

Issue No. 3 • Vol. 2 • October 2008



☒ Opportunity

☒ Experience

☒ Ideas

- This issue:**
- Strengthening the Connections Between People and the Land
  - Looking at Life as a Set of Sequential Episodes
  - Retirement Leads to Civic Engagement
  - Stuff—or Thoughts on Downsizing
  - The State Bar Association Plans to Face the Needs of Senior Lawyers Facing the Prospect of Retirement

## Table of Contents



Issue No. 3 • Vol. 2 • October 2008



01. **Publisher's Corner**

04. **Editor's Column**

06. **Feature Organization**

**Columbia Land Conservancy: Strengthening the Connections Between People and the Land**

*By Liz Bradford*

Columbia County has a rich agricultural heritage and beautiful landscape that the community-based Columbia Land Conservancy has been working to protect for more than two decades. It has evolved into one of the most successful land trusts in the country.

08. **Looking at Life as a Set of Sequential Episodes**

*By Robert J. Kafin*

During his forty-two year legal career, Robert Kafin specialized in environmental law in the upstate city of Glens Falls and went on to be the Chief Operating Partner and now General Counsel of a major Manhattan law firm. As he approaches the required scaling down as an active partner in his law firm, Kafin shares his thoughts on a sequential model for working life.

11. **Retirement Leads to Civic Engagement**

*By Jeffrey Swain*

ESCOT, a volunteer organization in the Capital Region, recruits and deploys professional volunteer consultants to improve the local community by strengthening service organizations. Retiree Jeffrey Swain stays connected through his association with ESCOT. He describes the organization and his current work to take this experience to the next level.

15. **Stuff—or Thoughts on Downsizing**

*Personal Essay by Mary Armao McCarthy*

Mary McCarthy discusses the challenges of downsizing and reducing clutter and, in the end, tells us what the "true treasures" are.

18. **The State Bar Association Plans to Face the Needs of Senior Lawyers Facing the Prospect of Retirement**

*Guest Column by John Dunne*

The New York State Bar Association is developing an agenda for how "senior attorneys" who are retired or are contemplating retirement can better serve the public and strengthen the profession. John Dunne is participating in this process and offers a first-hand account of how one profession, attorneys, is addressing the many issues associated with "boomers coming of age."

## The Dynamics of Aging and Our Communities

### Publisher

**Richard Iannello**, Executive Director  
Albany Guardian Society  
12 Corporate Woods Blvd.  
Albany, NY 12211  
www.albanyguardiansociety.org  
director@albanyguardiansociety.org  
(518) 434-2140

### Editor

**Paul M. Bray**  
126 South Swan Street  
Albany, NY 12210  
pmb Bray@aol.com  
(518) 472-1772

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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.

ALBANY GUARDIAN SOCIETY  
12 Corporate Woods Blvd. • Albany, NY 12211  
Phone: (518) 434-2140



*Richard Iannello*

### **Boasting Rights**

Whenever a group of what I call aging-interested individuals gets together, conversations frequently lead to the question of “How many seniors live in a given neighborhood, town, city or state?” It seems as if everyone has the most elderly or the highest proportion of a given age group or the fastest growing population of seniors. Elected officials use these measurements to argue for additional funding from farther up the food chain. Agencies that serve a specific region use this logic path to explain why their agencies should receive additional financial support because they serve “the fastest growing or largest group of seniors in the area.” You know what I mean—it’s the grown-up equivalent of “My Dad is stronger than your Dad.” Certainly, in many instances, there is a hint of truth, but I’m afraid we have a Garrison Keillor thing going on similar to when he explains that in the fictional town of Lake Wobegon, ALL the children are above average.

In the Capital Region, we definitely have a lot of elderly citizens and our great State of New York has a lot of elderly citizens as well. But, how do we look when we compare our state with several other states? I’ve chosen to compare California, Texas, New York, and Florida, the four most populous states, respectively. I’ll spare you the work of looking this up on the U. S. Census Bureau’s Website and tell you that based upon the 2000 Census, the Census Bureau projected that California’s population in 2005 would be 36 million people and that its population would grow to 44 million by 2025. California’s age sixty-five and older population is expected to grow from 3.9 million to 7.3 million people.

Texas, the second most populous state, will grow from 22.7 million people to 30.8 million people. New York, with a projected 2005 population of 19.2 million, is expected to grow to 19.5 million by 2025. Florida, the destination state most of us think of when we contemplate retirees seeking a warm climate, is projected to grow from 17.5 million to 25.9 million people.

If we just look at people age sixty-five and over in these states, we see that California



*Drowned Lands Swamp Conservation Area*

grows from 3.9 million to 7.3 million seniors. Texas increases from 2.3 million to 4.5 million seniors while Florida grows from 3 million seniors to a projected 6.4 million seniors. New York grows from 2.5 million to 3.6 million seniors.

We can make a couple of general statements about this data. First, we need to understand that these other states are projected to have far greater numbers of seniors than we will. But, they also anticipate a corresponding growth in their overall populations while our projected growth rate is almost flat.

Let's start with some good news. Our projected growth in our senior population is considerably more "manageable" than in these other large states as we seek ways to adjust our aging services delivery system. California has a seriously big task in front of it.

Now for some bad news: The relatively flat projection in the non-elderly portion of our population means that workforce issues (meaning shortages) are going to be a real challenge to us. Out-migration may be playing a role here, but I'm not equipped to make a meaningful calculation of what that means for us.

I do see more good news for our state. Our projected increases are less meteoric than in these other states. This means that our solutions may not have to be as radical as what may unfold elsewhere. Or, on the other hand, I might argue that New York can be more creative in its quest to align need with resources for our seniors. Rather than invest mightily in buildings, we could invest in people. Our workforce is capable of meeting these challenges if we incentivize the right components. Training and retraining are critical. Our State University system can play a big role in our success if it is willing to listen to what our state needs and put into motion the programs that will help our workforce effectively rise to the coming challenge. Our use of technology is just gaining momentum. We expect high-tech solutions in our hospitals. Demand no less in our community-based services.

Community Empowerment, the subject of a two-day conference on November 12 and 13, 2008, in Saratoga Springs, New York, fits in here. Government cannot do it all. We have to engage civically.



*Access for All Trail, Greenport Conservation Area*

Fortunately, many of us already give back to our communities. We need to tell our stories to motivate others to follow. And while government can't do it all, it certainly can do something. Service organizations petition our government for funding; however, the dollars they seek are usually tied to old programs that are becoming increasingly unaffordable. Our government should support existing community-based delivery systems, and create new programs when needed, that are enormously less costly than institutional-based services and, coincidentally, are much preferred by the public.

In 1991, just 17 years ago, demographers and planners were looking at their population projections in an effort to structure a services delivery system that would be sized and featured to address today's world—our world in 2008. Nineteen ninety-one really isn't that long ago. You remember—the Giants won Super Bowl XXV, the Soviet Empire collapsed, the Dow rose above 3,000 for the first time ever, and a young governor from Arkansas announced he was seeking the Democratic nomination for the Presidency of the United States. The next 17 years will go by as quickly as the last 17 years—2025 will be here before we know it.

The next time you discuss population projections, don't boast about how large or fast your community's senior population is growing. Rather, invest your creative energy to promote changes to our services delivery system that will make it responsive yet affordable. Now that would be something to boast about. 🐉

*Rick Iannello*  
*Executive Director*  
*Albany Guardian Society*



*Borden's Pond Conservation Area*



*Paul M. Bray*

### **Time to Retire the Notion of Retirement**

A psychologist friend of mine, when I lived in Boston, told me there was no word in Danish for “frustration.” His wife was Danish so I assumed he wasn’t just pulling my leg. I thought how lucky the Danes were that they did not need a word for the feeling of being prevented from gratifying impulses or desires, what we see as being frustrated. I assume when the Danes are frustrated, they just keep trying or move on without the angst we feel.

In the light of the impact of words, I would like to strike “retirement” from our vocabulary. Retirement is thoroughly ingrained in our culture and thought patterns. Even before I started working, I was fully aware that when I got old I would withdraw from working. It is just the accepted pattern of life. I have come to increasingly wonder if this makes sense.

I am not thinking about the people who simply like to work or feel they need to work and will do so as long as they can find work to do. I mean, for example, if retirement is good, why should it be reserved for the aged? As we now think about life-long learning, isn’t it time for the young to start thinking about their lives holistically with the whole range of options available to be mapped in a personally preferred sequence that may be fulfilling from beginning to end?

There are biological forces at work such as when you are able to have children and when limits that go with aging set in. There are also financial considerations to take into account. But increasingly, there are opportunities at any age for schooling, career change, caring for others, traveling, and even dropping out of the workforce. What works for one person may not work for another. We shouldn’t feel there is a prescribed way that, for whatever reason, we have to follow. The notion of retirement tends to reinforce the sense that there is this prescribed way.

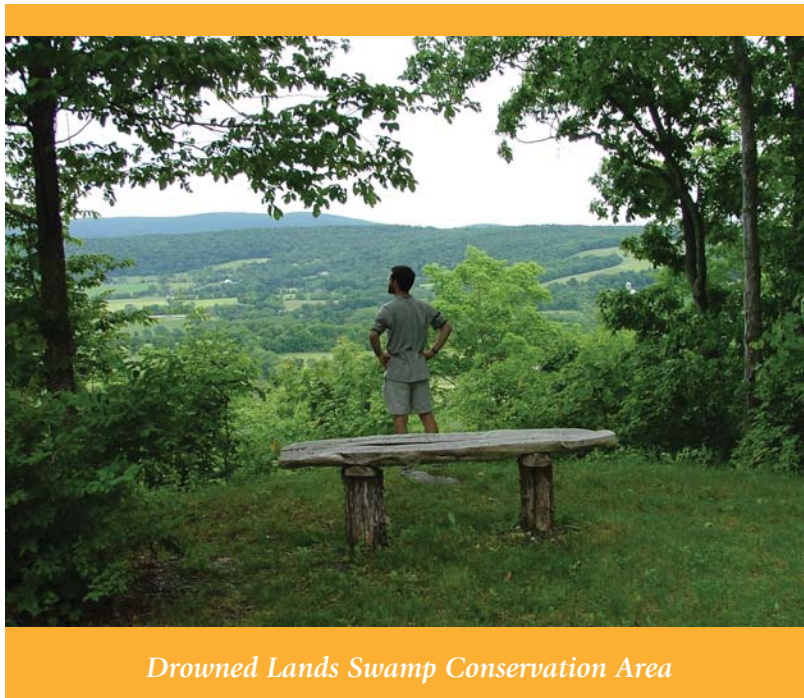
I suspect we are evolving toward the notion of retiring retirement. In the meantime, we are seeing efforts to reinvent retirement. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristoff wrote in July 2008 about “Geezers Doing Good” in talking about “a booming trend: the ‘encore career’ as a substitute for retirement.” Kristoff highlights a survey by an unnamed research institute finding that “half of boomers are interested in starting such new careers with a positive social impact.”

Attorney Robert Kafin gives his personal thoughts about “Looking at Life as a Set of Sequential Episodes” in this issue of CCQ. I share his belief that there is nothing wrong with the traditional retirement that reflects the similar experience of both of our fathers. Yet, we

also believe in realizing throughout life the personal motivators he identifies in his article: structure, action, accomplishment, and connection.

Kafin provides thoughtful background to the articles in this issue by Jeff Swain and John Dunne, both of whom are addressing how retirees may fulfill social roles in their retirement years.

Our conservation focus in this issue is the Columbia Land Conservancy. It has been protecting the rural landscape of Columbia County for twenty-two years. We also offer Mary McCarthy's personal essay on "stuff," something that plagues many of us. 🌿



*Drowned Lands Swamp Conservation Area*

🌿 *Paul M. Bray is an Albany attorney who is a lecturer in planning at the University of Albany, a columnist and founding President of the Albany Roundtable civic lunch forum. His e-mail address is [pmbay@aol.com](mailto:pmbay@aol.com).*

### **The Columbia Land Conservancy: Strengthening the Connections Between People and the Land**

*By Liz Bradford*

Columbia County is situated southeast of Albany, stretching roughly from Kinderhook and Stuyvesant in the northwest corner down to Ancram in the southeast. Rich in agricultural heritage and natural beauty, it is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts of all stripes. There is hiking, fishing, bird watching, boating, and a great deal of scenic open space, habitat, and diverse ecosystems.

The Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC) is dedicated to ensuring that these qualities endure. From its inception in 1986, the Conservancy has grown from a bare-bones volunteer group to one of the most successful land trusts in the country. Having just completed a five-year strategic plan, CLC is entering its third decade with a renewed focus and sense of mission.

A community-based land trust, CLC's staff of 19 uses a variety of strategies to conserve farms, forests, and wildlife habitats in Columbia County and supports the agricultural economy. It also strives to strengthen the connection between people and the land, primarily through public outreach and education programs and a system of publicly accessible properties.

"At CLC, we take a community-based approach to conservation," notes Executive Director Peter Paden. "We actively seek to engage the public in our work and respond to the conservation needs expressed by the people who live here in Columbia County."

This approach is perhaps best reflected in the organization's walks, talks and hands-on workshops conducted at the six Public Conservation Areas (PCAs) maintained by the CLC (soon to be nine with openings scheduled this fall). This system of public lands is similar to other nature preserves and parks found throughout the Capital Region, with a strong emphasis on the human experience. Open daily from dawn to dusk, these properties are available for everyone to enjoy, free of charge.

Situated throughout the county, these areas provide a wide variety of landscapes and habitats to explore. At the High Falls Conservation Area in Philmont, you can fish, enjoy a picnic, and see Columbia County's highest waterfall cascading over 150 feet into a crystal pool. Hand Hollow in New Lebanon has over 300 acres of streams, wetlands, and two and a half miles of nature trails. The Greenport Conservation Area, just north of the City of Hudson, features more than 700 acres of woods and fields on the Hudson River shore with some four miles of trails throughout.

A special feature of the Greenport PCA is a mile-long wheelchair-accessible trail, providing visitors of all ages and physical abilities access to spectacular views of the Hudson River. The "Access for All" trail is the first of its kind along the Hudson River. The accessible trail benefits senior citizens, people with mobility impairments, people who are blind or visually

impaired, and families with young children in strollers, giving them all the opportunity to participate in events like the “Rolling Ramble” (part of this year’s annual Hudson River Valley Ramble) or to just take a stroll.


In addition, CLC protects private property with *conservation easements*, which are voluntary agreements with individual landowners that protect the natural resources of the property in perpetuity. The land remains on the tax rolls and can be sold or leased, but future development is limited. CLC now holds donated conservation easements on more than 20,000 acres of some of the county’s best agricultural, scenic, and natural lands, a number that grows every year.

CLC also works with farmers to find new ways to support local agriculture—arranging land leases and providing advice on conservation programs. CLC has helped secure state funding (about \$6 million to date) through the NYS Farmland Protection Program for the purchase of development rights on 5,300 acres of agricultural lands. CLC also assists local town boards and community groups with grant writing, zoning issues, and development proposals with an eye toward progressive land use practices. Protecting the county’s rural heritage and improving the quality of life for the population can go hand-in-hand; sound land use plans are not just for today’s residents, but for their children and grandchildren as well.

CLC relies on over 200 volunteers and has volunteer opportunities available for everyone from adolescents to seniors. Options are available for trail building and maintenance, assisting at events, monitoring conservancy properties, serving as a co-educator, or helping with mailings at the office. Volunteers allow CLC to serve as a “community” resource in the truest sense of the word.

Every facet of the community benefits from CLC’s programs: tourism can expect a boost from new recreational areas, local residents can be confident that wilderness habitats and scenic open spaces will be conserved for future generations and that a secure land base will remain available for farming, and towns are assisted in developing sound land use policies that support the rural way of life that helps define Columbia County.

To learn more about CLC’s work, volunteer opportunities, the schedule of public education programs, or for directions to its wonderful public conservation areas, visit CLC’s Website at [www.clctrust.org](http://www.clctrust.org), call (518) 392-5252, or stop by the office at 49 Main Street in the Village of Chatham. 

 *Liz Bradford is a member of the Columbia Land Conservancy staff and she provides assistance to the communications and outreach team.*

## Looking at Life as a Set of Sequential Episodes

By Robert J. Kafin

My father retired at age sixty-five from the Philadelphia School District where he had been a teacher and administrator for almost all of his adult life. Until his ninety-fifth year, the year following the death of my mother (to whom he had been married for sixty-five years) and also the year in which he died, he was healthy and active. And, he spent the last thirty years of his life playing golf, tennis, and bridge, and puttering around his home and neighborhood. He seemed happy and to have no regrets about having retired in the traditional sense of retirement with a complete withdrawal from “working” activities.

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*“However, for many individuals in good health, the route to personal satisfaction is rarely a one-lane highway to money.”*

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Many would say that such a pattern is the way life should be lived. For sure, for those with a secure pension or adequate net worth and no need to keep bringing in an income, traditional retirement at a traditional retirement age is a viable option. Many people seem satisfied taking that option. However, as the paradigm for a working life has changed from one career with one employer to a sequential one with the norm becoming multiple jobs over time, the idea of ending the sequence and going into a single form of retirement or withdrawal for a twenty-year period or more seems anomalous.

### Drivers of personal satisfaction

An alternative way of analyzing the sequential challenge is to determine what the drivers of personal satisfaction are and to be attuned enough to life changes to notice when circumstances modify those drivers. A conventional view might lead to the conclusion that if the primary motivator for a career was to earn money, and if the time arises when the availability of a pension or savings eliminates that driver, then perhaps it is perfectly appropriate to announce “satisfaction accomplished” and move into retirement where “work” is no longer on the agenda. However, for many individuals in good health, the route to personal satisfaction is rarely a one-lane highway to money. It is usually a more complex mixture of motivations. Eliminating or diminishing the force of one does not take away the others, although it may alter the order of priority.

I suggest for many people there are four other significant contributors to personal satisfaction, beyond the need to earn money. They cannot be served by leaving work and going into a single form of retirement for an extended period of time. These are: the need for structure, the need for action, the need for accomplishment, and the need for connection with others through shared goals. To be sure, one size does not fit all. My list is not exclusive; there

are other personal motivators. And, for some, filling one's days with entertainment and recreation can be adequately satisfying. But, merely falling, without examination, into the old formula for retirement is to squander the opportunity to consider the potential to move into a new life development stage that comes with the end of one job or career—or the opportunity to bring them to an end.

To look briefly at the four personal motivators that seem poorly served by traditional retirement, one sees:

- **Structure:** there is something satisfying about having a schedule or an agenda, an office or workshop, a part of one's day that differentiates it from other parts.
- **Action:** the human body and mind are wired to stay in motion, and all the evidence proves that the sedentary life is not a good or happy one, nor is the one without significant mental stimulation.
- **Accomplishment:** most people need tangible objectives to energize them and provide personal satisfaction. Even in "play," humans seem more interested when the outcome is a score, a victory, or some other measurable result.
- **Connection:** while family and other qualities that promote affinity enable interaction with other persons, working with others with whom one shares a common purpose has always been especially rewarding, and I have noticed people seem to derive more pleasure in participating in a team activity than even in social and family gatherings.

For the healthy and financially secure individual whose job or career is coming to an end by reason of mandatory retirement, boredom, or burn-out, there can and should be a new season in which one's personal motivators and sources of satisfaction can be reexamined and reset and one's personal energy flow can be rerouted into different activities responsive to the needs identified in the reexamination. For some period of time, I would suggest, those activities will resemble traditional work as that is where one most readily finds structure, action, accomplishment, and others with whom to share purposeful activity. The alternatives to be considered surely should include:

- **Keep on truckin'!** In some walks of life, and the professions of accounting, law, and medicine come readily to mind, it is possible to keep doing what you have been doing if it was fun and satisfying. It might be at a different pace, or in a different place, or with a different orientation, but there is nothing perverse or "workaholic" about extending one's professional life by continuing to use acquired skills and experience in a workplace that remains personally rewarding. In fact, with the economic pressure off, it might be possible to concentrate on the elements that drew you to your career in the first place and shuck off the less-pleasing baggage that came with management responsibilities or economic requirements in mid-life.

- **Take a different road.** While few can or want to write the Great American Novel, many people have ideas about other things they wish they had been able to do, but which events, family pressures, economic needs, and other circumstances prevented them from doing. In a new season of life, there may be the opportunity to open the shop or business you always dreamed about having for those with an unsatisfied entrepreneurial bent or take up employment in a different field.
- **Shift your gears.** Take your skills and experience into the non-profit sector where there are opportunities to serve others who have needs not met by for profit businesses. There is a whole range of ways in which one can embark on a season of service, from part-time volunteering, to enlisting in an “executive corps” organization that supplies executives and professionals to coach non-profit managers, to full time work in a non-profit organization (either for compensation or not).


Longer life spans open up huge opportunities for exploring ways to reroute one’s personal energy flows when the time comes to consider leaving or changing the job or career that one had been in. It is not really “What should I do with the rest of my life?” as it is “What should I do next?” Looking at life as a set of sequential episodes may be a better way to approach one’s more senior years than settling for a traditional long-term retirement or withdrawal from “work.”

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*“Longer life spans open up huge opportunities for exploring ways to reroute one’s personal energy flows when the time comes to consider leaving or changing the job or career that one had been in.”*

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 Robert J. Kafin is a partner in a 750 attorney law firm headquartered in Manhattan. Over his forty-two years as a lawyer, he has refreshed his career several times, both geographically (having two episodes in New York City in a very large firm with sixteen years in the middle practicing in the small upstate city of Glens Falls) and substantively (having started as a corporate/securities lawyer, developing a concentration in environmental law, then moving into law firm leadership as Chief Operating Partner and now General Counsel of his current firm). Approaching a required 2010 scale down as an active partner, Bob is ratcheting-up his participation in not-for-profit organizations with an eye to beginning a new season of service when the one he is in sunsets.

## Retirement Leads to Civic Engagement

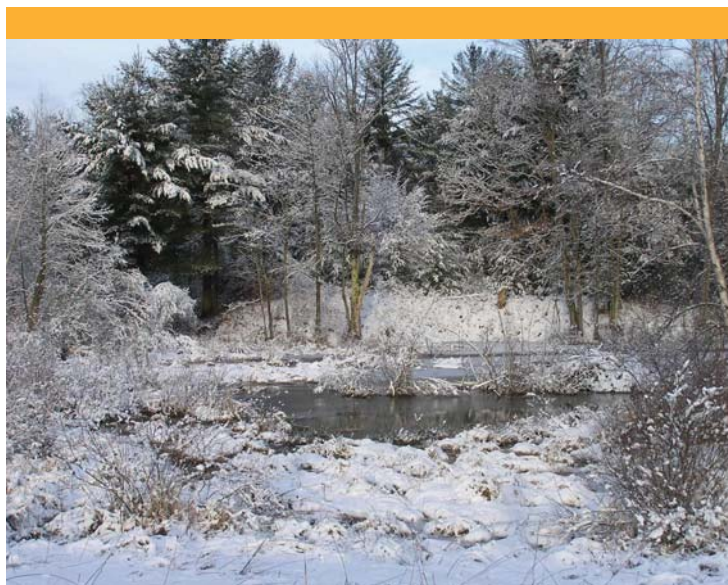
By Jeffrey Swain

This is a story about me and an organization with which I have become affiliated since my “retirement” from full-time work. I always put “retirement” in quotes because I believe it is a relative term, with a different meaning for each person. As far as my wife and I are concerned, retirement in the traditional sense is an oxymoron. For us, since we retired several years ago from public service careers, it has meant transitioning from working full-time to something else where we can contribute to the community, give back, have a sense of fulfillment, have our efforts appreciated, and “stay connected.” Of course, to be entirely honest, it has also meant more time for family, friends, and travel.

Shortly after my “retirement” from full-time employment, while deciding how best to “stay connected,” I had a serendipitous meeting with a former business colleague who introduced me to ESCOT (the acronym for Executive Service Corps of Tri-Cities, Inc.). ESCOT is a non-profit corporation with a twenty-year history in the Capital Region, and is an affiliate of ESCAN, the umbrella national corporation. I am now on ESCOT’s Board of Directors, and over the past several years have worked on five ESCOT consulting projects serving community-based non-profits.

But, I’m getting ahead of myself. Over the years of its existence, ESCOT has developed a very solid reputation as an experienced, affordable, and well-respected management consulting organization that recruits and deploys professional volunteer consultants.

ESCOT’S mission is “to assist not-for-profit organizations, governmental units and educational institutions solve operational issues and organizational problems by providing high-quality consulting services at minimal cost. Its volunteer consultations work to benefit the community by assisting these organizations in delivering effective service to their clients. In fulfilling this mission, ESCOT provides opportunities for rewarding community service for its corps of volunteers.”



*Hand Hollow Conservation Area*

For most of its twenty years, ESCOT had been an entirely volunteer organization, both board and consultants. Only recently a part-time executive director has been retained to help expand ESCOT's presence in the community. ESCOT's unique nature is largely that "retired" professionals have the opportunity to continue to use their substantial experiences and skills as volunteers in leadership-type consulting work. ESCOT's consultants have had long and distinguished careers with some of the Capital Region's leading non-profit organizations and government agencies. We volunteer our time to improve the local community by strengthening service organizations.

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*"The services offered allow the clients to gain access to the wisdom, dedication, and experience offered by the diverse group of volunteers."*

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### **Consulting services**

Consulting services are provided in a wide variety of areas including, but not limited to, the following: board development, fiscal practices/budgeting, human resources, management auditing, organizational development, strategic planning, employee training, information technology, and marketing. ESCOT charges clients a very modest fee for projects based on project size, project complexity, and ability to pay. The services offered allow the clients to gain access to the wisdom, dedication, and experience offered by the diverse group of volunteers. Typically, ESCOT consultants work in project teams of two to four persons depending on the project's size and scope and are reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses such as mileage and parking. Currently, ESCOT has the resources to undertake and complete between six and eight projects each year.

Feedback from the client organizations involved in the projects is the true test for the ESCOT consultants.



*Hand Hollow Conservation Area*

From among recently completed projects, the client representatives had these things to say: “Our agency was in need of some strategic guidance in organizational development of our long-term vision. ESCOT allowed our agency access to such services that had been otherwise unattainable due to budgetary limitations.” And, “with ESCOT’s help we formed a shared vision for our organization and the means to achieve it. The process was well-organized and we now have a clearer direction for the future.”

Sentiments like these are a part of what drew me to ESCOT in the first place. So what is it about ESCOT that engenders positive client feedback and is attractive to potential volunteers? It is well-organized in how it conducts its business; we recently completed the updating of our own strategic plan—a good thing to do if we are urging others to do the same; also, new volunteers are required to participate in a thorough orientation in ESCOT’s policies, procedures, and processes prior to being assigned to any project work. The Board of Directors is very committed and passionate about the mission, and not reluctant to check itself by inviting client organizations to give feedback, and by holding sessions for consultants to share experiences and discuss such questions as: What are client organizations seeking? What issues and trends are we encountering? What makes effective teamwork in the consulting group?

Annual meetings are held each year in the fall with a specific theme and provide ESCOT volunteers with a way of staying connected to some of the broader community issues. In the recent past, Judith R. Saidel, Executive Director, Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, and Teri Bordenave, President/CEO, Girls Incorporated® of the Greater Capital Region, reported on their findings in “High Tech Growth and Community Well-Being: Lessons Learned from Austin, Texas.” In another session, the theme was “Let’s Collaborate,” and the gathering heard from the United Way executives of the newly restructured United Way of the Greater Capital Region, as well as a panel of agency executives who discussed some of their experiences with inter-agency collaborations. These are vitally important discussions in these times of shrinking resources.

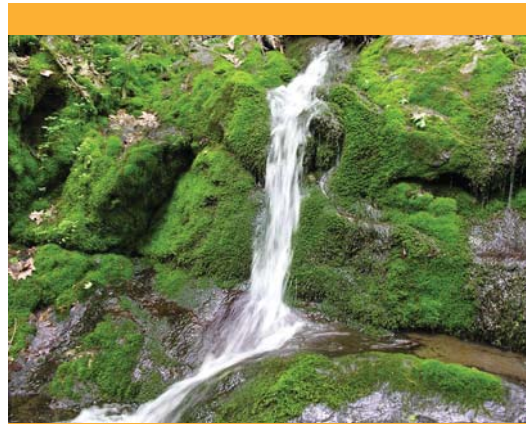
**Staying connected**

This brings me back to the beginning of the story; you can see why I’m affiliated with ESCOT, and



*High Falls Conservation Area*

am proud of the work we do. It has afforded me the opportunity to “stay connected,” use my skills and experience, meet new people, learn new things, contribute something of value to the clients, and, yes, even enhance my self-esteem when someone I respect says something nice about me. This is what Dr. Philip McCallion, Professor and Director of the Center for Excellence in Aging Services at the University at Albany School of Social Welfare, means when he refers to the principles of Civic Engagement. “These principles speak to our willingness to commit ourselves to assisting our communities with essential needs and moving beyond self to both identify and seek ways to address those needs. Through working in organizations that support the delivery of services or by volunteering in such organizations, each of us has come to recognize that our individual action can have a collective effect on the community if we choose to engage.”



*Round Ball Conservation Area*

It’s fitting that I close with those thoughts of Dr. McCallion since the Center for Excellence in Aging Services has recently launched a new effort called ExcelleShare, whose vision is “to establish a one stop Volunteer Resource and Support Center for leadership volunteer opportunities and capacity building assistance for non-profit and government agencies in the Capital Region, providing personal development, continued civic engagement, and innovative, up-to-date volunteer management models and techniques.” As I am now also working with this new initiative, I see it as having the potential to take the work of ESCOT and other similar programs to the next level of program development by establishing the one stop community location for both prospective leadership volunteers and community-based non-profits. ExcelleShare is in its early stages, but already there is good evaluative evidence that its vision can become a reality. 🦋

🦋 *Jeffrey Swain retired in 2003 as Deputy State Comptroller for the State and Local Retirement System. That position capped thirty-four years of commitment as a public servant both in the City of Rochester and for the State of New York. While in Rochester, Swain served as Commissioner of Recreation and Community Services, and Commissioner of Community Development.*

### Stuff—or Thoughts on Downsizing

By Mary Armao McCarthy

One of my goals this year is downsizing—carried over from the past year, decade, century. Like many of our friends, my husband and I are trying to reduce our waistlines and our clutter. The divesting process goes something like this:

- Tense hours in basements, attics and nether reaches of closets: *100% of downsizers*
- Desperate reading of self-help books: *Women only*
- Donations to Salvation Army and recycling to charities: *110% of downsizers*
- Garage sales: *40%*
- eBay: *15%*
- Rented dumpsters: *12%*
- Storage pods: *8%*
- Divorce afterwards: *3%*

Part of the challenge is that Acquisitions create energy whereas Divesting depletes it. Yes, there can be a surge once a Divesting Project is rolling, but working up to that bright place is an uphill climb. I am at the age where my energy level is dropping along with my jaw line and other assets. But, I am not a quitter. I eat some chocolate for vigor and try to make the most of its caffeine and sugar high to carry on.

My biggest challenge is to get my Beloved into our main storage area, the basement. His biggest challenge is to get past feeling that he does not need to be involved because I am responsible for every unneeded possession. I admit my fingerprints are on many items. His prints are concentrated on his train set and anything related to electronics.

I have developed a mathematical formula to answer the question, “*Where did all this stuff come from?*” It’s simple; I’ll explain:

$$[\text{Family of } 5] \times [2 \text{ items per month}] \times 12 \text{ months} \times 19 \text{ years} = 2,280 \text{ items}$$

After using this scientific analysis to clear my name of the title Acquisitions Queen, it took only five years to coax my husband, Kevin, into the basement for heavy lifting and major divesting. Among our treasures are baby clothes for children who now have offspring of their own, and eight boxes containing a fireplace system that we never installed.

I concede my stuff can get excessive. When I saw a display of immigrant baggage at Ellis Island, I realized that my grandparents started a new life in America with less stuff than I pack for a long weekend. My grandmother did make up for her limited luggage after she

settled in, and I now treasure her china collection. This makes downsizing harder as I try to draw a positive line between sharing heirlooms and foisting things off on the children. I don't want to deny future generations their due by discarding things indiscriminately.

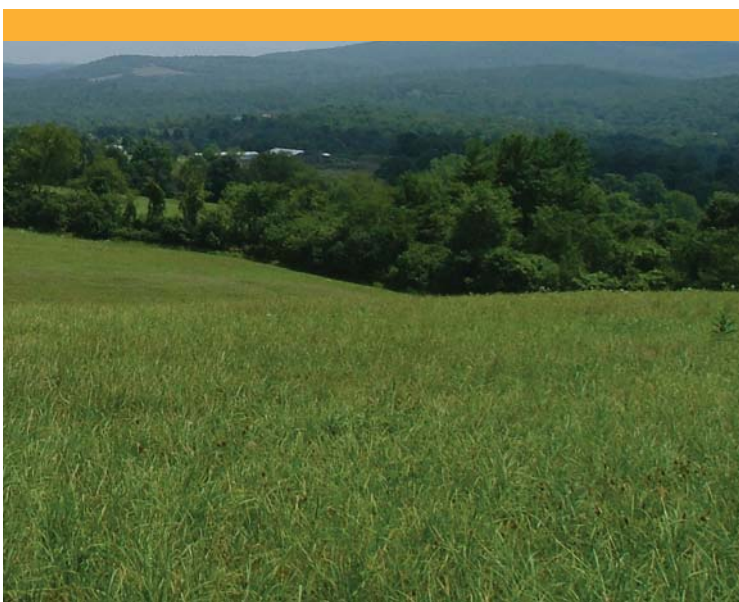
I'm convinced the adage that "as soon as you throw it away, you need it" is only true because if you had not just parted with the item, you would not remember it. It's all the sorting and deciding that creates stress. One of my daughters has recommended that instead of a garage sale, we pay people \$5 each to take away a bag full of things from our basement.

According to my self-help book, *Scaling Down*, "Once you are given a gift, it is yours to do with as you like." Despite this sage advice, it is hard for me to part with gifts, even those that do not suit. Guilt still lingers from giving away a sweater knit for me by a friend's mother. I fully expect that if our area has a winter blizzard where only the most well-prepared survive, I will be among the departed while the new owner of that sweater will be featured on the front page of the newspaper, saved by the warm knitting.

Too often, stuff wastes my time. When sorting or switching out seasonal clothes, I'm reminded of the old nursery rhyme, "*The King was in the counting house counting up his money.*" As a kid, I wondered why the king did that. Didn't he want to go out and play? Weren't there better things to do? Why did he count his stuff? And now I'm doing it. I'm trying to cut down and cut back, but it's a struggle.

In the tumble of our oversized basement is everything from seasonal items to my Wardrobe Hall of Fame hanging in wait for my Fantasy Weight Loss. There is a Basement Boutique of furniture from dearly departed relatives and children in transit. And, did I mention paper? There are yearbooks, diplomas, tax records, photographs, and newspapers from when JFK was assassinated and man first walked on the moon.

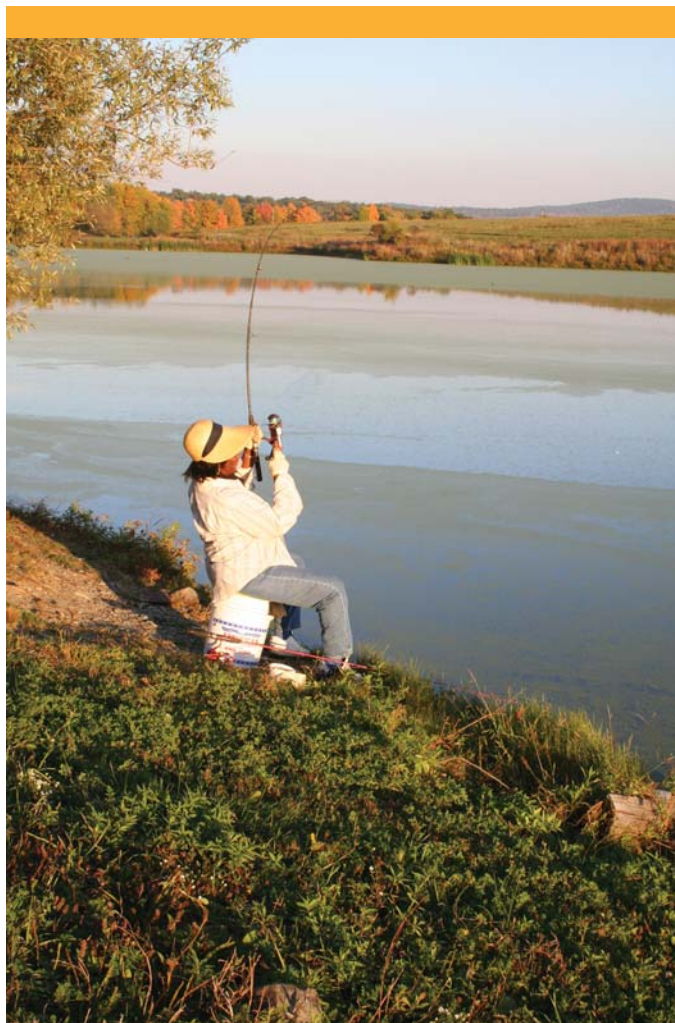
I admit that I am attached to my stuff. It's a combination of sentiment and the impact of my parents' experience with scarcity during the Great Depression. I am imprinted with a modality called Keeping. I store our



*Ooms Conservation Area at Sutherland Pond*

kids' school papers and flowers pressed from special bouquets. I keep old letters, friends, my original husband. Sometimes it's work to keep important things. I've purchased some of those new, improved storage systems. I've used counseling to keep my sanity and my marriage.

The Bible tells us, "Be passersby," reminding us to be aware that our sojourn with life and possessions is temporal. Deep down, I know what to seek out and what I should work to keep. True treasures are a heart that loves, food for the spirit, generous actions, community, friends, and family. This is the stuff I truly need. 🌿



*Ooms Conservation Area at Sutherland Pond*

🌿 *Mary Armao McCarthy is a writer and former president of the Hudson Valley Writers Guild. She is a retired state worker and teacher.*

## The State Bar Association Plans to Face the Needs of Senior Lawyers Facing the Prospect of Retirement

By John Dunne

At a time when policymakers, politicians and community leaders ponder and discuss the myriad of issues generated by the phenomenon of “boomers coming of age,” let me tell you about an organization—our Capital Region neighbor, the New York State Bar Association—that is doing something positive to better serve the public and to strengthen the profession by addressing the special needs of “senior attorney” members who have retired or are contemplating retirement.

Lawyers who are fifty-five or older have experience, talents, and interests. They are a valuable community resource and the Association intends to recognize these resources by providing opportunities and programs to serve our communities and to further the interests and quality of life of senior lawyers. Specifically, its goals, identified by the Association’s Special Committee on Senior Lawyers, are to utilize the expertise of senior lawyers in community service, pro bono activities, and mentoring younger lawyers; to identify employment opportunities for those senior lawyers who seek them; to present programs in areas of professional development, financial and personal pre- and post-retirement planning; and to prepare publications designed to explore and advocate on behalf of issues of interest to senior lawyers.

### Survey and its results

This ambitious action agenda was spurred by responses to an in-depth survey of the Association’s 16,000 members over the age of fifty, which covered current retiree activities, planning by those contemplating retirement, and those who have no plans for retirement. Twenty-four

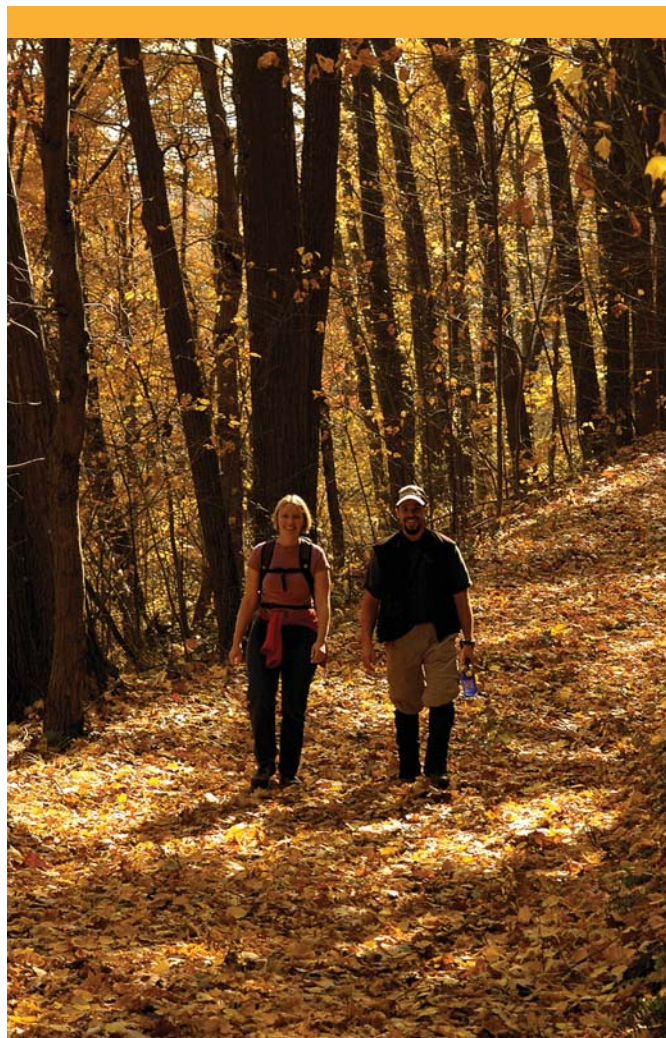


*Ooms Conservation Area at Sutherland Pod*

percent of the respondents said that they would not consider retirement until age seventy, 12 percent declared they had no interest in retiring, and 22 percent indicated uncertainty as to any specific retirement date. The objectives of the survey were to determine the viewpoints of senior lawyers regarding retirement; the planning and preparations for retirement that senior lawyers have undertaken or are planning to undertake; and the viewpoints of senior lawyers on community service and pro bono work. The key findings based on more than 2,300 responses to 66 separate questions are truly informative.

As for actively planning and preparing for retirement, the data suggests that attorneys anticipating retirement expect to work longer and have more concerns about retirement than their colleagues who have already retired. When they do retire, a majority plan to work part-time—confirming the growing expectation that retirement today needs to be seen more as a journey than a destination, an opportunity to gain renewed purpose in life, and a time when individuals begin taking a much more personal approach to living. Only 8 percent said they did not intend to do any work at all in retirement.

On a positive note, the retired senior lawyers expressed a significant level of satisfaction with their financial preparation for retirement and exhibited confidence in the continued viability of a number of retirement resources. No doubt somewhat reflective of their ages, pre-retirement lawyers demonstrated a fairly broad range of retirement preparations with sizable percentages showing no preparation and a noteworthy percentage dissatisfied with their financial preparations. Nearly 25 percent revealed that they had taken none of the common financial steps—savings, investments, planning—and fully one-third had not taken



*Round Ball Conservation Area*

any non-financial steps (hobbies, travel, writing) in anticipation of retirement. And, 44 percent of pre-retirees expressed real concern about the uncertain costs of medical services and long term health care.

### **Pro bono and community service**

The next major area of inquiry was the attitudes of pre- and post-retirement lawyers toward pro bono and community service. Here we found significant differences between the expected activities of those looking toward retirement and the behavior of those who are actually in retirement. Retired attorneys as a group are less active in both community service and pro bono work than are their working counterparts. However, those retired attorneys who do perform community service give more hours than the pre-retirement attorneys.

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*"Another special committee of the Association examined growing member concern about law firms' policy of a mandatory retirement age."*

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The opposite is true of pro bono work with the pre-retirement attorneys providing more service and higher numbers of hours. For those retired attorneys who provide pro bono work, a higher percentage prefer the context of special projects versus involvement with ongoing projects, while a majority of pre-retirement attorneys have no preference.

Working attorneys also demonstrated a willingness to participate in supplemental training in areas of practice that may be in high demand for pro bono services, e.g., alternative dispute resolution and estate administration. Other areas of practice drew noticeably less interest. One proposal that received lukewarm endorsement was that of a "reverse mentoring" program in which younger, more technology knowledgeable attorneys would be available to volunteer to assist senior attorneys with computer hardware and software questions.



Another special committee of the Association examined growing member concern about law firms' policy of a mandatory retirement age. A recommendation by the committee that legislation be enacted to outlaw such restrictions was endorsed by the executive committee as Association policy. There has, to date, been no action by the State legislature.

Armed with this solid data, the Association's Special Committee has prepared a proposal for the statewide House of Delegates to create a new permanent section within the membership devoted to the needs and interests of senior attorneys. Regardless of what organizational form it may adopt, the State Bar Association is likely to focus major attention and initiatives on the challenges that its aging members face while seeking to utilize their strengths and experience to preserve a quality of life and law practice for the public benefit. 🌿



*High Falls Conservation Area*

🌿 *John Dunne is Senior Counsel to the Albany law firm Whiteman Osterman and Hanna LLP. He was formerly the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U. S. Department of Justice and served for twenty-four years as a New York State Senator.*



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Images. This issue of CCQ will use images of architecture and natural features that make the Capital Region a special place. The cover for this issue has an image of Albany's Washington Park Lake House, the Round Ball Conservation Area in Columbia County and the 18th century Johnson Map. This issue highlights the Columbia Land Conservancy.

Credits: The photo of the Washington Park Lake House on the cover is by Michael Brown. The photographs used inside this issue are by staff of the Columbia Land Conservancy except for the Borden's Pond Conservation Area and the Round Ball Conservation Area that are by Peter Blandori.

Correction: In the Publisher's Corner in the July 2008 issue the name ITNAmerica™ and any other use of ITN™ or Independent Transportation Network™ should be noted as being trademarked.

This and past issues of CCQ are 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 for 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>

**Center for Economic Growth**

<http://www.ceg.org>

**Civic Ventures**

<http://www.civicventures.org>

**Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region**

<http://www.cfgr.org>

**Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Buffalo Branch**

[http://www.newyorkfed.org/aboutthefed/buffalo\\_branch.html](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](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](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](http://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.unitedwaygr.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.