

Myths and Realities
The Role of the Older Citizen in our Society
By Jenny Biche' & Vicki Vance

"No country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources."
Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Fauquier County is getting a makeover! Currently over 10% of our citizens are over age 65 and soon they will have a lot of company. The impact of aging population is a result of not only the Baby Boomers but also a decade long trend in the dropping mortality rate- we are all living longer. The number of people in the U.S. who reach age 100 is the fastest growing segment of seniors.

One commonly mistaken myth is this influx will drain our resources adding a burden to those of us in the workforce. In reality this could not be farther from the truth. Many famous people made significant contributions to society in their senior years. At the age of seventy five, Helen Keller published "Teacher" in honor of her miracle worker teacher, Annie Sullivan. Michelangelo was appointed architect of St. Peters in Rome at age 72. He worked continuously until his death at age eighty-eight and during this time designed the dome of St. Peters. Mother Teresa worked right up to the time of her death at age eighty seven in setting up missions among the needy on several continents, primarily in India. At the age of sixty-nine she received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The impact of this unprecedented growth of the over 65 population will shape our public policies, literature, science, music and politics, as well as our families and communities. An effort needs to go to into community planning by and for seniors.

Robert Grayson 82, of Warrenton says "When I look at proposals in the newspaper that the town has in mind, I always wonder if anyone is looking out for the interests of older, less mobile citizens" Doris Farrell 68, is a volunteer for the Boys and Girls club and feels " We need to get a chance to mix with the young kids. We can learn what they feel about what is happening at home and school. Mentoring gives me a chance to give them something back."

How can we enjoy full inclusion of all generations in modern society? This is the challenge facing all communities.

Let's show appreciation for the elderly in our society. Sit and chat with older person. Ask him or her about, their lives and experiences during this ever changing period of history. Ask them about their experiences starting new businesses, major political and technology changes. We will all be seniors some day. We have an opportunity with this growing population to cultivate and benefit from a valuable resource in our community. Let's recycle their experience and sow new seeds.

Aging Together is a regional partnership that works to improve the lives of senior citizens and their caregivers in our community. To learn more visit us at www.agingtogether.org or call Vicki Vance at 540-351-1063.