

Are there opportunities for collaboration, consolidation and coordination of services among these municipalities, as well as among school districts, fire districts, and water and sewer districts, to name a few? This is definitely possible.

Though the individual communities in the Capital Region will and should retain their individuality and historical roots, it is imperative that we define the region as one and pinpoint ways to more efficiently and economically provide services to its residents.

Seniors have a lot at stake over how far we go with regionalism. They pay local taxes often on a fixed income and many depend on efficient and effective delivery of public services.

“Seniors have a lot at stake over how far we go with regionalism. They pay local taxes often on a fixed income and many depend on efficient and effective delivery of public services.”

In 2000, there were 111,000 persons aged 65 and over in the Capital Region (Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties); by 2030 that number will increase by 48% to 164,000. Whereas in 2000, persons 65 and over represented only 13.9% of the population, by 2030 they will represent 18.9% of the Region’s population. We need not wait until 2030 to see a significant increase; by 2020 there will be over 142,000 persons 65 and over, representing 16.8% of the population.

Government coordination and collaboration, and, where appropriate, consolidation represent not only opportunities for significant cost savings, but also for enhanced service delivery systems that will benefit older Americans. However, in order to effect significant changes in governmental organization, patience is required since relationships evolve over time and we have literally centuries of history to overcome.

The push and pull for regionalization

Let me share with you the forces at work in the push and pull for regionalism. A key force is New York’s long tradition of Home Rule. That is, each of the cities, towns, villages and an

array of special districts have primary responsibility to deliver specifically defined services to their residents.

There is a cost to Home Rule. Property taxes in New York State are 60% higher than the national average. In many cases, the cost to provide services and materials is increasing at a much faster rate than the increase in the population and inflation. Seeking out regional solutions and opportunities to address common problems can result in a more cost-efficient delivery system. Why not develop partnerships that result in the efficient use of resources which positively impact the “bottom line?” The public should understand why there is resistance to what appears to be common-sense cost saving measures.

“Seeking out regional solutions and opportunities to address common problems can result in a more cost-efficient delivery system.”

First, there is the factor of accessibility for citizens. We like the idea of being able to contact our municipal leaders. In smaller units of government, they are identifiable, available, and very much like us. Then there is accountability. If not satisfied, the buck stops at the mayor’s or supervisor’s office! And if they are not responsive, there is always the next election cycle, in many cases just two years away. Can we be assured of the same access and accountability under a government or service delivery structure that involves a multitude of entities sharing resources?

This brings us to control. There is a concern that “regionalizing” programs and services will result in a loss of local control and a decline in the quality of services: the “winners” and “losers” syndrome. Why should I share my services with someone else? It may cost me the same and I get less in service; worse yet, it is going to cost me more, and I will be receiving less. Or, will I have to travel further to receive the service since it may be centralized at one location?

Then, of course, there is the matter of who will provide the service? Similar to elected officials, in many cases, an individual in a city, town or village knows the service provider. How will they be absorbed into a larger bureaucracy of regional government and will there be job losses from consolidation of services? Who will have authority over the employees?

Finally, will the consolidation effort result in a loss of community identity? As noted earlier, we have a great deal of history and individuality associated with our communities. It provides a sense of security that we prefer to retain.

Opportunities for regionalization

Despite the obstacles, there are opportunities for collaboration and shared services. During the Pataki administration, a Shared Municipal Services Incentive Program was established to

provide financial support for shared service programs, cooperative agreements, mergers and consolidations, and dissolution of towns and villages. It was a good start in the right direction. The program is being expanded by Governor Spitzer. In addition, he has appointed a task force to investigate government consolidation and collaboration. No doubt there are a range of community benefits to be gained, including the efficient use of resources and economies of scale. But as noted above, there are legitimate concerns and possibly tradeoffs.

Lest we get too discouraged, the Capital Region has already taken on a few initiatives that are truly regional in nature. A good example is the education and outreach effort associated with the Medicare Part D program. It was a regionally driven initiative. Rather than each county developing its own materials, resources were pooled and a regional strategy was coordinated and implemented through the Elder Network of the Capital Region.

"Despite the obstacles, there are opportunities for collaboration and shared services."

In terms of bricks and mortar projects, there is the Secure Juvenile Detention facility. Many of you may not be familiar with the facility, but it houses children 16 and under in a secure environment until their Family Court cases can be adjudicated. In the early 1990s, it was determined that such a facility was needed in the Capital Region, but it was not cost-effective for any one county to build it. After several years of planning, the facility opened in 1997 and is an excellent example of the four Capital Region counties jointly owning and operating a facility through the creation of a not-for-profit Board.

Another example is the Combined Sewer Overflow study currently underway. Six communities, known as the Albany Pool communities (Albany, Watervliet, Green Island, Cohoes, Troy and Rensselaer), along with the Albany and Rensselaer County Sewer Districts, are working together to identify the problems and appropriate solutions associated with stormwater overflow discharges into the Hudson River.

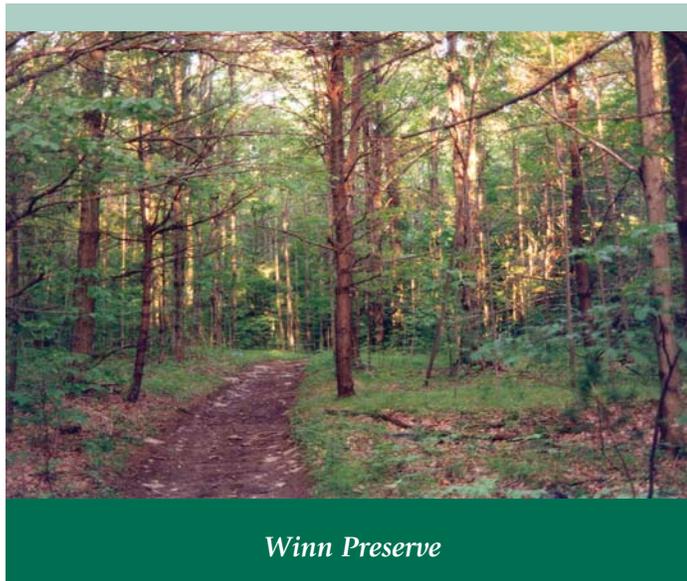


Wolf Creek Preserve

There is a growing recognition that through partnerships, cost-efficient regional solutions to common problems can be realized.

New with the old

The history of our communities is one of our greatest assets that should be promoted and embraced. Just as individuals, a community should proudly display and never forget its “roots.” However, just as important is the need to move forward and embrace new ideas to enhance the quality of life of the Region’s residents of all ages. These are not mutually exclusive concepts. In a Region steeped in history and tradition, it requires patience and an understanding of the opportunities and constraints in order to successfully establish a win-win situation for all residents. We’ve made some initial progress, but there is a long way to go. We must continue to communicate with each other in order to develop the trust necessary to define effective regional solutions to sustain the social, economic and environmental viability of the Capital Region. If not for us, then for our children and our children’s children. 🌿



🌿 *Rocco Ferraro, AICP, is the Executive Director of the Capital District Regional Planning Commission. He has over 30 years of planning experience ranging from neighborhood to regional planning in both the public and private sectors. Mr. Ferraro is also an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Geography & Planning, at the University at Albany. He can be contacted at Rocky@cdrpc.org.*

Personal Essay

A committee of one

By Diane Cameron

I work in community programs. I know the language of contemporary aging: demographic bump, NORC, dual-eligible health insurance, co-housing, medication reconciliation. I can talk about the factors that impact urban and community planning for an aging population. I follow the constant procession of panels, conferences and task forces. We wrestle the legal issues and the economic constraints to the ground.

But then I go home from work and talk to my friends, especially women who are near my age—54—and I laugh. We sound like the women we swore we'd never be. We answer, "How are you?" with a summary of physical complaints and medical updates. Oh, we still think we are not our mothers. After all, we go to many doctors not just one, and some of our healthcare is alternative or beyond.

"We are insistent that community is better, that the group is preferred and that one must age and die fully distracted by companions."

Most of us have been to some kind of self-help group. If we haven't been personally we've certainly learned the lingo by osmosis: Progress not perfection, one day at a time. We talk, we laugh, we joke about our kind, the Baby Boomers of whom the research says we won't even answer when called that name. Nope, we are the largest group to age together in U.S. history but we won't come when called unless you call us one at a time. I'm special, damn it.

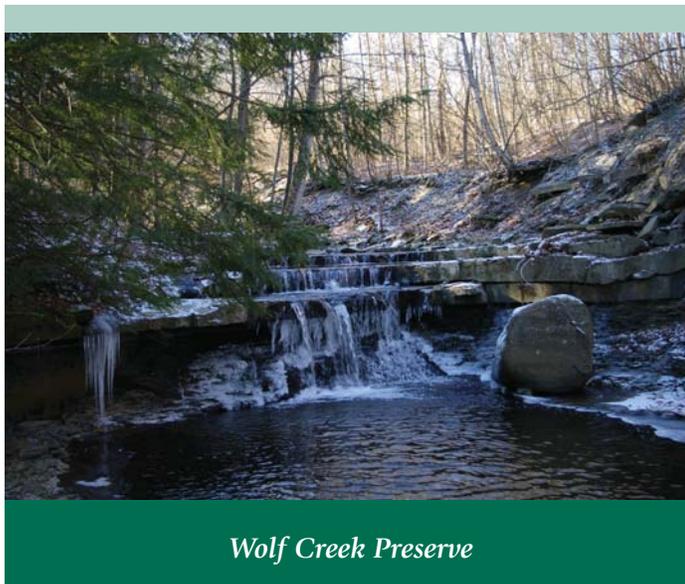
Then at the end of the day I go for my walk, (aerobic, weight-bearing, 30 minutes, four times a week) alone. I close the door, turn off the computer and get off the phone and again: I'm alone. I do my evening ablutions with costly applications of hope-in-a-jar. But sometimes while stroking up or down, or switching to the product for eyes or the one for throat, I see my real face, and just for a second—while shaking out the Ambien or the Melatonin—I hear my own heart. I stop and look in the mirror. Even with a loving spouse in the next room I get it: I'm alone.

That's what we neglect to talk about in aging circles. It is the thing that we are able to keep at bay most of the day, and it is what we claim to not be and to not want to be. But we are. Alone.

Oh, we know the sound bites and the grantspeak. We talk of community with its benefits and pluses. We can harmonize on this one: Reducing loneliness results in better health and extended life. We are not supposed to bowl alone or want to. We inundate nursing homes

with kids and dogs and folk singers and, God help us, mimes and clowns, so that no one should notice that they are alone.

We think we can plan and convene our way to staying alive forever. Of course, we know better. Except we don't. Even here, in magazines like this, where public intellectuals and social scientists weigh in, there is a tone of intervention and solution. We are insistent that community is better, that the group is preferred and that one must age and die fully distracted by companions.



Wolf Creek Preserve

But is that really what's best or just another form of denial? What if it's okay to age in solitude? What if this last third of our lives—the Third Age—requires aloneness, and even some loneliness, to process the most relevant fact in all the research on aging: We are gonna die.

No amount of friendly visits or assurance calls can take away that essential fact. Sit with it for just a few breaths and you get the rest of the story: We need to be alone as we age. We need to do the work of aging which requires reducing the distractions—and companions—so we can assess who and how we really are.

"What if this last third of our lives—the Third Age—requires aloneness, and even some loneliness, to process the most relevant fact in all the research on aging: We are gonna die."

Let's give loneliness some credit. Let's recognize its purpose. We don't get out of here alive, and we don't go in groups. Is that scary? Maybe, but—I'll appeal to Boomer narcissism: Don't we want to die well?

We do, especially those of us aging now, who believe we can do anything better. "Ha, ha," our hollow laugh again; "Oh, Boomers think they can cure or at least reform death." We like to imagine that we're laughing the self-deprecating laugh which suggests we know the truth. But we don't. We keep rearranging the deck chairs.

I heard it again this week, someone my age who said, "If I knew I was going to die, I would..." And I think, "You don't know you're going to die?"

Is this depressing? Only if you don't sit still long enough. Only if you believe that urban planning and advances in medicine can remedy the deepest truth of human life: We are born and we die. But there is liberation in this. I swear there is. All of us over 50 know the words to "Me and Bobby McGee." Hum along with Janis Joplin late at night in that truck, "Freedom's just another word for..."

We have nothing left to lose. That's the good news and it's what you come to when you get quiet and still and yes, alone. That's when we get to make genuine choices for ourselves and our families and yes, even for our community. Discernment—personal and political—comes from that deep and uncomfortable place. It's a place we only, finally, have the muscle for when we're older.

"Let's give loneliness some credit. Let's recognize its purpose."

But you can't get there in committees or through group process. You can't get there through legislation, the right housing or a new medical treatment. You really do have to bowl alone.

This may be heresy for someone committed to building a caring community, but it's not all or nothing. We are alone and we are in community. In fact, we can only create true community after we have accepted being alone.

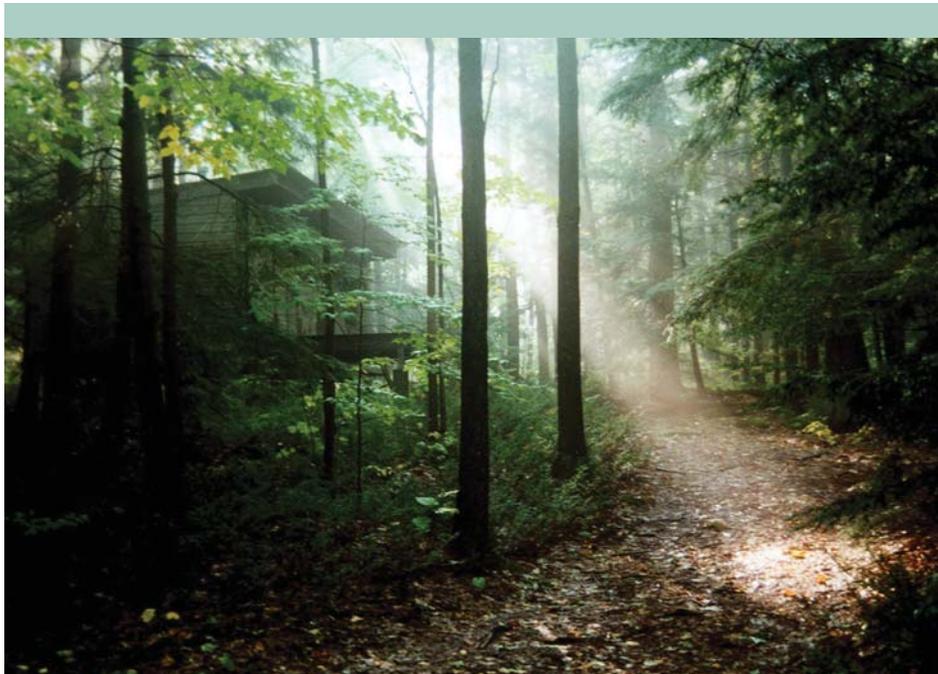
The truth is in the paradox. That shouldn't surprise anyone over 50. Familiarity with paradox, and the creeping realization of aloneness, are what drive our search for spiritual connection as we age. And that typically arrives—the like AARP letter—right after your 50th birthday. Some of us hear this alarm sooner, some later. The call that goes out to all of us eventually turns us toward a search for meaning, but in our culture that gets harder to answer because we have pseudo-meaning packaged for us.

Want to search for self? You can go on a pilgrimage to holy places led by "the world's best professors," with gourmet meals thrown in. Or you can participate in unlimited personal growth workshops and Elderhostel till your comfort shoes wear out. But one morning, walking alone, you might see the light hit a tree a certain way and feel a rush of grief and joy so powerful it takes your breath away. Then you know: Life is short.

So how, as we consider aging in our community, do we factor this in? How do we address the importance of aloneness without forming a committee? Please no task force on Aging and the Meaning of Life.

We do need radical changes in our systems—housing, employment, healthcare, yes. But the most radical change we need is this: Don't confuse theory with reality. And don't confuse planning with living.

You have the mirror and that tree in slanted light. This is where we begin. 🌿



Winn Preserve

🌿 *Diane Cameron is a writer, teacher and director of Community Caregivers in Albany, N.Y. Her e-mail address is Diane@Communitycaregivers.org*

Protecting human health in neighborhoods and communities

By Kathy Sykes

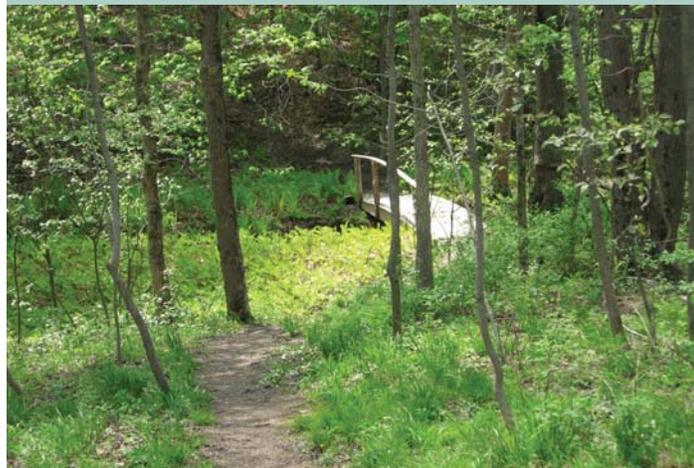
The nation's environmental agenda continues to expand, especially with regard to human health and well-being. Let me share with you some background on why aging matters to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"The mission of EPA is to protect both human health and the environment."

Powell Lawton, a leading gerontologist, conducted seminal research about the relationship between one's environment and well-being. His work led to the development of assessment tools designed to guide planners in their efforts to create appropriate indoor environments for persons with declining capacity. Lawton's pioneering work is largely responsible for enlightened design of facilities for older people, facilities that enable them to feel safe but not overly controlled. In some respects, Powell's insights have evolved into one aspect of what we are today calling smart growth.

What Lawton did for the indoor environment, smart growth can do for our neighborhoods and communities. Those devoted to creating healthy communities should study Lawton's findings about the nexus of people and their environments, about enabling persons of any age, but especially the frail and vulnerable people, to remain active, safe from environmental hazards, and working to keep their communities vibrant and safe.

As we learn more about how environmental hazards affect our health, we need to find ways to minimize exposure to these hazards. The mission of EPA is to protect both human health and the environment.



Footbridge at Phillipinkill Preserve

In November 2002, EPA announced a concerted effort to address the needs of the older adult population. Two years later, EPA's Aging Initiative announced a grant opportunity for "Protecting the Health of Older Adults by Improving the Environment." Among the 19

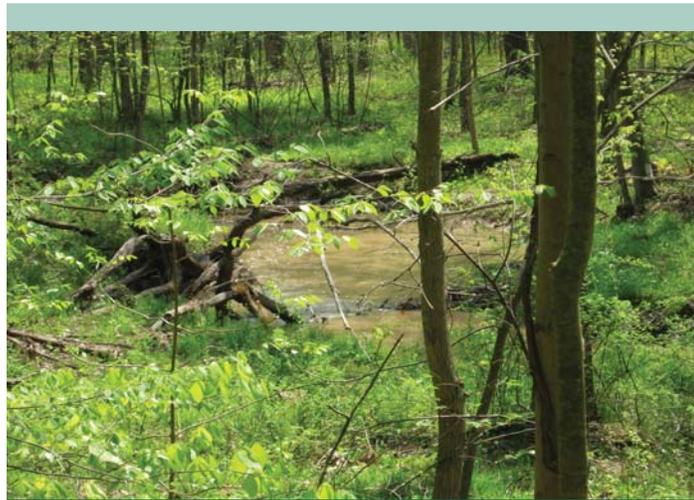
funded proposals, five set out to demonstrate how smart growth activities could improve the quality of life for older adults while improving environmental quality.

“Important work will be done at the community level as leaders raise awareness not only about threats to the environment, but also about the relationship between the environment and health.”

It may take some head scratching to understand the connections between smart growth and aging, but the connections are there. Smart growth is a planning buzzword for controlling the spread of auto-dependent development away from cities and traditional suburbs by, in part, revitalizing urban areas to be more attractive and healthy places to live. If it understands it is a beneficiary, the older population can play a key role in making smart growth happen through its voice in the politics of communities and its decisions on where to live.

Active aging is one of the smart growth connections

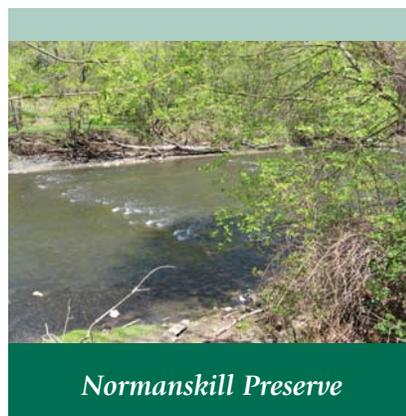
Only 20% of those over the age of 65 participate in regular activity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 80% of persons over 65 years of age live with at least one chronic condition. Furthermore, according to the Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, overweight and obesity are reaching epidemic proportions and soon they will pass smoking as a major cause of preventable disease and premature death. Research demonstrates daily physical activity is vital for keeping fit and controlling chronic conditions. Walkable communities, a smart growth objective, foster active aging.



Phillipinkill Creek

The benefits of a healthy, pollution-free, community are another connection. Older persons are a vulnerable population with respect to air and water pollution. Research has demonstrated links between where we develop and environmental degradation.

Here is one way development patterns affect air and water quality. Increases in impervious surfaces like highways and parking facilities needed for sprawl development result in more storm water runoff that may enter surface waters without being filtered through the soil. This often contributes to contaminants in drinking water. In addition, increasing distances between where people live, work and play can contribute to longer trips, increasing motor vehicle emissions and air pollution.



The aging population can be part of the problem if they migrate to greenfields at the edge of cities and towns where senior housing developments often are found. This requires additional and costly community infrastructure for water and sewer facilities along with the aforementioned reduction of environmental quality.

Smart growth practices resulting in walkable communities and shorter trips to work, to shop and to do other activities help protect the environment and the ability of people to maintain their independence as they age. The environment benefits and quality of life is enhanced.

Therefore, the EPA Aging Initiative and a coalition of federal and non-governmental partners recognized the importance of the aging population when it comes to the national environmental mission. While considerable attention has been paid to traditional risk factors predicting longevity and quality of life, the time is now for broadening our nation's attention to include the built environment, our communities.

Acting at the local level

While EPA strives to promote a healthy environment for older Americans through its own actions, it realizes the important work will be done at the community level as leaders raise awareness not only about threats to the environment, but also about the relationship between the environment and health.

EPA and its partners, the Centers for Disease Control, the President's Council for Fitness and Sports, the National Council on Aging's Center for Healthy Aging, Active for Life and the National Blueprint launched a web-based tool that can serve as a resource for planners dedicated to maintain and build healthy communities for active aging.

In May 2007, EPA announced that applications for commitment and achievement awards for municipalities, counties and tribes that are Building Healthy Communities for Active

Aging will be accepted. By awarding grants to communities for excellence in both smart growth and active aging, EPA and its partners will, in effect, help to spread the news about what communities can do to achieve the designation as a healthy community that cares about older persons and their shared environment.

For more information on Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging, see www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards/index.htm. For general information on EPA's Aging Initiative, see www.epa.gov/aging. 



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IMAGES. Each issue of CCQ will use images of people, architecture and natural features that make the Capital Region special. The cover, for example, has images of features of the State Capitol, Schoharie Creek Preserve and the 18th century Johnson Map. This issue highlights the natural settings protected by the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy.

CREDITS. The middle picture on the cover is the "Schoharie Creek Preserve" by Dan Driscoll. Other photographs by Dan Driscoll are "Building a kiosk on Bennett Hill," "Hikers on Bennett Hill," "Holt Preserve," "Winn Preserve," and "Wolf Creek Preserve." Photographs by Jill Knapp are "Trail in the Phillipin Preserve," "Footbridge at Phillipinkill Preserve," "Phillipinkill Creek," and "Normanskill Preserve." Photograph of the Capitol on the cover is by Jill Malouf.

CCQ is available in pdf format on [Http://www.albanyguardiansociety.org](http://www.albanyguardiansociety.org)

Organizations and their web sites that may be of interest to CCQ readers

Albany County Department of Aging

<http://www.albanycounty.com/departments/aging>

Albany Roundtable

<http://www.albanyroundtable.com>

American Library Council

<http://www.lff.org/about>

Capital District Regional Planning Commission

<http://www.cdrpc.org>

Civic Ventures

<http://www.civicventures.org>

Community Foundation for the Capital Region

<http://www.cfcrr.org>

Elder Network of the Capital Region

<http://www.albany.edu/aging/ENCR>

Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Buffalo Branch

http://www.newyorkfed.org/aboutthefed/buffalo_branch.html

Fulton County Office for the Aging

<http://www.fcfa.org>

Generations United

<http://www.gu.org>

Global Action on Aging

<http://www.globalaging.org>

Government Law Center at Albany Law School

http://www.albanylaw.edu/sub.php?navigation_id=668

Grantmakers in Aging

<http://www.giaging.org>

Greene County Office for the Aging

<http://www.greenegovernment.com/departments/aging/index.htm>

New York State Office for the Aging

<http://www.aging.state.ny.us>

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/olli/national>

Rensselaer County Department for the Aging

http://www.rensco.com/departments_familyservices.asp

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

<http://www.rpi.edu>

Rockefeller Institute

<http://www.rockinst.org>

Sage Colleges

<http://www.sage.edu>

Saratoga County Office for the Aging

<http://www.co.saratoga.ny.us/aindex.html>

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services

www.schenectadycounty.com

Schoharie County Office for the Aging

<http://www.schohariecounty-ny.gov/CountyWebSite/OfficefortheAging/ofaservices.jsp>

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

<http://www.scaany.org>

Town of Colonie

<http://www.colonie.org>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Aging Initiative

<http://epa.gov/aging>

University Albany School of Public Health

<http://www.albany.edu/sph>

University Albany School of Social Welfare

<http://www.albany.edu/ssw>

United Way of the Greater Capital Region

<http://www.unitedwaygcr.org>

Warren County Office for the Aging

<http://www.co.warren.ny.us/ofa>

Washington County Office for the Aging

<http://www.co.washington.ny.us/Departments/Ofa/ofa1.htm>

Our Mission

Albany Guardian Society continues to seek opportunities to improve the quality of life for seniors as we carry out our Mission.

- The mission of Albany Guardian Society is to engage in a broad spectrum of endeavors that will improve the quality of life for seniors.
- We will devote funding to develop and support services for seniors.
- We will create an environment that will maintain the growth of creative and innovative ideas.
- We will fund the exchange of information to enable interested parties to learn how to create a better standard of living for our elders.
- We will attract additional resources to increase the impact we can make as we remain mindful of our mission to serve the elderly.