Opportunity

Experience

Ideas

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~ Albany Guardian Society, Albany, New York, USA ~
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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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A Recipe for Success: Three Important Ingredients

Here at CCQ we are starting to get into a routine. Our editor, Paul Bray, reaches out to people he thinks could write an interesting article for CCQ. He tells me about the people and the subjects he has asked them to write about. A few weeks pass and Paul sends his edited articles to Sue Kenneally, our truly universal worker, for copy editing. Then, Paul and Sue start asking me if I’ve written my column. I say “yes” when, in fact, I haven’t put any words to paper. When we get down to the wire, I decide that if I’m going to write a column, I had better read the articles we’re about to publish. I’ve long-forgotten what the articles are about so reading them for the first time is a pleasant surprise.

This accurately describes the chain of events that occurred in preparing this issue of CCQ. The same routine and once again, I am pleased with how on-target these articles really are. Dynamics. Aging. Community. Three words in our sub-title that are absolutely essential to what we are attempting to convey in CCQ.

The same three words are woven through each of the articles you will find in this issue. Because these themes are embedded in the articles, they play over and over in my mind. I catch myself imagining what it would be like to live in a community such as the Washington Park area of Troy. Lynn M. Kopka’s description of life in that community speaks to me—the older I get, the more willing I am to consider living in a neighborhood such as Washington Park. Paul Ehmann offers a poignant view of life, attachment and the need to accept change. His essay reminds me that all things eventually change and we must be prepared to accept these changes. We have no choice.

I currently live in a rural area and have lived in rural settings since 1977. I can’t walk at night because there are no lights or sidewalks. I can’t walk to a store because the road narrows at one point transforming such a walk into a dangerous situation. And while I know my neighbors, I don’t know them very well. Katherine Freund’s description of ITNamerica reminds me that when I can no longer drive safely, I want to live in a community that has its own independent transportation network.
Last year, when Albany Guardian Society and WMHT co-produced our 13-part television series, *It’s an Age Thing: Our Communities*, we did a segment on Marilyn E. Douglas. At that time, Marilyn asked me repeatedly why we wanted to feature the Pine Hills Retired Ladies. “There was nothing to it,” she stated. No, Marilyn, there is A LOT to it. It is beautiful and inspiring in its simplicity. I believe it’s important to feel a sense of community, especially when we’re older, so that we can avoid the social isolation that is all too common among the elderly. And, who better to offer a helping hand or a ride to the store, when needed, than a neighbor.

Our guest columnist, Deborah Van Amerongen, New York State Commissioner of the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, addresses the basics of policy and programs as they relate to providing housing for the most vulnerable people in our community. It is gratifying to know that our state has programs that provide opportunities for low income families to own a home, to assist the elderly with modifications or repairs to their home, and to rebuild distressed neighborhoods. These are excellent programs that go a long way to building a sense of community.

Finally, we are highlighting The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as our community conservation organization. While TNC is nationally and internationally very active, it has a strong presence in the CCQ community.

Let’s recap what we have in this issue of CCQ. We have articles that speak to the inevitability of change; that describe programs that help certain individuals own, maintain and modify a home; that remind us that where we live often determines how we live; and that highlight natural conservation efforts in our communities. I call this a recipe for an interesting issue with three main ingredients. Dynamics. Aging. Community.

What’s not to like?

**Report to CCQ readers**

You may recall that our April issue of CCQ was entirely devoted to the topic of caregiving. It was composed as an integral part of a month-long series of caregiving-related events throughout our region. What I want to share with you is the impressive collaboration that occurred. Many aging services organizations developed or expanded their caregiving programs in an effort to reach out to as many people as possible. Numerous special events were held throughout April on a wide variety of topics important to caregivers and care recipients.

Events were held in the four counties of the Capital Region and in nine additional counties that comprise the WMHT viewing area. A community forum titled “Caregiving: Ethnic and Cultural Considerations” highlighted issues facing caregivers and presented uplifting success
stories. An event held at Hudson Valley Community College, “A Resource Day—A Toolbox for Caregivers,” sought to provide the “tools” and support caregivers need to assist their loved ones and themselves.

As part of the month-long events, Albany Guardian Society once again partnered with WMHT and produced a new 30-minute segment of It’s an Age Thing: Caring for Your Parents. WMHT, with its wide broadcast area, added a special edition of Health Link Quarterly hosted by Benita Zahn. If you had the good fortune to watch that show, you saw the best of a community working together on matters that will touch each of us at some point in our lives.

As I said at the beginning of this column, this publication is about dynamics, aging and community and I can assure you these words accurately describe what is happening in our region.

Community empowerment

Several of our earlier issues of CCQ featured articles on zoning and land use. Some asked what these topics have to do with aging, but as you spend more time in the aging services arena, you realize that how communities respond to their changing demographic composition is often a function of how they approach planning. Communities that actively plan are communities that are creating their own destiny. The phrase “community empowerment” is receiving more attention lately and I want to let you know why we agree that community empowerment deserves a mention here.

In November 2008, Albany Guardian Society, in partnership with the New York State Office for the Aging, AARP, and the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, is producing a two-day conference that will be held at the Saratoga Hilton and Conference Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. Titled “Empowering Communities for Successful Aging...Housing, Neighborhood Supports and Services,” the purpose of this program is to demonstrate how communities are able to set their own course. Some have indicated that demographics are a time bomb beyond our control; however, to ignore planning only reinforces that notion. We hope to offer numerous examples of communities that have decided that by working with not-for-profit organizations, local government and the business community, they can develop programs and create environments that work for citizens of all ages.

If you would like more information about the Community Empowerment conference, please visit our Web site at www.albanyguardiansociety.org. We hope to see you at the conference.

Rick Iannello
Executive Director
Albany Guardian Society
Emerging Social Entrepreneurialism

America has a mixed and complex economy even though we want to think of economics in the simple terms of letting the “market” decide. While the market is a factor, for example, in the decision of Advanced Micro Devices, Inc. (AMD), to build or not to build a chip fab facility in Luther Forest, the $1.3 billion of public funds offered by New York State will have something to do with the ultimate decision. Publicly financed infrastructure, rules and incentives play a big role in what business does and whether it succeeds.

The nonprofit sector is also a big player in our economy. Along with the public and private sectors, our region has a $4 billion nonprofit sector “that cares” fueled by charitable donations and public dollars.

In fact, business, government and nonprofit sectors are all pillars of the economy and they converge in more ways than are generally recognized. The emergence of social entrepreneurialism as an economically sustainable means of meeting social needs is one of the ways these pillars may converge.

Katherine Freund, Executive Director of ITN America, is a leader of a “new breed of entrepreneurs” who has seamlessly developed a market-based solution of providing transportation for seniors with nonprofit practices and governmental support. Katherine explains how she did this in Portland, Maine, and how it is now spreading across the nation through the efforts of the nonprofit corporation, ITN America.

Mobility for seniors is a challenge in a landscape shaped and dominated by the automobile. After World War II, trolley tracks were removed and the middle class fled cities for the green fields of the suburbs. The auto was king. Now seniors face having to get around to shop, to visit friends, go to the doctor and other things they may want to do as they lose their ability to drive a car.

When my father was separated from his car, he was like a beached whale at senior housing in the lovely, landscaped suburbs. He wanted personal mobility even if only to go to the mall and see people as they go about their business, but taking a taxi wasn’t an option he would accept. There was no public transit available where he was living and his senior housing provided only limited van service, like once a week, to a supermarket and for doctor appointments.

Senior friendly taxi service would seem to be a market waiting for private taxi firms to grab, but they haven’t so far. In the suburbs, seniors are too scattered for the kind of cost-effective transit that can be provided in cities.
In stepped a social entrepreneur with a vision, Katherine Freund, to come up with a low-profit-market approach with high social value. The profit from beneficiaries able to pay for rides is less than the typical for-profit venture, but is complemented by strategic use of volunteers and some public support like grants. A transformative social service is provided in a financially sustainable way.

Read about social entrepreneurship in this issue and hopefully it may spark your thoughts on how the low-profit-market approach may open the door to creatively providing social benefits in our community. Louisiana recently opened a new Office of Social Entrepreneurship and North Carolina has legislation pending to create the Low-Profit, Limited Liability Partnership Company to allow limited-profit entities to gain access to philanthropic funds. Social entrepreneurialism is clearly an emerging trend to meeting our growing social needs in a cost-effective manner.

Creativity and entrepreneurship are alive and well in our region as you will also see in reading how Lynn M. Kopka is fostering an intergenerational community in the historic city of Troy and Marilyn E. Douglas is connecting retirees in her Pine Hills neighborhood in Albany. On the public side, Deborah Van Amerongen, our guest writer and New York housing commissioner, exhibits real energy in her social commitment to assure good housing for all New Yorkers in need.

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 pmbray@aol.com.
The Nature Conservancy: Protecting the Capital District’s Ecological Treasures

By Kate Adams

The Nature Conservancy, the leading conservation organization working to protect the most important lands and water for nature and people, plays a vital role in protecting habitat, species and open space in New York’s Capital District. “The Capital District is a mosaic of contrasting landscapes. Rarely is so much natural diversity located within a relatively small geographic area. Within only 35 miles from the city, natives and visitors to the area can explore a rare inland pine barrens, the ravines at Hannacroix and Lisha Kill, the rhododendron at Bear Swamp or the waterfalls of Christman Sanctuary,” explains Katie Dolan, Executive Director of the Conservancy’s Eastern New York Chapter.

“The Capital District is a mosaic of contrasting landscapes. Rarely is so much natural diversity located within a relatively small geographic area.”

The Nature Conservancy owns and manages over 12 natural areas for public enjoyment throughout the District. The beauty and diversity of the region can be discovered at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, Barberville Falls, Bear Swamp, Christman Sanctuary, the preserves of Hannacroix, Limestone Rise, Kenrose and Stewart, Lisha Kill Natural Area, Moccasin Kill Sanctuary, Wilton Wildlife Preserve, and Whitbeck Memorial Grove. Since its earliest conservation efforts in the region, the Conservancy, together with state and local governments, has protected over 3,010 acres of habitat in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, one of the most endangered landscapes in the northeastern United States, and 1,800 acres in Wilton Wildlife Preserve and Park.

“The Capital District is one of the fastest growing regions in the State,” notes Dolan. “In our efforts to protect a host of rare species and ecological communities at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve and Wilton
Wildlife Preserve and Park, we look to guide local development to promote both economic and ecological vitality.”

Using sound science, the Conservancy works to meet the many conservation challenges of the region including, but not limited to, increased growth and development, fire suppression, habitat loss and fragmentation, habitat degradation from deer and other herbivores, and inappropriate recreational use. Through the identification of critical parcels of land, the Conservancy strategically protects and buffers areas protected by the Conservancy and its conservation partners. Additionally, the Conservancy works with local and state officials to assure the protection of habitat for rare or vulnerable species.

In highly select areas, prescribed burns, beneficial to species regeneration, are undertaken while always putting safety and smoke management first, to maintain rare fire-adapted natural communities. Nearly 600 acres have been successfully burned since 1991. The Nature Conservancy undertakes several stewardship activities to restore and protect the pitch pine scrub oak barrens, home to the federally-endangered Karner blue butterfly and other threatened species. Additionally, an invasive species education program led by the Conservancy helps community members identify and eradicate these problem species from their own landscapes.

Community members and visitors can enjoy some of the hidden natural treasures of several of the Conservancy’s preserves in the upcoming months. Sarah Clarkin, Program Director at the Wilton Wildlife Preserve, will tell the story of the state-threatened Blanding’s turtle at a special indoor/outdoor program at Wilton on Saturday, July 19, 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. On Saturday, August 2, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Chris Hawver, Executive Director of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, will lead a tour of the globally rare Albany Pine Bush ecosystem.

A full trip calendar and additional information about the work of The Eastern New York Chapter of The Nature Conservancy can be found by contacting the Eastern New York Conservancy Office at (518) 690-7878.
An Intergenerational Community in the Capital District

By Lynn M. Kopka

As the residents of the Washington Park neighborhood gathered around the piano at 3 Washington Place in December to sing songs of the season, there really were ‘kids’ from one to ninety-two. Clutching their songbooks, our carolers’ voices rang clear and true. A decade ago, the Washington Park neighborhood, located south of downtown Troy, was almost child-free and aging. Today it is a dynamic community with young families, newlyweds, college students, singles, same sex couples, retirees, empty nesters and the elderly. None of the members of these statistical groups are isolated or consigned to spend their days with each other.

“A decade ago, the Washington Park neighborhood, located south of downtown Troy, was almost child-free and aging. Today it is a dynamic community with young families, newlyweds, college students, singles, same sex couples, retirees, empty nesters and the elderly.”

The changing demographics happened as a result of changing perceptions of urban living, affordable housing and rents in formerly overlooked cities such as Troy, and a desire for community. It has also happened because the Washington Park Association has been aggressive in promoting our neighborhood, its livability, its assets and its diversity. We have established informal networks to help new arrivals get, and stay, connected with each other as well as with those who have made the Washington Park neighborhood their home for many years. We have gone so far as to run a first-class promotional ad in area magazines (graphics donated by recent arrivals from bucolic Eagle Mills).

Washington Park does not exist—nor flourish—in a vacuum. We work closely with our neighbors, the Pottery District, Little Italy, Osgood, Downtown, Fifth & Grand, Think 1st, to create an integrated community consisting of smaller, defined neighborhoods that offer distinct options. Downtown and Little Italy are great for living above the store, the Pottery District and Osgood have more manageable sized homes, Fifth & Grand has more substantial housing stock and Think 1st is a mix. By blurring boundaries, we offer more choices and create a larger network and a more vibrant community.

Retirees seeking urban option

It was not so long ago that those dealing with a large house with the kids gone chose to live in recently-constructed retirement communities nestled in remote locations—remote in terms of easy access to public transportation, services and neighbors.
Now those retirees and empty nesters are opting to live in cities such as Troy, with livable neighborhoods such as Washington Park, Historic Sage, Osgood and Downtown. Proximity to downtown’s shopping, dining and service core; cultural and arts facilities; public transportation network; established resident networks; and medical facilities make the option an attractive one. The option for live/work space and the ability to convert large homes into multi-purpose uses are appealing to telecommuters and home-based business owners. The success of The Conservatory loft apartments surprised only those who were unaware of the trend to return to the cities.

“These new arrivals have not cocooned themselves, but they are part of the community.”

Retirees seeking the ease of urban living in the close knit neighborhoods in and around Washington Park include former U.S. Foreign Service personnel Steve and Mary Muller, who undertook their first total gut rehab of a manageable building on Washington Park; Jim and Beverly Traa and Patrick and Denise McAvey, who purchased prominent buildings and joined an established community on Fifth Avenue; Nina Pattison, who had great foresight and arrived many years ago (and recently celebrated her eightieth birthday with a neighborhood party); and Wally and Jane Altes, who sold their home in Albany and now lead a life of leisure by renting in The Conservatory. Others approaching retirement are starting to arrive and put down new roots. Caroline Callner now calls The Conservatory home, while commuting to Schenectady for work. Long Island’s Bruce King bought a ramshackle building in Little Italy as he approached retirement. Now retired, he is busy creating a new home; his wife Nancy leaves teaching in a few years and the couple will retire to their newly-refurbished row house in Troy.

These new arrivals have not cocooned themselves. They are part of the community. They serve on boards; they volunteer for Earth Day; they join the Troy Public Library; they shop locally; they walk everywhere; and they inspire the younger set with their energy.

 Those retirees and empty nesters are not the only ones searching for manageable buildings and wonderful apartments. Surprising to us is the number of children we see in the neighborhood. The same attractions for the older crowd are also attractive to the younger singles and families—great affordable housing, proximity to downtown and neighbors who know your name.

Families are once again putting down roots in neighborhoods their parents and grandparents fled as the suburban craze took hold. Attracting and keeping families has long been a goal of our community, but dependent on many factors beyond our control—adequate educational options, recreational opportunities, and proximity to other families.
**Things we do**

As families began settling in, we broadened our focus to include them in a wider range of activities. Caroling around the piano, picnics, volunteer recognition brunches, the Pumpkin Carving Contest, Pirate Treasure Hunt and croquet attract as many adults as kids to the extent that we have separate competitions and prizes for the pumpkin carvings. The competition is fierce; the carvings are impressive. So inspiring are the Pirates of Washington Park that we have kids who want to grow up to be pirates, much to their parents’ dismay.

The Association produces an informative and chatty newsletter each month. Not only do we run pet obituaries, notice of milestones (such as birthdays with a zero) and general gossip (in the good sense of the word), but we also highlight the local businesses, cultural offerings and events that depend on our patronage and contribute to a dynamic community. We subscribe to the belief that the state of a neighborhood’s health depends on breakfast—the more breakfast places one can walk to, the healthier (and more stable) a neighborhood is.

The various neighborhoods help each other and each resident. We have crews of young and middle-aged volunteers pushing snow blowers in front of everyone’s house. The team has a great time (or so those not out there think) keeping the sidewalks clear of snow, but more importantly, those who cannot shovel do not worry about their walks. The “fleet” of snow blowers was purchased through contributions, is stored in one location and is accessible to the team members.

The neighborhood also has a neighborhood watch and an assigned community police officer who knows us and our concerns. Perception about safety, or the lack of it, is an obstacle we are successfully overcoming. In a community where residents know each other, strangers are noted immediately. E-mail notice about potential problems goes out to a wide distribution list; those not on the list receive notice by phone.

Our multi-generational neighborhood evolved over the last decade. It appears to be strong enough, and attractive enough, to remain that way. Location, location, location, as they say, seems to be in our favor—walk to meet your basic daily needs. And while you are walking, meet your neighbors doing the same thing.

It is the small things that make a vibrant, multi-generational community. It is being there for newcomers and old-timers alike. It is recognizing, and addressing, various needs across a broad spectrum. It is finding a way to meld everyone (or a large percentage) into a community where they are welcomed and valued. It is recognizing each person’s potential to make our community stronger. Join us!

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*Lynn M. Kopka is President of the Washington Park Association in Troy, New York.*
Re-Thinking, Re-Inventing, Re-Connecting

By Marilyn E. Douglas

Our careers and our lives can take up so much time that we never get to meet the people in our neighborhood, and then, when we do retire, we find that we just don’t know anyone. When I retired, I decided to be pro-active and do something about it. The result—the Pine Hills Neighborhood Retired Ladies group.

It started easily enough. I sent out an email: “If you’re retired, female, and live in the general Pine Hills area, please join us at the Muddy Cup for coffee, tea, and conversation on the third Thursday of the month at 3:00 p.m. Please pass this message along to your female friends and neighbors.”

“While we didn’t know each other at first, we’ve become an extended family with each of us bringing our interests, our passions, and our concerns to the conversation.”

There’s nothing new about having coffee with friends, but what makes our group different is that most of us didn’t know each other when we began to get together a little over two years ago. I retired from my job as a library consultant at the end of 2004 and I began volunteering at the New Netherland Institute, an organization that I’ve been involved with since its inception in 1986. Over the next year, I spent a lot of time thinking about myself now that my former identity and connections were gone. I realized that our professional lives tend to isolate us and there is a real need to re-think, re-invent, and re-connect once one retires. So, I set about re-inventing myself and re-connecting with a neighborhood in which I had lived for over 30 years.

I’d been reading Ray Oldenburg’s The Great, Good Place and Celebrating the Third Place in which he describes all sorts of hangouts in the heart of many communities and the need people have to connect with each other. The Muddy Cup recently opened on Madison Avenue and it seemed to fill the bill, in my mind at least, of a ‘great, good place’ to get together.
Pine Hills neighborhood in Albany

Luckily, Pine Hills is fortunate enough to have two electronic means of communicating with the neighborhood—the Pine Hills Neighborhood Association list and the Friends of the Madison list. So, I sent out my message thinking maybe a few women would respond. At the first get-together there were eight of us and the number has ebbed and flowed from there. Sometimes four or six show up, sometimes only one or two. There is no structure to the group, no dues, no obligation or commitment. If you happen to be free on the third Thursday of the month and feel like having a conversation with women in the neighborhood, just show up!

While my original intent was that there would be no structure, I did say to myself that the get-togethers (I don’t like to use the word meeting) would take place at the same time of the month, the same hour, and at the same place. Since that first get-together, I did start an e-mail group list and when anyone new shows up, I add her to my list. Almost everyone nowadays has e-mail, a phenomenon that certainly makes communicating with the neighborhood easy. My list now numbers about 30 and continues to grow. Once or twice a month I send out a reminder that we’ll be getting together.

Becoming an extended family

While we didn’t know each other at first, we’ve become an extended family with each of us bringing our interests, our passions, and our concerns to the conversation. Now, we run into each other at the grocery store, the bank, and the library so it’s really helped all of us strengthen our ties to the community. Many of the women are either new to the area or perhaps grew up in Albany, moved away, and have come back. Some have family that brought them here, but most have gone through the jarring process of re-inventing themselves. Whatever the circumstance, you realize that no matter how long you live in a neighborhood it doesn’t mean that you know your neighbors. There is that urge to meet others and to create new friendships.

People creating communities is a theme that’s sprouting up more and more. It just takes a simple act of reaching out to a group, starting your own group, or joining us. You can contact me at med3940@yahoo.com.

Marilyn E. Douglas retired from the New York State Education Department and is a volunteer with the New Netherland Society.
Dignified Transportation for Seniors

By Katherine Freund

“You really think older people will trade their cars for rides?” said the famous researcher in Washington. “People love their cars.”

“I know, but they love their freedom more,” I said. I was a lowly graduate student, and this was my little elevator pitch. I marshaled my courage.

For many older people, their cars just sit in the driveway, depreciating. When they do drive, it’s very expensive. Their cost per ride is astronomical, and their crash risk is just as high,” I said.

"ITN is a transportation service designed to meet the mobility needs of America’s aging population."

I could tell he thought I was dreaming, but he was a good researcher, and he suggested ways I could test my wacky hypothesis. That was in 1991.

In 2008, older people now trade their cars for rides in ITN® affiliate communities across the nation. In Portland, Maine, where the Independent Transportation Network® was invented, so many older people traded their cars for rides, the vehicles filled a parking lot, and the original ITN was in danger of becoming a car dealership—literally, in the eyes of the state. With vision and flexibility, the Maine legislature amended the state’s automobile dealership laws to exempt non-profit organizations that provide transportation for older people.

ITN is a transportation service designed to meet the mobility needs of America’s aging population. ITN is a membership organization that provides rides in automobiles, 24/7, for any purpose—just like private automobile ownership. ITN members open Personal Transportation Accounts™, into which resources flow from many sources and in many forms, and from which resources are debited to pay for rides.

Trading cars for rides is only one of the wacky ideas that make the Independent Transportation Network an economically sustainable solution. Volunteer drivers receive credits for their miles through a program called Transportation Social Security™. They store these credits electronically in ITNRides™, the proprietary software that holds the whole business model together and connects families, communities, and ITN affiliates from coast to coast. Volunteers may use their stored credits to plan for their own future mobility needs or they may transfer them to a family member in another ITN affiliate community. They may even donate their credits to ITN’s Road Scholarship Fund™ for low-income riders.
Growing the idea

Connecting to other ITN communities gets easier all the time. In addition to Portland, ITN affiliates are now delivering rides in Orlando, Los Angeles, and Charleston, and other ITN affiliates are opening in Chicago, San Diego, central and north central Connecticut, Lexington, and in the Quad Cities on the Mississippi River. ITNAmerica, the non-profit parent organization that supports and connects ITN affiliates across the country, is on track to open 40 affiliates by 2010, with the possibility of four opening this year in New York State, through a program sponsored by the New York State Office for the Aging.

“New York will be ready to launch our economically sustainable demonstration program in the coming months and it is through our collaboration with ITNAmerica that we will be the first state in the country to help finance the development of these models to ensure that older adults have access to transportation when they want it and for whatever reason they want it,” said New York State Office for the Aging Deputy Director Greg Olsen.

Wacky ideas may be the future. ITN is sometimes described as a scarecrow on the outside and a Swiss watch on the inside, with donated or traded cars, used office furniture, and volunteers doing much of the work. That’s the scarecrow. The Swiss watch inside is a clock work of cleverly named marketing and outreach programs that convert assets and local community support into mileage credits managed with a state-of-the-art technology program built with Microsoft’s latest development tools. ITN is a carefully researched and tested business whose entrepreneurial incubation was funded by numerous public and private organizations, including the Transit IDEA program of the Transportation Research Board (National Academies of Science), the Federal Transit Administration and AARP.

ITNAmerica’s national rollout is now supported by such leaders of philanthropy as The Atlantic Philanthropies, such giants of business as Liberty Mutual, and such national policy makers as Senator Susan Collins of Maine and Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut. State legislators in New York, Connecticut, Kentucky, Florida, Rhode Island, Utah and Illinois have stepped forward to help advance ITNAmerica’s vision for a national non-profit transportation network for America’s aging population.

“ITN is sometimes described as a scarecrow on the outside and a Swiss watch on the inside, with donated or traded cars, used office furniture, and volunteers doing much of the work.”

In the case of ITN America, philanthropies are interested in this model because a sustainable approach frees them to move on to other social needs; businesses are interested because older people and their adult children represent a market for goods and services; policy makers are interested because a sustainable transportation alternative improves public safety without increasing the tax burden. Win. Win. Win.

ITN America’s entrepreneurial vision includes an approach to policy that actually ranks public policy according to its impact on the taxpayer, with the most favorable policies being those that cost the taxpayer nothing at all. This approach clears the way for policy makers to work with people and communities to participate in the solution, either by removing barriers or by creating incentives for participatory, market-based solutions.

The car dealership law is a good example of a barrier removed, and the new matching grant program in New York State and the federal matching grant program for sustainable senior transportation that was folded into the Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act are also excellent examples of policies that use small amounts of public resources to create incentives for private solutions. Since ITN is designed to be sustainable through fares from the people who use the service and voluntary local community support, public resources may be used to seed a start-up, and the training, technology, marketing and communications support

Female Karner Blue Butterfly
necessary for long term sustainability resides with ITN\textit{America}, in the non-profit sector. It is important to note that the entrepreneurial approach is not limited to the local affiliates. The national organization is sustained, in turn, by affiliate fees and corporate sponsorships.

\begin{quote}
\textit{“When a social purpose like dignified transportation for seniors can hitch its wagon to the marketplace engine, the market will take it away.”}
\end{quote}

When a social purpose like dignified transportation for seniors can hitch its wagon to the marketplace engine, the market will take it away. This does not mean that social enterprises like ITN and ITN\textit{America} are magic, or even easy. Like any market solution, they are lots and lots of hard work. At ITN\textit{America}, the mascot is a little character called the Ginger Boy\textsuperscript{TM}. He has a non-profit heart, a business head, and a sparkplug in his hand to show that he is not afraid to get his hands dirty. That may be a little wacky, but it’s fun, and it works.

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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Albany_Pine_Bush}
\caption{Albany Pine Bush}
\end{figure}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Katherine Freund is Executive Director of ITN\textit{America}.}
\end{quote}
The Rub

By Paul Ehmann

I’ve sold the coin collection, distributed her savings and closed her bank accounts. The house, at once full and empty, is all that remains. What’s left inside are the last things. When the door swings open at my mother’s house, I stand in the hall gripped by the pang of a missed life, hers. She is there like my father isn’t, her spirit hanging in the air like pollen, seen only through the sun’s rays that peek through her old window. I live with her dead. It’s a compromise I’m coming to accept.

We are selling the house. The one I’ve always called home. It was my grandfather’s house, then my father’s house, then Mom’s. Now it’s ours, the three grown kids. We own it, for now. This house has held my tether. Been reliable and constant. The container that holds my memories. I always felt taken care of here, provided for. In life and now in death. But the house is sold and the well is running dry. Only then will I become an adult. Even at fifty-two, the thought of growing up makes me tremble. My insecurity grows louder, like a bold tie.

The detritus

Then there’s the detritus. What’s left of the whole life. The fragments she’s chosen to save are now ours to sort out. A mish-mash of prayer books and thimbles and purses and spoons, baseballs, Christmas stockings and poems. What’s left isn’t much, but it’s mine if I want it. There are some of Dad’s old hats. Pictures from his wallet. Mom’s Georgetown diploma. Autograph books from the 1940s. Mother’s Day cards from my brother Dave in kindergarten. He’s almost sixty. Awards and recognitions. Newspaper recipes, Ireland vacations and old calendars of the Jersey shore. A tin-full of souvenir matchbooks from places like The Singing Pub in Killarney, Guppy’s Bar in Boca Raton and The Hungry Horse in Johnstown, N.Y. Obituary notices and funeral cards of the long dead, relatives known and unknown, people obscure and remote, friends and neighbors. Harry Kemp, Birdie and Big Dom Basile, Bill Costigan, Ida Mae and Mo Clancy. There must’ve been a hundred of them. Mom was remembering them for a reason. There was the book, Rational Typewriting, from 1928. Costume jewelry, baby rattles and rosary beads.
History clamors from the withered edges of old photo albums, pictures, like life-rafts, attached to the dark pages. These pictures, curled and yellow, are of people I never knew. Unidentifiable, yet I have trouble letting them go. We will never know who graces the old black and whites. Their sullen faces portraits of a more serious era. All stored, anonymously, and for decades, by my mother. They mean nothing to me except that they meant something to her. Her life is in those boxes. There’s the catch in my throat.

“Saying goodbye to a life is sad. Growing up at fifty-two is reality.”

Saying goodbye to a life is sad. Growing up at fifty-two is reality. This is the age where people are burying their parents. The obituaries are full of recognizable names, the parents of my friends, who will be buried by their now adult children. What history will they dispose of? There is so much to shed. Aren’t we all still kids until the last shovelful drops on the last parent’s casket?

Some families are stoop-sitters, some are porchies; my family sits out on the driveway. We’re driveway-sitters. We engage pedestrians and bicycle riders and wave at the beeping cars. The driveway was where it all came together; as soon as it was warm enough. I could rely on Mom and Dad being there. Now it’s just the empty chairs. Before the closing on the house, I will sit out on the familiar macadam and look at the garden. I will wave at the passers-by and I will say goodbye to my life there.

There are two trips left to the house before it changes hands; one to go through the last of the boxes, one to scatter my parents’ ashes. That was what they wanted and there’s the rub. This house was what we knew, the hub of our lives. It was there Mom and Dad dispersed their attention. They intended for us to have it. Both parents echoed the same sentiment, “Throw my ashes under the lilacs or in the strawberry patch. Just put me at 515.”

They just didn’t know that when we came to visit them, we’d have to ask permission.

Paul Ehman is an essayist from Loudonville who writes about the personal side of his experience.
Guest Column

Safe and Comfortable Homes for All

By Commissioner Deborah Van Amerongen

While most New Yorkers don’t live in luxury, we are fortunate enough to take for granted the fact that we have access to safe and comfortable homes. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are not nearly so fortunate. In most cases, they are the most vulnerable among us—the poor, the elderly and people living with disabilities.

“The most gratifying work we do is to provide our most susceptible and at-risk neighbors with the opportunity to live independently in safe, comfortable and affordable homes.”

Our goal at the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) is to provide New Yorkers with opportunities. For low- and moderate-income families, we help provide the opportunity to own a home. For many urban and rural communities, we provide the opportunity to address blight, create jobs and rebuild neighborhoods.

The most gratifying work we do is to provide our most susceptible and at-risk neighbors with the opportunity to live independently in safe, comfortable and affordable homes. Last year alone, we helped finance the construction, rehabilitation or modification of more than 2,000 units of senior housing—more than 200 of those units here in the Capital District. In the coming year, I am confident we will be able to do much more. The recently passed state budget includes a record level of investment for our housing programs. While the state’s housing budget had been relatively flat for two decades, the 2008-09 budget contains an historic increase of $200 million over traditional funding levels.

Our Housing Trust Fund Corporation (HTFC), which provides, grants, loans and tax credits to encourage the development of affordable, supportive and senior housing, will be buoyed by $73 million in state funds, as opposed to traditional levels of $29 million. The HTFC will also distribute more than $4 million in state Low Income Tax Credits, which are sold by developers in order to finance affordable housing projects.

Additional funding in latest budget

There is more good news in the budget, particularly for those of us who understand the importance and the need to help senior citizens and people with disabilities live their lives with dignity and independence.

Two highly successful programs that have enhanced the quality of life of thousands of New Yorkers will see significant funding increases. The first program is called ACCESS TO HOME,
which helps to finance modifications to homes in order to make them accessible and safe for low- and moderate-income senior citizens and people with disabilities.

ACCESS is a wonderful program that enables people to continue to live safely and comfortably in their own residences and avoid institutional care. Unfortunately, it has been underfunded for many years. Last year, we received 53 applications for more than $15 million worth of modifications; however, with a budget of $5 million for the program, we could only accept 21 of those applications.

“I continuously espouse the message (well-researched and easily provable) that affordable housing is an economic engine, encouraging businesses to locate in New York and create new jobs for our residents.”

For the coming year, funding for ACCESS will nearly triple, to $14 million. This money will provide wheelchair ramps and lifts, handrails, easy-to-reach kitchen work and storage areas, lever handles on doors and roll-in showers with grab bars. These little accessories may not sound like much, but they are life-altering for the frail elderly and disabled and can often mean the difference between independence and institutionalization.

The second notable program is called RESTORE, which stands for Residential Emergency Services to Offer Repairs to the Elderly. RESTORE funds are used to pay for emergency repairs and eliminate hazardous conditions in the homes of low-income elderly who cannot afford to make the repairs in a timely fashion.

Last year, we received 57 applications for RESTORE funding that would have provided about $2.7 million in needed repairs. The budget last year included only $400,000 for RESTORE projects, and, as a result, we could only approve nine of those 57 applications.

The good news is that in the coming year, more than $9 million has been allocated for the RESTORE program, a significant increase, that will help senior citizens in all corners of the state make the emergency repairs their homes drastically need.
The mission of DHCR is fairly straightforward. We try to make New York State a better place to live by supporting community efforts to preserve and expand affordable housing and economic opportunities.

**Affordable housing an economic engine**

In talking about the work we do at DHCR, I emphasize the pragmatic benefits of affordable housing. I continuously espouse the message (well-researched and easily provable) that affordable housing is an economic engine, encouraging businesses to locate in New York and create new jobs for our residents. Affordable housing also helps in our efforts to revitalize and strengthen downtrodden communities, and helps prevent the brain drain that occurs when recent college graduates and young people leave New York to search for greener, more affordable, pastures.

I frame the work we do as economic development, rather than as social service, and portray our mission in pragmatic terms, with as little sentiment as possible. There are times, though, when a resident of a senior or supportive housing development will approach me at a groundbreaking or ribbon-cutting event and tell me that the work of our agency has made a huge difference in his or her life or in the lives of their children or parents.

Those moments are for me very gratifying and often very moving. I am hoping that with an additional $200 million in resources, there will be many more of those moments in the coming year.

Deborah Van Amerongen is Commissioner of the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal and is from Delmar, New York.
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IMAGES: Each issue of CCQ will use images of architecture and natural features that make the Capital Region special. The cover for this issue has an image of Lock 7 of the State Canal System, the Christman Sanctuary and the 18th century Johnson Map. This issues highlights The Nature Conservancy.

Credits: The photos of the canal locks are from the New York Canal Authority. Other Photographs throughout this issue are from the Nature Conservancy. The photographs of the Christman Sanctuary are by Bob Stone, of the Albany Pine Barrens sand dune is by Frank Knight, of the Buck Moth is by Jesse Jaycox, Albany Pine Bush sunset is by Steve Young and of the Karner Blue Butterflies are by Carly Knight.

CCQ is available in pdf format on Http://www.albanyguardiansociety.org
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.