

SENIOR
CONNECTIONS
THE VISITOR

a newsletter for friends of senior connections

The mission of Senior Connections is to recruit, train and support volunteers who visit and befriend isolated older adults in our community

Dear Friends,

Volume 50 December 2012

Greetings to you all from all of us here at Senior Connections! As we enter this year-end season of family, holidays and times of thanksgiving I am especially mindful of the spirit of connection and mutual friendships that infuse all that we do here at Senior Connections. Thanks to your support and belief in the nourishing and life sustaining importance of relationship nearly 80 seniors have received 4,250 hours of visits this year at a cost of \$8.70 per visit! This is a bargain you will find hard to beat anywhere!

Earlier this fall I received a personal reminder of the importance of friendship and mutuality when I got a phone call about my friend Donna.

I have known Donna for over 30 years, she has been a substitute mother to me, a sharer of a pew at church, a cocktail drinking buddy over tables laden with Swedish and German food, an elegant and beautiful woman who I never saw without her hair and makeup done –even after brain surgery!! – And a straight shooter who never said a thing she didn't mean and who **never** paid full retail. Through the welcoming and honest arms of Donna I became a member of a large family of friends who were bound together by a shared joy in living, telling it like it is and a sense that there's nothing like being relaxed with those who know all about you and like you anyway. Donna was the force of nature who helped make the world feel safe and somehow right even when things started to go off-kilter.

Well you know how it goes - over the years some of us moved, others got married or got high pressured jobs, some drifted off, life got complicated and we forgot to pick up the phone and, then, forgot some more. But that was ok, because Donna was always there. Always.

The phone call was to tell me that Donna was in the hospital and not doing well. Suddenly, as if no time had passed at all, this band of friends and family - some of whom had not seen each other in years!, gathered together once again at Donna's home and were comforted and comforting as we prayed for the miracle that did not occur. Three days later we were all together again as we bade her farewell at a funeral that raised the rooftop with her favorite hymns. And now we are left without this wonderful woman who, though having spent the past 30 and more years as a widow, knew the magic of caring and connection and gathered us close to be friends and family to each other. Donna was lucky in many ways, she was healthy till the end, she had a rich community of friends, and she shared her love of life and friends with abundance. But she knew too, shared it, and showed it to us all, that at the end of the day, it is the tender touch of a hand when you are weeping, the welcoming smile of a friend when you are lonely, and the presence of that person who knows you that lightens the days and nights of our lives.

At Senior Connections this is what we do too. We endeavor to pierce the lonely nights and hold tenderly and with gratitude the thoughts and feelings of those who have given much in their long lifetimes. The friendships that emerge from our volunteers and seniors are testaments to the best parts of what we can give. Thank you for making it happen.

Barbara

Students, Students, Students!!!!!!!

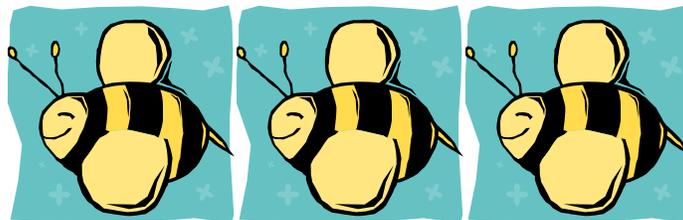
WOW - have we had a wonderful year! We have been deeply encouraged and greatly assisted by a host of students from all around town. Let's start with Debbie Hassler from the **Wright College Gerontology Program** who completed her 2nd year Practicum with us this fall.

Not only did Debbie transform our office space and our resource directory but she became the brain child and project leader our **Senior Jeopardy** game with our four "Senior Studies" students from **Evanston Township High School**. Madeline Brooks, Serena Dully, Chris Rudnicki and Jernone Smith are the wonderful and gifted high schools seniors who come to us faithfully for two hours each week for the entire fall semester for their service learning volunteer rotation. Their senior year experience focuses on interdisciplinary and thematic content coupled with experiential opportunities. And are we glad! They researched music of the 20th century and created the Jeopardy categories of musicals, lyrics, artists, genres and hymns. The game was debuted at our annual Fall Luncheon and was a huge hit with 80 seniors and their visitors vying for first place prizes as they whipped through the categories and remembered old songs and lyrics and the pleasures they brought with them.

Not be outdone, **Chicago State University's** Professor Carla Burruss offered us 4 students: Levester Hughes; Jakoba Kip Norfleet; Ciara Murphy and Jasmine Harper who each devoted 8 hours a week to prepare a business plan for us as we move forward to expand to meet the needs of Evanston's older adults.

Kerry Herdegen, a member of Reba Place Church, former office manager and student of the School of Business and Nonprofit Management at **North Park University** profiled Senior Connections in a paper that examined the organization's overall structure and concluded with recommendations for development and strategic planning that are a real help to us as we move forward.

Finally, in an embarrassment of riches, **Northwestern University's Capstone Project** has brought Krysta Smith and Karen Wilber to work with us on a civic engagement project that runs through this entire academic school year and will be working with us to expand our presence in the Evanston community. We are planning to build an even larger cadre of volunteers, gain a robust source of funder and donors (much like yourselves who have kept us at this work for 21 years!) and enable us to be a bigger and stronger resource for our elderly neighbors who have so much to offer.



So, as you can tell, we have **busy as bees!** this year. (even forgot to write the fall newsletter!) and feel pretty darn good about all that we have been able to accomplish. In addition to welcoming all the terrific support from our students, our volunteers and our seniors, we have finalized a new **Training curriculum** (thanks to Director of Volunteers Wendy Klinkner and some devoted volunteer editors, formatters and general wise souls) established an **Advisory Council** and, with the help of Graphic Designer Julie Neely of **RiskoNeely Design**, have a beautiful **new brochure**.

We love our donors! Should you wish to support Senior Connections through a tax-deductible gift of stock please contact Barbara Sittler at 847-869-0682 or at Barbara@senior-connections.org. Barbara can provide you with instructions for gifts that can be processed for calendar year 2012.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!!!!!

Our senior Florence Sibert celebrated her birthday this year hitting an extra-ordinary milestone!



A Story to Share – From Director of Volunteers: Wendy Klinkner

Two weeks ago I introduced a young woman- new to Evanston and to Senior Connections to one of our first time seniors. The daughter of this senior was hoping a visitor would provide some social stimulation and friendship since her mother had memory issues and tended to be shy and therefore isolated. The introduction went extremely well, but when the visitor called back the next week to confirm, the senior graciously declined. Not to be turned down so easily, the visitor contacted the senior's daughter for her advice. The daughter explained how her mom's memory issues cause anxiety around decisions and changes and so encouraged her to just go ahead and visit as they initially planned. I got a call from the visitor immediately following her. She reported that the senior graciously received her. They had a wonderful hour and a half visit - with the senior playing her favorite records, teaching her some new German words and going on a walk to the neighborhood bakery. It was heartwarming to hear of this visitor's excitement and satisfaction of pushing through her senior's resistance and then experiencing the satisfaction of a fun and rewarding visit! I love how the visitor was proactive in getting help and not giving up so easily, as well as knowing we were able to provide friendship and connection in a way that was not so overwhelming and threatening to this new senior. This is the beauty of Senior Connections and the difference one friendship can make.



Chris



Madeline



Jernone



Serena

ETHS “SENIOR STUDIES” STUDENTS AND WRIGHT COLLEGE INTERN WOW THE CROWD WITH THEIR MUSICAL JEOPARDY GAME AT SENIOR CONNECTIONS FALL LUNCHEON.

On Friday November 9th older adults and their volunteer visitors were hosted by Senior Connections at their annual Fall Luncheon. This year the crowd, an all-time high of nearly 80 folks, gathered at the Reba Place Church Meeting House for a wonderful lunch provided by local caterer Karen Ewen of “My Sister’s Kitchen” and were treated to a rousing game of Jeopardy based on music from the 1920’s through the 1960’s.

The excitement grew to fever pitch as the ten teams of participants competed with enthusiasm and long memories to the challenge their musical know-how in the areas of Musicals, Lyrics, Genres, Artists and Hymns.

The game was completely by the ETHS students under College intern Debbie Brooks, Chris Rudnicki, Dully met at Senior learn about the music and Hammerstein, Cole Porter, Benny Goodman, Mahalia Dinah Shore and create game of Jeopardy.



developed and researched the guidance of Wright Hassler. For weeks in ETHS students Madeline Jernone Smith and Serena Connections each week to times of Rogers and Al Jolson, Ella Fitzgerald, Jackson, Frank Sinatra and their unique spin on the

But don’t just take our word for it! This is what we heard from a very satisfied Guest:

“Another success, dear ones.
First – the menu.

Someone in your outfit is a genius in the selection –simple, substantial and delicious—who could ask for better? My compliments to the chef.

Let’s move on to the entertainment. This year’s game show was a riotous success. Our table ...once the Jeopardy game started was Wham-bam—everybody in the circle was laughing, shouting, waving arms, SINGING for Pete’s sake and having a great time.

Anyway – quite seriously, so pay attention: thanks and congratulations!”

Founder's Corner - Envisioning Effective Community-Building

Wow! It's been 2 years since my "retirement"! I've had some great opportunities to reflect upon those 19 years, and I'd like to share about this significant and influential encounter.



I first met John McKnight in the early 1990's, when he placed an undergraduate intern with Senior Connections. John is emeritus professor and co-director of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University. In a recent article he writes, "I've been around neighborhoods, neighborhood organizations, and communities in big cities for decades. I have never seen service systems that brought people well-being, delivered them to citizenship, or made them free... Have they substituted the vision of service for the only thing that will make people whole—community? Are they service peddlers or community builders?" He goes on to say in his article that service systems fail for several reasons, including shifting resources to the "professionals," doing for others instead of finding and using others' gifts and capabilities in the community; focusing on "need" rather than assets. AND, he has advice, based upon years of solid research as well as his own astute observations.

He championed the sense of community and saw it in us. His student assisted us with our first volunteer manual. John attended one of our board meetings; I thought to tell us with his expectations of what he wanted his student to accomplish with her participation in Senior Connections. He proceeded to share his thoughts on community-building and effectively working with our seniors, and I have never forgotten the conversation. "Vocabulary is important," he said. "It sets the tone and philosophy." If you have helpers and helpees, you are diminishing one's equal footing and their ability to contribute to their own well-being. "One-directional service delivery does not build community." Mutuality and the ability of people to be participatory, focusing upon their priorities, is what builds up a community.

Backed by research and with wisdom and eloquence, Mr. McKnight was articulating the community-based approach we intended, as modeled by Reba Place Church, our founding parent organization, and the resonance was delightful! These are the principles upon which Senior Connections was founded and continues to operate.

Senior Connections IS different! We don't exist to give rides, chores, take people out to movies, run errands for shut-ins, give people a respite or something to look forward to, although all these things happen all the time. We exist to build friendships, mutual friendships, in which each participant gives of their gifts and talents and receives of the other. We get to know each senior. We train each visitor. We match them according to interests, not needs. And our beloved Evanston community is built stronger, relationship by relationship.

We tell our volunteers, "Each one of you can be a friend." We tell our seniors, "You have so much to offer." John McKnight concludes in his article that all of us need to bring into the service system the hospitality that is at the center of understanding a relationship as a friend not a servant. Our response to people in need should be hospitality, not services.

The other thing I remember about John McKnight is that he has sent Senior Connections a contribution each year in response to our tea letter. He must like what he sees!



New Board member Amy Tharpe started as a volunteer with Senior Connections visiting a lovely 98 year old woman named Mary Woeber in 2006. She visited with Mary every week until she passed away at 102. Amy has always volunteered with children but said that her time with Mary was some of the most rewarding time of her life. As a new board member, she hopes to get more community involvement, organize fun events and fundraisers as well as help to enrich the experiences for both seniors and their visitors. Amy works in Sales and she and her husband are new residents to Evanston.



Wish List:

Big Dry Erase board, stamps, event planning support, prospective board members, drivers for semi-annual events.

Senior Connections Board and Staff

Chairperson

David Hovde

Secretary

Penny Whiteside

Treasurer

Glynis Doyle

Joan Battle

Patricia Caine

Amy Keefner

Allie Payne

Staff Members

Barbara Sittler LCSW;
M. Div.

Executive Director

Wendy Klinkner, LCSW

Director of Volunteers



Senior Connections new email address: wevisitseniors@senior-connections.org

SENIOR CONNECTIONS + 535 Custer Ave. + EVANSTON, IL 60202

847-869-0682

www.senior-connections.org

Or visit us on Facebook

"We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high."

Florida Scott-Maxwell,
The Measure of My Days