Opportunity

Experience

Ideas

This issue:

• Featured Organization: Troy Farmers’ Market: Our Village Green
• Smart Homes - Designing and Redesigning Homes for Aging in Place
• Being Aware of Hospital Discharge Barriers
• The Crucial Traid: Creating Green, Accessible, and Multigenerational Communities
• Birthday Reflections
• Going Local
Table of Contents

Issue No. 3 • Vol. 3 • December 2009

01. Publisher’s Corner

03. Editor’s Column

05. Feature Organization
Troy Farmers’ Market: Our Village Green
By Amy Halloran
Troy’s year round farmers’ market is called “our village green” because it is a lively setting where residents of our region meet and chat with each other as well as with the farmers who bring their vegetables and other farm products to the city.

08. Smart Homes – Designing and Redesigning Homes for Aging in Place
By Patricia E. Salkin, Esq.
As more seniors prefer to age in place, either in the home they lived in for years or another residence in their community, Patty Salkin points out that changes will be needed in government programs, policies, and regulations to encourage the development and redevelopment for aging in place housing. What is your community doing to support aging in place?

11. Being Aware of Hospital Discharge Barriers
By Nora Baratto, LCSW-R, ACM
Hospitalization for ourselves or a loved one is often unexpected. We are unprepared for the changes we have to confront when discharge from the hospital takes place. Nora Baratto offers pointers on what we need to do to be prepared to navigate hospitalization and what comes afterwards.

13. The Crucial Traid: Creating Green, Accessible, and Multigenerational Communities
By Esther Greenhouse, M.S., CAPS
Society is facing a myriad of challenges to meet the needs of seniors and the disabled as well as threats, for example, from climate change. Esther Greenhouse helps us understand the interrelationship between these challenges and the need to take this into consideration as we create multigenerational communities.

17. Birthday Reflections
Personal Essay by Roger Fink
Roger Fink shares with us his birthday reflections that integrate his personal values with his wishes for our society and the generations to come.

19. Going Local
Guest Column by Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Hooker
State Agriculture Commissioner Patrick Hooker believes “the key factor to New York’s successful agriculture industry is our tenacious farm families.” Agriculture is a large industry in New York State and its return to “going local,” as the Commissioner observes, is improving our state’s economy and the quality of life of New York’s residents.
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 defines 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.
You Are Here

Humans are inquisitive creatures. We like to know where we are. Entering a large shopping mall, we often gravitate to the kiosk that contains a floor plan. Most of us spend our first few moments looking for the “You Are Here” sign because it’s important for us to understand something about our environment and how we interact with it. Many of our discussions about aging in place and the concept of community are really no different from going to the mall and finding the “You Are Here” spot.

This publication devotes considerable space to the idea of community and place. Each cover contains the same historic map of Albany because it sets the tone; it says this publication is about this place. (Note to whoever is interested: I have looked at ten covers over the past two-and-a-half years and each time I noted the historic Albany map, I took comfort in the reinforcement of the concept of place. Two weeks ago, my sister-in-law in Florida looked at the Albany map and said, “That’s interesting, but why did you write the word Batavia in the lower left corner of the map?” She and I are both from Batavia and in all those issues, I never saw that reference.)

Editor Bray and I are routinely asked why issues of CCQ feature organizations such as The Columbia Land Conservancy, Proctors Theater, or the Historic Albany Foundation. What do they have to do with old people? Our answer is consistent: these organizations and community landmarks are what make this region what it is. They help us establish that sense of place, and as many of our articles have emphasized over the years, the qualities that make a community a good place to be are qualities that apply to all citizens, young and old.

This issue contains several articles on aging in place—a concept that Albany Guardian Society is devoting considerable energy and resources towards. When citizens indicate that they wish to age in place, they’re doing the same thing that we do when we put that historic map on each cover of CCQ. They are laying claim to their place, defending their turf, so to speak. Their sense of belonging might be tied to a house, a neighborhood, or a city, but in any case, their desire to age in place is firmly rooted in their sense of place.

Each of us should respect the power of that process. When we ask an elderly loved one to contemplate moving to a new home, or even perhaps a new city, we are typically motivated by the pragmatic aspects of the discussion. You’ve heard them before. The house is too big, you need more help, you travel great distances to be closer to children and grandchildren. What the loved one hears is much less pragmatic and much more rooted in his or her very being. We are asking someone to give up place, arguing that it will be possible to reestablish that sense of place in the new surroundings. Sometimes, that’s true. But, never forget what a big leap this is for many of our older adults.
Speaking of where you are (or might be) . . .
Albany Guardian Society is completing work on our third Housing Options for Senior Adults. This year we collaborated with the United Way 2-1-1 initiative for housing updates. I am always amazed at the popularity of this document. It has never been intended to be the ultimate guide, filled with minute facts and details. When we first began working on a housing directory in 2006 with Ann DiSarro and the staff at Senior Services of Albany, our discussions centered on the fact that this directory is meant to be the beginning of a conversation, not the end. While families explore housing options for their senior adults, they need to go slowly, they need to recognize that that sense of place has been well-established, and as they sit with their loved ones to consider new housing, they need to remember that regardless of how much a move might be needed, it’s still a difficult decision for the senior to leave one’s place. The directory will be ready for distribution in early 2010 and we hope it remains helpful to you and your loved ones.

Rick Iannello  
Executive Director  
Albany Guardian Society
Editor’s Column

Our Own Special Place

Seniors today, like me, may be the last generation firmly rooted in their communities. I was born, raised, and lived most of my adult life in Albany (except for a decade away for college, law school, and two years to learn how to ski in Vermont). As it appears to be for most of my cohort, work experience included decades in the same employment and I was able to leave that employment with a pension. (The one difference in my experience may be that after retirement I went on and continue to work in a number of jobs. You know how that is, sixty is the new forty and so forth.)

It is increasingly the pattern for the younger generation to move from job to job and place to place so roots in one community with a deep network of family and friends is not common.

Rootedness is probably a strong reason why today’s seniors have expressed the desire to “age in place.” They are accustomed to their home, neighborhood, and large and small communities, and there is comfort in being at home.

Yet, I wonder if the aging in placers in the Capital Region really love the place they don’t want to leave. Some do and some may not. Many think it is just too darn cold in this place. Some are satisfied with their own pattern of life revolving around their parish, church or synagogue, a favorite restaurant, movie theater, and other activities. For some seniors, I am happy to say, attending the monthly Albany Roundtable Civic Lunch Forum (www.albanyroundtable.blogspot.org) has been one of those “other activities.”

Okay, let me get to my point. I do love this place in which I am aging. It is nice when others share this love. I do get discouraged when love of my place is not shared.

How could one not love to walk around the historic Stockade neighborhood in Schenectady or along the Mohawk River trail in Colonie and Niskayuna or see a musical at Proctors in Schenectady. There is an abundance of natural, scenic, historic, cultural, and recreational areas in our multi-community region. Outdoors in the winter with a pair of cross-country skis or snow shoes there is no shortage of local areas to enjoy, and indoors there is an abundance of museums, theaters, and galleries. Our feature organization in this issue, the Troy Farmers’ Market, is open on Saturdays all year.

In part, CCQ is about helping all of us become more familiar with our own special place on this planet and especially how we can enjoy its benefits, participate in civic life, and contribute to the quality of life through volunteering to service organizations. When it comes to what falls under the rubric “aging in place,” we want to foster understanding of the dynamics that make for better mobility through “complete streets,” housing that serves all ages and special needs, local food and the agricultural activities that make locally grown food accessible for us, for example,
at the Troy Farmers’ Market, maintaining the local economy, and social services (or better yet social solutions as was pointed out by Dr. William Foley in the last issue of CCQ).

Please keep in mind as you read the articles in this issue of CCQ (and hopefully read or reread previous issues available at www.albanyguardiansociety.org), that aging in place is about having the resources and means to meet the needs of seniors staying in our community, but it is also about how seniors, through their special knowledge, advocacy, and participation, can contribute to making our place healthy and interesting for people of all ages.

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Troy Farmers’ Market: Our Village Green

By Amy Halloran

“This is the village green. Where you come to see what’s going on with your neighbors and get all this wonderful produce,” said Nan Carroll, putting two canvas bags brimming with food on the ground to pause and chat. “This is a way of checking on people, a way of providing support for people. Feed the psyche, feed the soul, feed the stomach.”

Weekdays, Carroll is Director at the Center for Legislative Development at the University at Albany, but Saturdays she is a faithful shopper at the Troy Waterfront and Winter Farmers’ Markets. She and her husband Tom are longtime fans of local agriculture and joined New York State’s first CSA, run by Janet Britt in Schaghticoke, a town in Rensselaer County. CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture, and is a method for the consumer to share investing in the crop with the farmer.

“Loyalties tend to grow when you know who is feeding you, and lines at stalls can be long early in the morning as people are eager to get the best choice.”

Tom Carroll is Director of the Hudson-Mohawk Industrial Gateway and Troy’s RiverSpark Visitor Center; he was instrumental in getting the market settled in the city. The Carrolls are now members of Denison Farm’s CSA, which runs on the same land as Janet Britt’s, and pick up their vegetable share weekly at the Troy market where they can round out their grocery shopping with a full complement of locally produced meats, breads, cheeses, and maple and honey products. Plants, soaps, flowers, and other gifts and necessities are also available from over fifty vendors. Once you get hungry, prepared foods are at the ready whether the market is outside at the Riverfront Park or indoors at the Atrium.

The market is a decade old and going strong. Several groups took an interest in forming a regional farmers’ market in the Capital District in the late 1990s. The Regional Farm and Food Project, a nonprofit committed to developing and supporting small-scale agriculture, Troy’s RiverSpark Visitor Center, and a couple associated
with Siena College, Matt and Amy Lindstrom, joined forces and built a solid framework for a summer producers only farmers’ market. Guidelines to assure foods would be locally grown were strict. Special events such as chef demonstrations, kids’ activities, and live music drew people who were not seeking to shop from farmers, and helped create a sense of place and community on a parking lot. The Waterfront Market was such a success that after a couple of summers vendors approached the owners of the Atrium about setting up indoors over the winter. The momentum of this four-season market continues.

“Ten years ago, it was nothing. Now probably we sell a million and a half dollars of goods. That’s a lot of stuff that didn’t have a market,” said Seth Jacobs of Slack Hollow Farm in Argyle. Jacobs brings vegetables weekly to Troy. The market enabled him to switch from a CSA model to retailing.

“I would never have started this up without this market as a target. We don’t wholesale. We don’t do other markets much,” said Ave Gillis of Gillis Acres Farm. She and her husband invested a considerable amount of money to make a creamery on their Washington County land. She milks fifty Alpine goats to make over twenty different products, mostly cheeses but also yogurt and kefir. She also sells goat’s milk and just introduced goat’s meat. Her clients tend to be the same people week to week and year round.

Loyalties tend to grow when you know who is feeding you, and lines at stalls can be long early in the morning as people are eager to get the best choice. Shoppers develop connections with farmers and producers, and often know exactly what they want to buy from where. Carrots from one person, bread from another, and a very certain cookie as a treat. The Keebler bakers just don’t communicate as well as a live and lively human being.

“I liked the people I met,” said Dinnie Shanley, a steady customer at the market. “You get to know the farmers. It’s a whole different type of atmosphere. You can ask questions about how the food was grown.”
Shanley has been in the area twenty-three years, and got to know two of this market’s vendors while shopping at the market Capital District Community Gardens established downtown. Charlie Riggio, of R&R Farms, and Christine Bielawski sold vegetables on the sidewalk around a fenced-in hole that eventually became the Atrium, and started selling at the Troy Waterfront Farmers’ Market in its first years. Shanley stretched her relationships with the farmers by collecting food to deliver to food banks. She still collects and delivers food in a low profile, matter of fact manner that is all about function, and cares nothing for grandstanding.

“Got all walks of life here, right? Got the kids and families, rich people, not so affluent, everyone,” said Charlie Riggio, who still sells at the summer market. “I like it down here. When I’m up in Saratoga, I’m just another pretty face selling vegetables. Down here, people know me.”

Get connected
Come to the market and be known this winter. Take time for your visit, and plan to make connections. You might meet old friends, and should make the acquaintance of the area’s next generation of farmers. Jen Ward of Our Farm, Sarah Bulson of Homestead Farms, and Dale Cornell of Cornell Farms, are maturing with the market, which is helping to mold a steady future for family farms.

Be ready to be wowed by the wealth of fresh vegetables growing in the winter sun, from arugala to spinach, stopping at every lettuce in between. See the squashes and root vegetables that store the light of summer as you stroll the improvised village green of the Atrium.

For more information, visit the market’s Web site at www.troymarket.org. Or visit the market in person on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. year-round: at the Uncle Sam Atrium, Broadway at 3rd & 4th Streets from November through April; and at Riverfront Park from May through October.

Amy Halloran, www.amyhalloran.net, lives and writes in Troy. She was market manager in the early years of the Troy Market, and her sons remain in love with the community, food, and friends they find at the market.
Introduction
Communities must be welcoming to a variety of housing options as residents age. While media images conjure two ends of a spectrum—acute care nursing homes for people unable to care for themselves and high-end choices for active, healthy seniors who are also affluent—the reality is that so few people need or can afford these options. A common myth, often dispelled, is that as people age and eventually retire, they move in large numbers to warmer and drier climates in the South and West. Yes, some people do either permanently relocate or spend winters in other places, but the vast majority of seniors do not fit this pattern. Many studies have demonstrated that people prefer to “age in place,” or stay in the community where they spent a significant part of their life. The National Aging in Place Council defines this concept as “[t]he ability to continue to live in one’s home safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level. It means living in a familiar environment, and being able to participate in family and other community activities.”1 In addition to the practical challenge of affordability, many homes just are not equipped to accommodate the changing needs of an aging owner. New home architectural designs, including remodeling of older homes, along with the introduction of new home-based technologies are being incorporated into housing projects across the country aimed at aging baby boomers to enable them to age in place more comfortably and safely.

Education and advocacy is needed to ensure that government programs, policies, and regulations encourage the development and redevelopment of aging in place housing. This includes audits of local planning and zoning laws and regulations to determine whether amendments are needed to facilitate the granting of permits on an expeditious basis, since often retrofitting projects need to be done unexpectedly and quickly following a change in physical health; the adoption of plans and regulations to accommodate new state-of-the-art housing designs specifically for seniors; and grant and loan programs to help seniors on fixed and low-income access desperately needed capital to make necessary repairs.

Universal design and retrofitting of existing homes to enable aging in place
Universal design is the idea that a home is designed and functional for everyone, regardless of any sort of physical impairment that a person may have. Few existing homes are automatically suited for people who desire to span the decades in the same residence as their bodies and minds.
change with the aging process. However, modifications to both the inside and outside of the home can be made easily to enable this goal. One initial problem in most homes is the ability to enter. Steps and steep inclines may become impassible barriers for people with arthritis, bone and joint issues, and other common physical impairments. Designing and redesigning homes to permit entry by reducing or eliminating steps to an entryway or by installing a ramp can help eliminate the problem. In addition, the installation of external and internal handrails or grab bars (along walkways and hallways and in bathroom showers), ramps, and an easily accessible bathroom can make a world of difference. Other modifications, such as widening doorways to allow access by a wheelchair or electric scooter, may be more costly but necessary.

“Many studies have demonstrated that people prefer to “age in place,” or stay in the community where they spent a significant part of their life.”

One Website offers a checklist of things seniors can do to make their homes more age friendly that includes, in addition to the above mentioned items: changing faucets to allow for floor pedal operated sinks; lowering counters in kitchens; installing an elevator or chair lift in multi-story dwellings; and the repositioning of light switches and outlets no higher than 48 inches from the floor.2 Knobs or handles on cabinets can be easily changed to enable less frustrating access, and cabinets can be repositioned to allow for more comfortable use. The National Association of Home Builders now offers certification for an Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS), which indicates that the person has the technical, management, and customer service skills necessary to assist the public with home modifications for aging in place.3

When designing a new home, a number of companies now promote floor plans and building options that are specifically designed to allow for aging in place.4 Single story ranch style homes with wide hallways and open spaces, as well as details similar to those discussed above for retrofitting homes, are common design elements. In addition, level flooring and level transitions from carpeted areas to tiles or other floor coverings are smoother.

Smart homes for seniors
Technology has evolved from the early 1990’s version of LifeCall or LifeAlert where a pendent is worn by the senior so he or she can summon emergency help when getting to a telephone is not possible. Now, motion sensors and other high-tech devices can be used to notify emergency responders even when the senior is unable to push a button because the senior may be unconscious or injured. In addition, sensors and wireless communication devices can be installed in homes to monitor vital signs and this information can be conveyed electronically to medical providers, caregivers, and/or family members regardless of geographic location. Pressure sensors strategically placed on the floor can register how much a person weighs and if the person is walking with a limp, and sensors placed in a bed can register how well a person slept and when the person gets up. Another technology, Stove Guard, is available to turn off a person’s stove when it is left on for too long. In addition, installed home-based technology can monitor whether a person
has visited his or her medical dispensers and what medication was taken and when. Robots are now being used to assist people challenged with memory loss to remind them to eat, sleep, and take medication. Vibrating bracelets are also being used to remind seniors when it is time to take a pill. Another technology that will soon be available in homes is an updated caller ID-like system that will flash a picture of a caller and the relationship to the person who suffers from memory loss.

New technology can be installed to improve an individual’s ability to navigate the home. For example, one company builds houses that employ some of the newest technology, such as a front door that can only be accessed by a fingerprint scanner. This eliminates the need to find keys and the difficulty of getting the keys in the appropriate locks. Other technology used includes sensors that activate lights on the floor to create a lighted walkway for the homeowner. This can be especially helpful when someone awakens during the night to go to the bathroom. Another technology helps to control every light and electronic device in the house with one remote. An automatic door feature benefits people using wheel chairs, scooters, or walkers and those who cannot physically open a door. Another benefit of the use of technology to assist with closing doors and windows and turning off lights when not needed is the savings realized from greater energy efficiency.

Conclusion
The advent of computers and the internet have enabled the refinement of many affordable technologies and modifications to enable the design and redesign of “smart homes” that can maximize independence and the ability to live longer and more safely and comfortably in one’s own home. State and local government programs should recognize the importance and availability of these opportunities and ensure that senior homeowners can expeditiously acquire needed approvals and building permits to accomplish desired age-friendly home features. Laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, already exist that require local governments to make reasonable accommodations in their regulations to permit these types of amenities. Further, existing grant and loan programs should be modified, where possible, to include the types of home repairs/modifications needed to enable seniors to age in place.

2 http://www.toolbase.org/Home-Building-Topics/Universal-Design/aging-in-place-checklists
4 http://www.familyhomeplans.com/search_results.cfm?collectionE&mc&action=1&OrderCode

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Being Aware of Hospital Discharge Barriers

By Nora Baratto, LCSW-R, ACM

A hospitalization can be unsettling. Your concern is your treatment and making a speedy recovery, but you might be surprised by unanticipated barriers to going home.

As the health care system gets ever more complex, your welfare depends on carefully planning ahead. Needless to say, an individual and especially one infirmed enough to require hospitalization, is in a difficult position when having to navigate the rules and procedures of a modern hospital.

“As the health care system gets ever more complex, your welfare depends on carefully planning ahead.”

I am in charge of hospital discharge at St. Peter’s Hospital and I wish I had the opportunity to advise patients and their families long before hospitalization became a reality for them. I don’t want to see patients confront pitfalls when their time for hospital discharge comes and would like to see a seamless transition from a hospital stay to the home patients want to return to. I offer the following responses to three key questions everyone should think about in order to help my wish be realized as much as possible.

“How sick am I?” Many technological advances in the medical field and improvements in hospital efficiencies overall have changed how we receive health care today. Many medical conditions that required hospitalization in the past are now “outpatient” procedures, requiring a stay in the hospital of twenty-four hours or less. Also affecting a patient’s “length of stay” are the insurance companies. Strict criteria must be met for a patient to qualify for an acute inpatient stay. This means your hospital stay is only covered until your condition “stabilizes,” then it is expected you will be discharged to an appropriate setting for your recovery. Consequently, hospitals are discharging patients much quicker and sicker and the responsibility is placed on discharged patients and/or their caregivers to make sure that an “appropriate setting” is available, whether it is the patient’s home or elsewhere.

“Am I physically ready to go home?” The physician may tell a patient that he or she is medically stable for discharge, but that doesn’t necessarily mean the patient is able to go home and function as before. Especially among older adults, arrangements may need to be made for home care or a skilled nursing facility for short-term rehabilitation because, for instance, the patient is unable to climb stairs in the home, or are unable to bathe without assistance.
Patients can be shocked to find their insurance does not adequately cover post-hospitalization services. The Medicare handbook leads you to believe your hospital stay and post-hospital needs are covered, but you must meet certain criteria; you must have orders by a doctor and those orders must be considered by Medicare as medically necessary.

“Who can help me?” Before a hospitalization happens to you, have an open and honest discussion with family members about a plan. Avoid creating family tension and adding to an already stressful time and appoint a Health Care Proxy and a Power of Attorney to legally act on your behalf in case you are unable to make decisions for yourself. Tell these appointed decision makers your wishes relative to your care. Not having these advocates often results in extending a hospital stay until a safe plan can be put in place. This extended stay will not be covered by your insurance because it is not medically necessary. Call your insurance company and find out what your hospitalization and post-acute coverage includes.

The health care system is fragmented and can be difficult to understand; ask for your Discharge Planner/Social Worker as soon as you are admitted to the hospital. These nurses and social workers are there to help you navigate through the system and overcome any potential barriers. In our new world of health care, you have many more decisions to make. If you are an informed, proactive consumer, including one who has taken care of legal, financial, and other affairs relating to changes as you age, you can avoid most barriers and regain control of your plan of care.

Nora Baratto, LCSW-R, ACM, is director of discharge planning at St. Peter’s Hospital in Albany, New York.
The Crucial Triad: Creating Green, Accessible, and Multigenerational Communities

By Esther Greenhouse, M.S., CAPS

We are at a crucial juncture in our society. Our demands for energy and increasing concerns over global warming are garnering attention, resulting in policy, incentive, and product development. Likewise, the burgeoning senior population has implications for virtually every aspect of society; particularly housing, zoning, transportation, and health-related areas. There is a great deal of overlap between these major societal issues. In addition, if we cast a slightly wider net, we will address the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as families with children; two groups which are underrepresented. When we address the needs of the aging population, we are also meeting a lot of other societal needs.

“It is environmentally and socially irresponsible to build without maximum accessibility when we cannot predict when an occupant will acquire a disability, and viable portions of the building will need to be ripped out and tossed into the landfill in order to make the appropriate modifications.”

Our basic standards are expanding. New construction and newly renovated buildings, for example, are not green and sustainable if they have not been built for minimum levels of accessibility. What is unexpected must be anticipated. As 85 percent of disabilities are acquired in life and many persons experience temporary disabilities (injuries, effects of pregnancy, pre- and post- hip or knee replacement, etc.), buildings (particularly residences) that are not designed to address a wide range of abilities are not sustainable. It is environmentally and socially irresponsible to build without maximum accessibility when we cannot predict when an occupant will acquire a disability, and viable portions of the building will need to be ripped out and tossed into the landfill in order to make the appropriate modifications. At a time when there is concern for salvaging the embodied energy contained within the existing housing stock, we cannot simply encourage energy efficiency renovations, but must also address accessibility with environmental objectives.

Responding to needs of seniors and others

Due to the marked increase in the senior population (65+: 15 percent increase from 2000 to 2010, and a 36 percent increase from 2010 to 2020), there is a corresponding increase in attention to the design of buildings in order to meet seniors’ changing abilities and acquired disabilities. Not long ago, AARP recognized this need and worked with the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) to create the Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) designation. This program trains builders, disability services organizations, designers, and many other professionals to meet the needs of seniors through a properly built and enabling environment. A benefit of this training is specialized knowledge which allows these professionals to address the needs of
non-senior persons with disabilities, and many have done so by renovating homes for returning Iraqi War veterans, among others.

The Baby Boomers are large in numbers (approximately 77 million or 28 percent of U.S. population), politically powerful (AARP), and with the financial strength of having the highest median income of any category. The disabled population is not as large (at least 33 million), however, they are finally having many of their needs addressed due to the overlap with the 50+ population. For example, the disability rights advocacy group, Concrete Change, has been working to promote the concept of “visitability.”

Visitability
Visitability provides for a minimum level of accessibility to allow a person in a wheelchair access to the homes of friends and relatives. Because most homes do not address this, persons with disabilities face extreme social isolation simply due to barriers of the built environment. There has been increasing awareness and implementation of visitability, in large part due to efforts to address the needs of the senior population and their desire to age in place. Throughout the nation, several municipalities have passed visitability ordinances, which mandate visitability in new construction (ConcreteChange.org); others have offered incentives for accessibility projects (Accessible Long Island, “Long Island Towns’ Universal Design Initiatives,” 2009); and Rep. Schakowsky (D-IL) has introduced the “Inclusive Home Design Act.”

Fortunately, design for seniors and for persons with disabilities can benefit persons of all ages and a range of abilities, including children. Most design standards are based on male adults within the 5th to 95th percentiles of anthropometric data, but this still does not meet the needs of 90 percent of even the male population. Children are generally not included unless they are the primary user. A lower height countertop can be more readily utilized by an individual using a wheelchair, an older person seated for better balance, or a child.
Exterior environment
The overlap between the benefits of universal design, the needs
and abilities of seniors, persons with disabilities, and children
requires all these groups be kept in mind when developing
guidelines, proposing policy, and making decisions. In addition
to housing, an area where this is particularly relevant is the
exterior environment, particularly community planning related
to transportation and walkability. In this light let us consider
the “Complete Streets” movement. Complete Streets are to
roadways what Visitability is to housing.

Like enabling environments, complete streets are sustainable
and multi-faceted in societal benefits.

Enabling roadways, which allow for non-vehicular travel,
reduce dependence on carbon dependent transport. Some
estimates indicate that in this country, non-vehicular travel
doing distances of less than one mile may reduce carbon dioxide
emissions in the range of 12 to 22 million tons annually.
Additionally, when integrated in the design of traffic-calming
elements such as islands, vegetation can address drainage and
run-off reducing the use of impervious materials.

Like enabling environments, complete streets address persons
with a range of abilities, and families with children. Longer
signal times allow persons with various disabilities, including
the elderly, as well as parents with young children, sufficient
time to safely cross. Under the “Safe Routes to School” program,
community members are working together to promote walking
to school in adult-supervised groups.

Complete streets are also beneficial to health. Enabling
housing can increase the degree of independence and level
of functioning. Roadways that allow for pedestrian, bicycle,
stroller, and wheelchair use provide opportunities for people
to be outdoors in the fresh air and be physically active. Both of
these issues have reached critical levels in our society. The EPA
estimates that most Americans spend as much as 90 percent
of their time indoors, a factor in the rise of asthma, allergies,
and other indoor air quality health issues. Walkable streets
also serve to address the nation’s rising obesity epidemic. This
is particularly important for the nation’s children, who are
already facing health problems today.

“The National Institute of Medicine
recommends fighting childhood obesity
by establishing ordinances to encourage
construction of sidewalks, bikeways,
and other places for physical activity.
One study found that 43 percent of
people with safe places to walk within
ten minutes of home met recommended
activity levels; among individuals without
safe places to walk, just 27 percent
were active enough.”

National Complete Streets Coalition Website
In addition, complete streets are beneficial to safety. Enabling housing, which is designed for a range of abilities, can increase safety by reducing the risk of falls and other injuries, by such measures as minimizing stairs and proper lighting. Complete Streets increase safety of users by “enabling pedestrians to cross busy roads in two stages, reduce left-turning motorist crashes to zero, and improve bicycle safety.”

At a time when our society is facing increasingly complex issues, it is pragmatic and beneficial in developing both understanding and solutions to look beyond the essential problem, and determine answers that address the needs of as many components of society as possible.

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**Caption**

Esther Greenhouse is an environmental gerontologist, specializing in how the built environment affects the functioning and well-being of older adults. An advocate and educator for Aging in Place, Ms. Greenhouse teaches NAHB’s CAPS classes. Her teaching and advocacy has led her to identify obstacles to aging in place and to explore the intersection of aging in place and sustainability, both of which she is examining in her doctoral work. She can be reached via e-mail at esg10@cornell.edu.
Birthday Reflections

By Roger Fink

Birthdays for me are times of reflection, taking stock, self-evaluation. The process is often exasperating.

This year, after eighteen months of focus on the presidential campaign, the financial disaster and the effort to pass health reform and climate laws, my birthday reflections have gone beyond reliving family dramas or bad days at work. I’ve been reading Michael Pollan and James McWilliams on the threats our food production and distribution systems pose to the environment, the economy, and our fellow inhabitants of this lovely burdened planet. Apparently my food choices have been part of the problem. In addition, I worry about my “carbon footprint.” Soon I’ll turn sixty-seven. I’d like to lighten up, “take it easy” on myself.

I give myself some credit. In retirement I enjoy volunteering with the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, the people who helped protect Indian Ladder Farm from the threat of residential development and are providing much of the organizational support for the Albany Rail Trail. And I drive a Prius. But it is also true that I get as much from volunteering as I give. The work adds valuable structure to my life as I schedule meetings, or plan to meet deadlines. I learn about new subjects and get to work with new software, and I value relationships with like-minded volunteers and professionals in the land conservancy movement. It feels good to participate in something more connected to the world than reading in Starbucks, kayaking, and soccer on TV. As for the Prius, it saves me a lot of money, and I admit to feeling virtuous when I pull up next to an SUV. Should the credit I give myself come with an asterisk?

“But it is also true that I get as much from volunteering as I give.”

In the Conservancy’s most recent newsletter, Board President Peggy Sherman of Slingerlands talked about its mission of “saving special places” by owning conservation easements on open spaces and working landscapes. The easements obligate us to protect these properties “in perpetuity.” It’s a big responsibility, but, as Peggy said, “How wonderful to be part of a movement that aspires to the everlasting!” I find “Conservancy” a useful idea. I’ve begun to think of myself as member of the Earth Conservancy and the United States Conservancy and state and community conservancies and others. I
want the next generations of my immediate and world-wide families to have at least as much chance at a good life as I have had. I want to be part of passing on a sound economy, “a more perfect union,” a healthy planet.

“I want the next generations of my immediate and world-wide families to have at least as much chance at a good life as I have had.”

If that’s what I want, how am I doing? It seems like a good idea to take stock. But when does a healthy self-criticism become an obsession or an ego trip? It’s hard to know. Introspection is like peeling an onion or walking in a hall of mirrors.

When I turned forty, in 1982, I inherited a society and a world with terrible problems but wonderful promise. My parents’ generation practiced pretty good social, economic and environmental stewardship based on what they knew. They strengthened Social Security and established Medicare. They knew to raise taxes when necessary to pay for important things. They passed clean air and water acts in the early seventies. Then Ronald Reagan convinced us that “government is the problem” and taxes are simply “bad.” It was a convenient untruth coming just as I and my fellow war babies entered our peak earning years.

I’ve come to agree with Oliver Wendell Holmes who said, “taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society.” I think of them as the membership dues in all those conservancies I belong to. If I aspire to the “everlasting,” I need to give things proper value. We hear that “we can’t afford” a decent health care system or an energy industry that isn’t poisoning the planet. But we need to talk about “affording” in some context.

My bank’s Website has a new feature. I can combine all the different aspects of my financial life into a bunch of pie charts and tables on a single page. I can see at a glance how much I spend at Starbucks or Amazon.com. It gives me sobering instant “context.” What should I give up to pay for what I claim to really value—to pay my various conservancy membership dues?

Birthdays. Reflections. Once you start . . . .
Going Local

_By Commissioner Philip Hooker_

As the chilling winds of fall begin to nip at our heels and days grow shorter, many of us find our thoughts turning to stacking firewood for the winter, a roast in the oven, and all the books and journals piled up waiting to be read. Fall and winter are typically seasons for enjoying hearty meals and considering the passing year and years. I especially appreciate hearing seniors relate stories about the farms and foods of New York that they remember from their youth. This year has brought about many new challenges as well as many new opportunities to the New York State farm community. There is much to be grateful for and much to contemplate.

Is this a revolution or a revelation?

“Locally Grown” seems to be the new mantra symbolizing both health and kinship. “Locally Grown” is posted in every produce section, touted at every market, and has made headlines in all the major news organizations. From the White House to the school houses—everyone is demanding locally grown produce on their plate. Everywhere there is a heightened sense that one needs to savor the splendor of eating with the seasons and connecting with the producer of their food.

Additionally, there are many new and renewed avenues for marketing local produce. Internet marketing, farmers’ markets, urban agriculture, and community supported agriculture are becoming increasingly popular. There appears to be a revolution going on.
However, growing food locally is not a revolutionary idea or a new fad at all. We in the agriculture community are simply doing what has been done for centuries. On approximately 7.1 million acres of land and over 36,000 families strong, New York farmers, from the tip of Suffolk County to the corners of Niagara, Chautauqua, and Clinton County, nurture, train, and at times implore, this great earth to bear the high quality, nutritious fruits, vegetables, and grains to sustain us. On our dairy and livestock farms, we condition and coax our cows, chickens, sheep, and other livestock to yield their numerous contributions to our daily diets.

Through the spring plowing, the summer cultivating, and the quickening fall harvest, we labor long; we have daily discourse with Mother Nature; we utilize some of the best and most innovative technology available and we reap what we sow. In the end, we give thanks for what we have; we market the surplus to our neighbors and those who have not; and we eat. We all eat. This is not new, not a revolution. Many seniors remember the large markets where farmers brought their food product in trucks to be sold directly to consumers in cities like Albany.

"While the New York winters can be cold and long, it is important to remember that those frigid temperatures and penetrating frosts are actually something to be thankful for!"

Now there is a rebirth in farmers’ markets like the Troy Farmers’ Market featured in this issue of CCQ. There is definitely a new rebirth of thinking about and appreciating what we do. That much of what we eat and drink can be grown, produced, and processed in our own backyard may be a revelation to many. But the way things were is increasingly becoming the way things will be in the future.

So is it a revolution or a revelation? It’s both. The locally grown revolution is the revelation of the quality products grown locally by local producers. And we couldn’t be prouder!
Climate and people make New York an ideal place to ‘Go Local’
In New York State, we are fortunate enough to have three physical properties that help make agriculture one of the most productive and profitable industries in the State: good soils, adequate water, and seasonal variance. These three properties are what allow for the diverse array of farm products to grow and prosper in New York State.

While the New York winters can be cold and long, it is important to remember that those frigid temperatures and penetrating frosts are actually something to be thankful for! The prolonged cold temperatures rid our farm soils of lingering pests and diseases that otherwise would lie dormant only to emerge again in the spring and hex the next planting. The spring rains feed our burgeoning crops and the summer sun ripens the produce on the vine for a fall harvest.

Still, the key factor to New York’s successful agriculture industry is our tenacious farm families. At the New York State Department of Agriculture, we are committed to preserving and expanding agriculture in New York State. We work diligently to promote a viable agriculture industry, foster agricultural environmental stewardship, and safeguard our food supply. As Commissioner, I can say that this is truly a labor of love. I believe that one of New York’s many outstanding dairy farmers, Tim Fessenden, captured the sentiment of New York agriculturalists best when he said, “Our commitment to the land and community is long-standing and our family plans to be around for another hundred or more years.”

“From the White House to the school houses—everyone is demanding locally grown produce on their plate.”

In addition to supporting farmers and producers, the Department of Agriculture and Markets runs many programs that help bring these local products to you. Our market branding program, Pride of New York, helps consumers locate products grown or processed in New York at stores, in restaurants, and on farms. Our ‘Farm to School’ program helps introduce New York’s school children to farm fresh products by connecting school food service directors with neighboring farmers. And, of course, the Great New York State Fair held every year in Syracuse is one of the best showcases of all of the diversity of this agricultural State. From maple syrup production to wool spinning, it is the climate and especially the people that make New York different.

Patrick Hooker is the New York State Agriculture Commissioner. As Commissioner, he is responsible for addressing agricultural economic development, environmental stewardship, and safety issues to ensure agriculture remains a significant contributor to the State’s economy and quality of life.
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Images. This issue of CCQ uses images of features that make the Capital Region a special place.

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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.