Opportunity

Experience

Ideas

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The Dynamics of Aging and Our Communities

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

As this column is being written, the national economic news continues to be grim. Unemployment remains higher than expected following the Stimulus Bill and an oft-repeated phrase on the financial shows on cable TV is “fear of deflation.” Don’t worry—this piece will not turn into an economics discussion. I’m ill-equipped to offer thoughts on that topic, but I can predict one thing for sure: a future with fewer resources means a future with tough choices.

Let me explain. As health care spending continues to increase faster than inflation, everyone is trying to figure out some way to step on the brakes. Those tough choices I mentioned earlier are fairly straightforward. Pay less per unit of service (somebody gets a haircut—effectively a form of wage deflation) or reduce how much service is offered (to be frank, rationing—the “R” word).

When we start discussing health care rationing, people think of long lines and a nameless, faceless bureaucrat denying them or a loved one some essential service. Naturally, when faced with this possibility, it’s easy to suggest that perhaps government should spend less in other areas to ensure sufficient dollars for the care of our aging population. Remember, a really big portion of our health care dollar is spent on older citizens. In what other areas can we spend less? Education looms as a big target and, in fact, we have seen much in the news about reductions in the teacher workforce as school districts face their own economic difficulties.

How does a person older than sixty react to this? On the one hand, there’s a lot of health care that a sixty-year-old is likely to need in the coming years, but many of those same sixty-year-olds have grandchildren and it’s their future education that may be under-funded. Do we want our children and grandchildren to receive something less than the education we experienced? It’s important to remember, this issue is all about raising a false dilemma. It’s not an either/or choice. Our choices are not mutually exclusive. We can do both, just not as well or as thoroughly as we would like.

I recently read several articles on the subject of intergenerational warfare and they are a bit chilling. In Great Britain, author Francis Beckett just released his most recent work, What Did the Baby-Boomers Ever Do for Us? I’m not personally familiar with the book or the author, but his title surely says a lot. In 2005, Charles C. Mann authored an article in The Atlantic titled “The Coming Death Shortage: Why the longevity boom will make us sorry to be alive.” It’s a very interesting article that wonders if we might experience a “tripartite society: the very old and very rich on top, beta-testing each new [longevity] treatment on themselves; a mass of the ordinary old, forced by insurance into supremely healthy habits, kept alive by medical entitlements; and the diminishingly influential young.”

In 1997, Charlotte Gray wrote an article for the Canada Medical Association Journal titled “Are we in store for some intergenerational warfare?” She discusses the challenges faced by the Canadian government as it deals with a demographic reality: A growing senior population wants what some
would consider to be a disproportionate piece of the available pie. She goes on to recount how in 1985, Brian Mulroney explored cutting pensions and was “ambushed” by a “feisty senior” after he had promised not to touch the pensions. This encounter caused Mr. Mulroney to back down from his decision to reduce pensions.

Charlotte Gray concludes her article by listing four points being considered by developed nations: 1) There will be an increase in the number of seniors; 2) More seniors will need round-the-clock care; 3) There will be heavier demand on caregivers; 4) “The graying of Canada will intensify debate on ethical issues, including euthanasia and whether the availability and aggressiveness of medical treatments should be linked to age.”

This reminds me of the notable comment of then Governor of Colorado Richard Lamm who in March of 1985 was reported to have said, “We've got a duty to die and get out of the way with all of our machines and artificial hearts and everything else like that and let the other society, our kids, build a reasonable life.” In an appended editor’s note of November 23, 1993, The New York Times noted that Mr. Lamm wrote that he never said “the elderly or the terminally ill have a duty to die,” and he added, “I was essentially raising a general statement about the human condition, not beating up on the elderly.” In further fairness to Governor Lamm, I had the opportunity to hear him respond to this matter when he spoke in Albany in the early 1990s. He really sounded much more reasonable than the infamous quote with which he has been saddled. I guess context is everything.

This issue of how much to devote to seniors and how much to devote to other age cohorts has been going on for a long time and it's not over. The New York State budget process that occurred over the spring and summer of 2010 was symbolic of this issue. Do we cut aid to schools? Do we cut home care for the elderly and the disabled? You think you know where you stand on this matter until you hear an advocate for one of the sides stating his or her case. You listen and think, yes, that seems reasonable. Then, the other side brings out their advocate and that person sounds just as reasonable. That’s why this debate lives on. But as I said earlier, it isn’t an all or nothing game. It isn’t complete victory for any one group. It’s unfortunate that social policy can’t be fashioned more like the way we live our personal lives. We make personal decisions based upon what’s good for us and just how much of the “good for us” we can afford. We don’t give up when we realize we can’t afford to vacation in Europe. We go to the Adirondacks instead. We don’t sit on cinder blocks until we can afford the finest sofa. We buy something more modest and it works just fine. We compromise.

The financial woes facing our nation and our state will continue to cause pain to all age groups. We can get through this scary time by remembering that what each of us wants impacts a lot of other people. Some will benefit from our actions and some will be deprived of something they may have wanted because we got things we wanted. Maybe folks on all sides of this discussion could ask for a little less and preserve a future that will benefit everyone.

Rick Iannello
Executive Director
Albany Guardian Society
Growin\, \textit{Links Between Education and Community}

Former Mayor of Missoula, Montana, and author of \textit{The Good City and the Good Life}, Daniel Kemmis writes in his book about the application today of the ancient Greek notion of the city as classroom and teacher of citizenship.

In 1999, Albany’s Mayor Jennings caught the education bug for a while when he promoted an “Albany Education Compact” that declared “the interested citizens of the City of Albany and its environs including representatives of its educational, civic, and political institutions agree that the City of Albany shall hereafter be known as the ‘Education City’ dedicated to excellence in education . . . .”

In this issue of CCQ, our Guest Columnist, Chancellor Nancy Zimpher of the State University of New York, proudly points out, “With 64 campuses and nearly 465,000 students, SUNY is the largest comprehensive public university system in the United States. And with that size comes great diversity and accessibility. Not only does SUNY offer more than 7,000 degree and certificate programs, but we also provide a wide range of low- or no-cost programs, seminars, and workshops tailored to the interests and needs of adults and retirees.” Couple this grand public education system with New York’s esteemed private institutions of higher education and we can clearly see that New York State is the “Education State.”

When I was in public school, college, and finally law school, education was a much simpler activity than it is today. Education took place in classrooms within school buildings more or less separated from the world at large. Students were mostly of the same age. We studied what was going on in our communities and the world, but we were removed from it.

This issue of CCQ focuses on some of the expanded dimensions of education. Dr. Robert S. Herman, a retired professor and proud nonagenarian who believes about himself “the curtain is still up and the stage is still lighted,” challenges today’s teachers. He believes teachers must make “learning enjoyable” and must “allow for the expansion of young minds” by being “open to ideas that were not taught to us as students.” Dr. Herman’s age has not limited his passion for education and the breadth of his thoughts about the process of learning.

One emerging trend in education is engaging students in their communities. The School of Social Welfare at UAlbany does this through its Internships in Aging Project (IAP). Mary Moller, a 2009 IAP intern, shares her experiences as she got to know how several local community organizations collaborated to achieve their challenging goals and responsibilities. Another intern, Alexandra Zimmerman O’Clair, wrote a poem as a tribute and expression of the value she received from her field supervisor, Kim Swire of the CHOICES Program at St. Peter’s Hospital. Alexandra wrote: “you gave meaning,” “you gave understanding,” “so even someone as tone deaf as I could hear its definition”; “you sang the melody, and little by little, I wrote the lyrics.”
Chancellor Zimpher highlights her vision of each SUNY campus as having “a special role and responsibility in shaping a community’s future.” This is another emerging and expansive trend in education. The many programs SUNY offers for life-long learning in our communities are just part of that special responsibility the Chancellor is striving for.

Finally, CCQ itself is an instrument of education about our communities and life. It serves this purpose, for example, by informing our readers in Attorney Elizabeth Loewy’s article about the increased vulnerability to senior abuse and how the criminal justice system is dealing with it. On a lighter note, we are featuring the Adirondack Mountain Club that has been advancing outdoor recreation for residents of the Capital Region and across the state as well as the preservation of our state parks for almost ninety years.
The Adirondack Mountain Club

By Paul Ertelt

The Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) is a group of people who love spectacular wild lands and waters. New York State is blessed with a bounty of natural beauty: the Adirondacks, the largest wilderness in the Northeast; the Hudson River Valley, so majestic it launched an arts movement that bears its name; and Allegany State Park, with its stands of ancient hardwood trees. New York is also home to the Catskills, the Finger Lakes, the Long Island Pine Barrens, the Tug Hill Plateau, and much more. ADK is all about enjoying, celebrating, and protecting these treasures.

ADK was founded in 1922 by a group of individuals interested in developing hiking trails in the Adirondacks and promoting conservation of the region’s natural resources. Its charter members included Franklin Delano Roosevelt; Bob Marshall, co-founder of the Wilderness Society; Melvil Dewey, inventor of the Dewey Decimal System; and Irving Langmuir, the winner of the 1932 Nobel Prize in chemistry.

With nearly 30,000 members, ADK is one of the largest hiking clubs in America. But ADK is more than just a hiking club. The club’s members also enjoy canoeing, kayaking, camping, backpacking, cross-country skiing, biking, mountaineering, bird watching, snowshoeing, and other forms of “muscle-powered” outdoor recreation. And ADK members are interested in more than just having a good time in the great outdoors. Conservation, Education, and Recreation are the three pillars of ADK, summing up the club’s many facets.

In the club’s first year, members completed the Northville-Placid Trail, which rambles for more than 130 miles through some of the wildest parts of the Adirondack Park. ADK’s Trails Program continues that tradition with professional and volunteer trail construction and maintenance projects in the Adirondacks, Catskills, Finger Lakes, and other parts of the state. The High Peaks Summit Steward Program, a partnership of ADK, the Adirondack Nature Conservancy, and the State Department of Environmental Conservation, educates hikers about the fragile alpine ecosystems found atop the highest peaks in the Adirondacks. Our Public Affairs Office, a few blocks from the State Capitol, promotes responsible policies to protect New York’s wild places and ensure they remain accessible to the public. ADK also advocates for state funding for land acquisition and stewardship and has been on the frontline in the battle against acid rain and global warming.
Instilling a love of nature in others, especially young people, has always been central to ADK’s mission. ADK’s School Outreach Programs help children develop a deeper connection to their local environment while achieving the learning goals of their classroom curricula. ADK also offers adult workshops in such outdoor skills as canoeing and kayaking, using a map and compass, wilderness first aid, and backcountry ethics. As one of upstate New York’s largest publishing houses, ADK publishes comprehensive hiking, paddling, and winter sports guides; trail maps; and books on Adirondack nature, history, and lore. In 2009, ADK published a new edition of *The Adirondack Reader*, a renowned anthology of history and adventure spanning four centuries. *Adirondac*, ADK’s bimonthly magazine, provides news on club activities, conservation updates, and features on outdoor recreation.

“While ADK has its roots in the magnificent Adirondack Mountains that gave the club its name, it is a local organization for anyone who lives in New York State.”

Most of ADK’s recreational activities are organized by volunteer leaders, including many seniors, in the club’s 25 chapters located throughout New York and northern New Jersey. On any given day, in any season, small groups of ADK members can be found exploring Adirondack peaks, state parks, mountain ponds, and ocean beaches. When ADK members are not playing outdoors, they can often be found working outdoors as volunteers, whether it’s clearing brush from trails or putting a new roof on a backcountry lean-to. Volunteerism is essential to ADK. Volunteers set the club’s conservation agenda, help develop educational programs, produce chapter newsletters and maintain chapter Web sites, and perform the countless tasks needed to keep the organization running smoothly.

This past spring, when officials threatened to close dozens of state parks, our volunteer Conservation Associates wrote, e-mailed, and called state lawmakers to register their objections. ADK’s volunteer construction crews have been busy renovating the historic Adirondak Loj near Lake Placid and the Johns Brook Lodge, a hiker’s oasis in the heart of the Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness. Volunteers also organize ADK’s seasonal outings and run our Adventure Travel Program, which offers our members affordable opportunities for excursions around the world.

While ADK has its roots in the magnificent Adirondack Mountains that gave the club its name, it is a local organization for anyone who lives in New York State. ADK has chapters in New York City, central New York, the Hudson Valley, the Niagara Frontier, and on Long Island. The Capital District boasts three chapters—Albany, Schenectady, and Glens Falls-Saratoga, which are among the largest and most active ADK chapters. Roughly a quarter of ADK members live in the Capital District.

More information about the Adirondack Mountain Club can be found at our Web site, www.adk.org.

*Paul Ertelt is the Adirondack Mountain Club’s communications director.*
Progress in Prosecuting Financial Abuse of Older New Yorkers

By Elizabeth Loewy

The statistics are dramatic: in 1900, about one in 25 Americans was 65 years or older. With the aging of the baby boomers, one in six Americans will be elderly by the year 2010. This has been referred to as our nation’s “gerontological explosion.” And while it is certainly good news that people are living longer, chronic age-related illnesses will make many older adults more vulnerable to elder abuse, including financial exploitation.

Elder financial abuse costs older Americans more than $2.6 billion per year and is most often perpetrated by family members and caregivers, according to a report released by the MetLife Mature Market Institute (MMI) entitled, *Broken Trust: Elders, Family and Finances.* These numbers are not surprising to those of us in law enforcement responsible for investigating reports of larceny, forgery, cons, scams, and other schemes to defraud senior victims.

“One of the central issues in evaluating whether a larceny charge is viable is whether there is evidence that the impaired victim consented to the taking, or transfer, of his or her property.”

The cases are among the most difficult to prosecute. It is not uncommon for older victims to pass away soon after the case is reported. As in domestic violence cases, victims are terrified and often economically reliant on their abusers. Emotional ties persist, as well. Financial abuse cases involving parents and grandparents entail the same obstacles and a bigger one: shame. Victims tearfully confide their belief that since they raised the abuser, they must somehow be responsible for the “problem.” Other victims are not simply reluctant to testify—they may lack the ability to participate in the prosecution of their abuser due to physical or mental infirmities. It is likely that this is one of the reasons why they were targeted in the first place. Prosecutors work closely with agencies such as Adult Protective Services and the Department of the Aging, as experience has made clear that the more support an exploitation victim receives from law enforcement, local social service providers, health care professionals, and banks working as a team, the more likely it is that the prosecution will be a success.

Law enforcement in New York has been more aggressive in taking on elder financial exploitation and recent federal and state initiatives are promising.

The Elder Justice Act, signed into law in March of 2010, will serve to coordinate efforts and develop leadership at the national level, by creating councils and boards within the federal government to specifically address issues relating to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Act also authorizes funds for grants that establish centers for the purpose of developing forensic expertise of geriatric heath care professionals.
A 2009 amendment to the New York State’s General Obligations Law made wide-ranging revisions to the power of attorney statute. The most important changes amplify the fiduciary role and legal responsibility of the agent or “attorney in fact.” In addition, the amendment restricts the authority of the agent to affect major gifts without a separate rider, addresses liability related to acceptance of third parties, and creates the possibility for an accounting. The change in the law is expected to enhance law enforcement’s ability to prosecute cases involving theft in which exploiters abuse these documents to steal from seniors.

The Larceny section of the New York State Penal Law does not specifically address theft from victims who are mentally compromised. Although several states have criminal codes that codify exploitation involving elderly or impaired adults, New York’s theft statute is silent on this point. In 2008, however, the Scheme to Defraud section of the New York State Penal Law was amended, making it a felony to engage in a systematic ongoing course of conduct to defraud more than one person, in which two of the individuals in that group are Vulnerable Elderly Persons, as defined in the statute. This statute will be helpful to law enforcement in prosecuting serial predators who systematically target elderly, impaired victims.

When an allegation of theft involves a single impaired victim, an assessment is made by law enforcement as to whether the law, as applied to the facts of the case, establishes that a larceny has been committed. One of the central issues in evaluating whether a larceny charge is viable is whether there is evidence that the impaired victim consented to the taking, or transfer, of his or her property. If a victim does not understand that he or she is transferring property, this may be evidence that the property was wrongfully taken under the statute.

This was a pivotal issue in the 2009 trial involving the late Brooke Russell Astor, a well-known and beloved New York City philanthropist. The defendants, Mrs. Astor’s only son and his attorney, were accused of taking advantage of her diminished mental capacity to loot her estate. The case was referred to the New York County District Attorney’s Office soon after the initiation of a guardianship proceeding in late 2006, and several years after Mrs. Astor had been diagnosed with likely Alzheimer’s disease. A handwriting expert retained in that proceeding concluded that a 2004 codicil to Mrs. Astor’s will affecting millions of dollars did not bear her actual signature. Her attorney and the guardian of her person reported the expert’s findings to law enforcement, and a Grand Larceny and
Scheme to Defraud fraud investigation ensued. After a trial in 2009 which lasted six months, both of the defendants were found guilty of multiple felonies.9

The repercussions of elder financial exploitation are every bit as devastating as crimes involving physical abuse, and sometimes even more so. In addition to the loss of funds, victims suffer from emotional trauma, depression, and compromised access to food, medication, and housing—leading to a diminished quality of life and increased mortality.10 Given the rapid “graying” of the nation, it is more important than ever to continue in our efforts to improve and enhance our response to older victims of financial crimes.

6. New York Penal Law §§ 155.00; 155.05.
8. New York Penal Law §§ 190.65(c); 260.30.

Elizabeth Loewy is currently the Attorney in Charge of the Elder Abuse Unit under New York County District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. ADA Loewy recently served as a lead co-counsel in the trial involving the late Brooke Russell Astor, a well-known New York City philanthropist. She has been employed as an assistant district attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office for twenty-five years. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Albany Law School, she began her career in one of the Office’s trial bureaus, where she prosecuted general street crime, domestic violence, child abuse, sex crimes, and homicides. She is currently the Co-chairperson of the Advisory Committee of the New York State Coalition on Elder Abuse, Chairperson of the New York County Task Force on Elder Abuse, and Chair of the Elder Abuse Legislative Sub-committee of the New York State District Attorneys’ Association.
UAlbany School of Social Welfare Internships in Aging Project Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

By Linda K. P. Mertz, MSW, LCSWR

“How many of you want to work with children?” About half of the 25 masters in social work students raise their hands.

“How many of you want to work with older adults?” One student in the back raises her hand. Another half of the students raise their hands to indicate they are unsure. The rest look around sheepishly.

“The Internships in Aging Project is celebrating its tenth graduating class in 2010.”

Despite the publicity about the baby boom and the need for training in working with older adults, students’ reluctance hasn’t changed in the ten years that I have coordinated the Internships in Aging Project at the School of Social Welfare at University of Albany. I sigh, undaunted, and plunge ahead. It is my job, along with Associate Dean and Project Director Ricky Fortune, to enlighten students that working with older adults is not an option but a mandate. Older adults will be in any social service setting that the students choose to work in—and that they should consider joining the Internships in Aging Project (or IAP) so that they can receive specialized training in working with older adults.

IAP also brings aging information into all social work classes. Faculty, current IAP students, and guest lecturers bring energy and enthusiasm about aging into many classes. We also host lunch time lectures on topics related to aging, such as grandparenting, substance abuse, and caregiving for older adults (these are open to the public). By the end of the school year, we recruit enough students to fill the next year’s IAP cohort.

The Internships in Aging Project is celebrating its tenth graduating class in 2010. IAP was originally funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation, whose mission is to improve healthcare services to older adults. First among its many social work initiatives was a field education (internship) model for training social worker students to work with older adults. UAlbany School of Social Welfare was one of six sites selected to develop the new training model. The model includes collaboration with community agencies, field internships with opportunities for learning all aspects of aging and aging services, and a focus on developing leadership skills. The academic side includes required classes and an integrative seminar. The success of this model of field education is evident with similar projects now in seventy-one schools of social work throughout the United States (now all called Hartford Practicum Partnerships in Aging Education, www.hartfordpartnership.org/index.php?overview).
“It is my job, along with Associate Dean and Project Director Ricky Fortune, to enlighten students that working with older adults is not an option but a mandate.”

Local support for the Internships in Aging Project has been tremendous. More than twenty agencies in the Capital Region dedicate significant staff time to selecting, planning for, and training these stellar students. Although the Hartford funding of the project ended in 2003 (as was planned), the project continues with generous support from the University, the School of Social Welfare, the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, and many other corporate and individual donors.

In the ten years the Internships in Aging Project has existed, we have graduated 118 students! A majority of these students live and work in the Capital Region, contributing to the improving network of aging services. Many are social workers in hospitals, residential facilities, mental health centers, and senior centers. Others are legislative advocates, program managers, faculty, and administrators. Some bring aging related programming into agencies that serve all ages, such as substance abuse, mental health programs, faith communities, and agencies serving people with intellectual disabilities. We will hear more of one student’s experience in the next article.

So, although the battle against ageism is not an easy one, the Internships in Aging Project at the School of Social Welfare promotes aging specialization for social workers and, along with our supportive and dedicated community agencies, trains the future leaders in aging and social services.

For more information about the project, visit www.albany.edu/ssw/iap.

Linda K. P. Mertz, MSW, LCSWR, is the Project Coordinator of the Internships in Aging Project at the School of Social Welfare at the University at Albany.
An IAP Intern’s Experience

By Mary Moller, MSW

Have you ever wanted to try something new that would broaden your horizons and give you the opportunity to experience new surroundings while challenging you personally and professionally?

Did you always want to take a class in writing or photography, or learn how to become a fabulous interior decorator, or really challenge yourself and learn a foreign language? Taking that a step further, have you ever wanted to go back to school and earn a degree that you can be proud of?

“The most valuable lesson I learned was that the level of collaboration between local, county, and state entities is complex yet achievable with good leadership, planning, and vision.”

Recently I had the exciting opportunity to do just that! I am a 2009 graduate of the University at Albany School of Social Welfare earning a Master’s Degree (MSW). I also participated in the Internships in Aging Program (IAP). This program at the School of Social Welfare partners with community agencies to offer a rare opportunity to earn professional experience with a specialization in service to aging persons. The program prepared me for direct practice with clients and leadership and management in social work services. The goal of the program is to train students to become geriatric social workers.

The most valuable part of this program was having the opportunity to work as an intern at several local community agencies. My first internship was at The Center for Excellence in Aging and Community Wellness located on the UAlbany Campus. The Center is a leader in providing training and education to local agencies related to implementing evidence based intervention. For example, I received training to become a peer leader delivering “Living Healthy” workshops to seniors at several local providers. For six weeks, two peer leaders meet seniors once a week to discuss managing chronic illness, linking the importance of symptom reduction, stress management, and relaxation as well as many other topics covered during this self-directed intervention. This program provided the experience of working directly with seniors through implementing an evidence based intervention.

The second internship provided a very different experience for me. At the Albany County Department of Social Services, the understanding of management, administration, and research was very valuable. I assisted with research associated with Creating Aging and Disabled Friendly Communities. I learned about towns and villages throughout the country that have worked to make their communities more aging and disabled friendly with changes in zoning laws, funding for businesses and municipalities to expand sidewalks, improve lighting, and so forth. The most valuable lesson I learned was that the level of collaboration between local, county, and state entities is complex yet achievable with good leadership, planning, and vision.
Also while at Albany County, I learned about the important work that the Adult Protective Unit provides and the workers who treat people with dignity and respect while balancing the fine line of allowing a person’s right to self-determination to remain in his or her home.

Both of these internships provided valuable practice experience, working as a geriatric social worker developing professional skills and specialized competencies. The Internships in Aging Program at UAlbany prepared me for a career as a geriatric social worker. While I am learning new things everyday working as a Director of Pastoral Care and Outreach, I am forever grateful for the experience I had in IAP. Although I may not have learned a new language and I still want to learn how to become a fabulous interior decorator, I do have a degree that I can be proud of!

Mary Moller, MSW, lives in Knox, New York, on a small farm with her husband and two sons. Her family has a passion for restoring antique tractors and preserving the simple pleasures of living on a farm in a rural community. Mary currently works as Director of Pastoral Care and Outreach at St. Luke’s Church in Schenectady, New York, providing counseling and support to people who are hospitalized, homebound, or living in a long term care facility. Mary also coordinates over one hundred volunteers (primarily seniors) for various programs, including a food pantry that is the third largest provider in Schenectady County.
Someday

By Alexandra Zimmerman O’Clair

(The poem, Someday, is a very personal expression of a social welfare intern experiencing the many feelings, including fear and denial, during the process of becoming a social worker. It reflects the heart and soul of a thoughtful student who wants to commemorate her experiences as an intern. Editor)

Walking through a maze of people on our way to a meeting in Delmar, you half turn, smile, laughing your musical, contagious laugh, and say to Amy, “Just think, someday Ali will no longer be my protégé and she will look back and thank me for becoming the Social Worker she did.” It was a light moment, a joke thrown over your shoulder like salt chasing away demons. Perhaps it was too early and therefore dismissed, or perhaps my mumbled response of, “I already do,” was not heard . . . but, even in October it had been true.

A date not marked on the calendar, “someday” in November, I had already learned value in reminiscence of time, the heartache attached to unvoiced emotions, the amusements Europe can hold, and how they can be yearned for so terribly. Standing next to you, I watched, I listened, and I learned the importance of living life in one’s own way and in one’s own time; Sinatra should have been in the background signing “My Way” the day our shared client refused the refrigerator. It might have been “someday” in October or November when I learned how funny “H-U-G-E, it was HUGE!” could be while pondering the irony of a bottle of extra virgin olive oil set precariously next to a quart of whiskey as you settled a phone bill dispute—the mere fact your client is a retired Sicilian priest sounds as if it should explain away the paradox. Flexibility; all in a day’s work as an Elder Case Manager—you had, after all, given fair warning.

Another one such “someday” taught me how it was not just an Elder Case Manager who held her client’s hand when he died; she was a Roomie, co-worker, and friend; while the tears had been a surprise that stunned me for just a moment, the lesson taught was in the fact you hadn’t missed one beat in swooping in to comfort. This should have been my area, my cue, but I had missed it, like so many others—seeing the cost of failure in missed moments in time, missed opportunities.

I had moved on, and it was “someday” in February when the true worth of a trusted colleague was found as I could now see Discharge Planning required searching beyond what was immediately visible and heard. Heaven, I realized, is really clinical moments of brilliance, small, simple, and everyday occurrences happening just as easily next to a copier as they do at a bedside in the ICU. The “someday” had come when I could finally see it was somewhere between the medical paradigm and the ethics of Social Work wherein lies the balance I must seek to survive a hospital in any given moment—any given second.

March took me to Pittsburg, and one “someday” early in the month showed me a moment of lucidity, bright and hot, on fire with the acknowledgement in my own self of the denial behind my unvoiced emotions,
and thus my fears,

having successfully avoided not one thing; “someday,” I will have to fully explain.

By “someday” in May, the “someday” I had been counting down to,

I had seen the complexity of dying in a nursing home,

watching and learning how the softest, gentlest of touches can

heal gaping injuries and how disease cannot make us forget to feel,

especially love and kindness, integrity and honesty.

I caught priceless jewels of awareness like snowflakes on my tongue,

every intimate morsel of counsel etched upon my heart,

ready for a lifetime of service, knowing this was my talent,

this was my place, reflecting on Ralph Waldo Emerson who said,

“The artists must be sacrificed to their art.

Like bees, they must put their lives into the sting they give.”

Who better to re-teach the insight of Emerson’s words than you?

Weekly, behind every lesson, behind every question of “Why,”

behind the personal and professional struggles

attached to learning,

you sat,

you gave meaning,

you gave understanding.

Behind every process recording was a measurement of adjustment,

fine-tuning my Social Work practice

so even someone as tone deaf as I could hear its definition;

you sang the melody, and, little by little, I wrote the lyrics.

Someday, I will lie dying; they will send the Social Worker in.

I will tell them about the journey that came before the

Social Worker I used to be—the beginning.

I will tell them of André Gide who said, “The scholar seeks, the artist finds,”

and the years I spent trying to find who I was,

who had been left after the scars from the beginning had healed?

Maybe, I have been asking that question all these years—

perhaps it was simply a matter of waiting for you to help me answer that question for myself.

I will tell them the end—yet to be written.

In the middle is where you will be;

the end of everything,

and the beginning of everything. ☁️

Alexandra Zimmerman O’Clair has been writing poetry since 1991. She is a 2010 graduate of SUNY Albany’s MSW program, and wrote the follow poem for her field supervisor, Kim Swire of the CHOICES Program at St. Peter’s Hospital, to commemorate her experience with the Internships in Aging Program (IAP).
A large part of the future of every nation will be dependent upon the quality of its teachers. An old Chinese proverb tells us that, “A load of books does not equal one good teacher.” Many years from now, we may be judged by the quality of our teachers instead of the size of our nation’s industrial production.

Most teaching takes place outside of classrooms. Our learning and our values come from different sources: from our parents, from our friends, and from sources that we may not even be aware of. Life is a continuing process of teaching and of being taught.

“Teachers and students should be partners who participate together in a common adventure of learning.”

Teachers are ordinary people engaged in extraordinary work. To pass knowledge from one generation to the next is an exciting task. It is creating the beginnings of future thought and future behavior. To be a teacher is probably the highest honor and the highest responsibility that anyone can have. Teachers can never tell where their influence may lead. It is true that when you teach your son, you teach your son’s son.

There is much confusion concerning teaching, and metaphors are common. We usually consider teaching as a way of filling students with information, like pouring water into empty bottles. I prefer the metaphor of lighting a lamp. Students are like lamps waiting to be lighted, and the best teachers are able to carry a torch of light to their students. Teachers become candles that give light to the candles of their students.

Teaching takes place only when learning takes place. Of course teachers must teach the subject matter they are responsible for. Math teachers must teach math, history teachers must teach history. Beyond this, however, successful teachers assist their students in the art of discovery. They will give their students the greatest gift: the wish to learn. They inspire their students to do all they are capable of doing. Teaching is preparing

Trail workers taking a breather.
students to educate themselves and to teach each other. Teachers and students should be partners who participate together in a common adventure of learning. Good teachers learn while they teach. When a student fails, the teacher also fails.

To reach students’ minds, we must first capture their hearts. Teachers open the minds of their students, touch their hearts, and shape their future. In years to come, our students will probably forget what we have taught them. But they will always remember how we made them feel. Students need models rather than critics. They tend to be imitative. Teachers should assume that they are setting examples for their students.

“Life is a continuing process of teaching and of being taught.”

A story that illustrates this concerns a mother who asked Gandhi to get her son to stop eating sugar. “Come back in two weeks,” Gandhi replied. Two weeks later the mother brought her child back to Gandhi. Then Gandhi said to the boy, “Stop eating sugar.” Puzzled, the woman said, “Thank you, but why didn’t you tell him that two weeks ago?” Gandhi replied, “Two weeks ago I was eating sugar.” He couldn’t preach to others what he was not willing to do himself.

Teaching can be an arduous profession. It is not easy to combine two missions, which I believe to be: (1) to prepare students to understand the world with all its complexities and all its changes; and (2) to help students lead humane and creative lives so that they will become good persons and useful citizens. To teach the basic course requirements and also teach the need to become compassionate and cooperative citizens is a formidable task that makes severe demands on all teachers. To be able to accept change in a changing world and to bring this into the classroom presents a great challenge to every teacher’s imagination. An old rabbinic adage says to us: “Don’t limit a child to your own learning because he was born in another time.” This is a subtle message that we must consider when we are teaching. We must allow for the expansion of young minds, and we must be open to ideas that were not taught to us as students.

A common responsibility of teachers is to make learning enjoyable. An old saying tells us that, “Only the lesson which is enjoyed can be learned well.” How to make learning fun? How to make the classroom a place for laughing as well as learning? Much classroom humor is about relations between teachers and students. Perhaps it is time for a few examples to relieve the seriousness of this essay.

◆ Our first story is about the wealthy man who was summoned to the principal’s office to discuss his son’s poor behavior in school. After listening to the school’s complaints against his son, the man said: “I don’t see why the teachers can’t get along with Tommy; all the other servants do!” (This is a sad story, but it illustrates how some parents view their children’s teachers.)
◆ On the teacher’s birthday she found on her desk a handmade card with the message: “Mrs. Smith, your students in the third grade love you—all except three of us.”

◆ A wise schoolteacher sent this note to the parents of all the school children: “If you promise not to believe everything your child says happens at school, I’ll promise not to believe everything they say happens at their homes.”

In conclusion, here are a few questions for our teachers. In addition to teaching your subject matter, are you teaching compassion and cooperation? Are you giving students enough confidence so that they can enjoy being alone with themselves? Are they learning to appreciate and to treasure the differences among people? Are you helping them to understand and accept change?

“We must allow for the expansion of young minds, and we must be open to ideas that were not taught to us as students.”

Thank you for reading this column. Please join me in remembering that tomorrow’s world will be built by today’s children, and that the teacher who opens the door to the school closes the door to the prison.

Dr. Robert S. Herman lives in Slingerlands, New York. He describes himself as a “sometimes executive, author, economist, educator, poet, humorist, and sometimes none of these.”
SUNY: A Key Quality-of-Life Driver for Residents of All Ages

By SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher

The Capital Region offers many attractive quality-of-life-enhancing assets that appeal to people of all ages. We have an impressive array of cultural, recreational, and historic resources, along with two major hospitals and a multitude of excellent health care providers. But I’d like to focus on another critical positive feature of living in this region, and that is our access to excellent higher education opportunities, including several State University of New York (SUNY) campuses.

“SUNY also brings new worlds of opportunity and learning to mature New Yorkers who are training for new careers, exploring new interests, or seeking information that will enhance their quality of life.”

With sixty-four campuses and nearly 465,000 students, SUNY is the largest comprehensive public university system in the United States. And with that size comes great diversity and accessibility. Not only does SUNY offer more than 7,000 degree and certificate programs, but we also provide a wide range of low- or no-cost programs, seminars, and workshops tailored to the interests and needs of adults and retirees.

SUNY in your community

SUNY campuses serve as “anchor institutions”—institutions that are anchored in their communities, in that they cannot easily pick up and move—and therefore have a special role and responsibility in shaping a community’s future. This is certainly the case in the Capital Region where there is a high density and a full range of SUNY schools that employ and educate the twenty-first-century workforce. SUNY also brings new worlds of opportunity and learning to mature New Yorkers who are training for new careers, exploring new interests, or seeking information that will enhance their quality of life.

“Our plan includes six “Big Ideas,” one of which is “SUNY and the Vibrant Community.”

SUNY already plays a key role in our communities, but we are currently working to leverage our vast resources to maximize our positive impact on the lives of New York’s citizens. Earlier this year we launched a strategic plan called The Power of SUNY, which is riveted on revitalizing New York’s economy and enhancing the quality of life in our communities. Our plan includes six “Big Ideas,” one of which is “SUNY and the Vibrant Community.” This initiative will build on SUNY’s already strong presence as a provider of arts-and-culture programming, continuing education, volunteerism and service learning that make life richer and connect us to one another.
A remarkable 97 percent of all New Yorkers live within twenty miles of a SUNY campus, and SUNY schools across New York State continue to be recognized for their outstanding quality, accessibility, and unsurpassed value. Here in the Capital Region, we have a world-renowned doctoral degree-granting university center (The University at Albany), an innovative university college focused on adult learners (SUNY Empire State College), a technology college (SUNY Cobleskill) and five community colleges (Hudson Valley, Schenectady, Columbia-Greene, Fulton-Montgomery, and Adirondack), all of which offer continuing education opportunities and programs for adult students.

“What does SUNY mean to you at sixty? What opportunities does it hold for you? What will SUNY mean to you in the future if you plan to live in the Capital Region in your retirement?”

SUNY at 60 and continuing education
In 2009 SUNY celebrated its sixtieth anniversary, and to commemorate the milestone SUNY Press published the first comprehensive written history of the university system, SUNY at 60: The Promise of the State University of New York.

But the words “SUNY at 60” also make me think about what SUNY can mean to the Capital Region’s mature population as they make plans to retire or perhaps embark on a new career later in life. What does SUNY mean to you at sixty? What opportunities does it hold for you? What will SUNY mean to you in the future if you plan to live in the Capital Region in your retirement?

Last year, more than 660 students in the Capital Region above the age of fifty enrolled in degree-granting courses at local SUNY campuses, and of this number more than five hundred earned an undergraduate or an advanced degree in 2009. Of these, 102 local degree recipients were age sixty or over.

But adult students at SUNY need not be degree-seeking. SUNY campuses, and in particular the community colleges and Empire State College, offer a variety of non-credit programs and workshops at low or no cost. Also, state law provides that students age sixty and older may audit classes at community colleges free of charge, on a space-available basis. In fall 2009, 1,140 students age sixty or over audited courses at SUNY schools throughout the state.

What can SUNY do for you?
The wide range of classes and programs at SUNY extends to non-credit continuing education programs and workshops offered by The University at Albany, Empire State College, and SUNY’s community colleges. A few examples of local programs include:
• Hudson Valley Community College’s **Center for Creative Retirement and Health and Wellness Institute** offers courses and programs in single or multiple sessions, ranging from $10 to $275 per course. A selection from the fall 2009 semester catalog of non-degree programs includes more than one hundred offerings, including digital photography, genealogical research, healthy cooking, local history, and financial planning.

• Schenectady County Community College’s vast course offerings are complemented by its **Restart** program, an online support system for adult students that offers a great way to share advice and information about SCCC resources and events. The online format is a convenient way to contact other students for their encouragement or guidance and to help returning adult students navigate their way through college.

• Empire State College offers a wide range of individual courses, advanced certificates, and full degrees both on campus and also online through the college's popular **Center for Distance Learning**. The courses are completely self-contained and self-paced, and allow you to earn your degree from home.

“At SUNY, we see education as a pipeline that extends from birth through the retirement years.”

• The University at Albany also participates in a wide range of adult education programs, including the **Humanities Institute for Lifelong Learning and the Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN)**. Also, this fall, the **College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering** is hosting a community lecture series to discuss CNSE’s pioneering education, cutting-edge research, and significant economic impact. And UAlbany convenes the nationally-acclaimed **New York State Writers Institute**, which includes author seminars and readings, panel discussions, staged readings, film screenings, and writing workshops, most of which are free and open to the public.

At SUNY, we see education as a pipeline that extends from birth through the retirement years. We believe that education is a life-long process and that as long as people are learning, they are growing—a process that greatly benefits the community as a whole. SUNY represents a world of opportunity for all New Yorkers, and we are committed to making sure we play a big role in enhancing the quality of life in this region and in communities across the state.

For more information about the State University of New York and The Power of SUNY, visit www.suny.edu

*Nancy L. Zimpher is the twelfth chancellor of the State University of New York.*
Canoes and kayaks at Heart Lake.

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IMAGES. Each issue of CCQ uses images of people, architecture, artifacts and natural features that make the Capital Region special. The cover of the October 2010 issue has images of SUNY Plaza (formerly called the D&H Building), two women enjoying the peaks of the Adirondack Park, and the 18th century Johnson Map. This issue highlights the Adirondack Mountain Club with pictures of the natural beauty of the Adirondack Park and some of the people enjoying the Park and others doing trail work in the Park.

CREDITS. The photograph of SUNY Plaza is courtesy of the State University of New York. Pictures of the Adirondack Park were taken by Paul Ertelt and are courtesy of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

This and past issues of CCQ are available in pdf format on 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.