



April 30, 2020

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aging Together Underscores Importance of Older Americans Month in May

Since John F. Kennedy in 1963, every President has issued a formal proclamation for the month of May asking that the entire nation pay tribute in some way to older persons in their communities. Through the decades the intent for Older Americans month has been twofold: to raise awareness for elder abuse, neglect and gaps in programs, and to promote the contributions of older citizens to society. President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Older Americans Act of 1965 and formally declared May as Older Americans Month, which advanced the creation of the Administration on Aging Agency that introduced programs to help struggling older Americans with such things as nutrition programs, transportation and legal assistance, and paved the way to passing the Medicare Program. In 1976 Gerald Ford proclaimed Older Americans Month stating, "Among our nation's most precious natural resources are the collective wisdom, and experience of our older citizens."

Aging Together agrees and recognizes that communities who encourage the contributions of older adults are stronger. Our older population has endurance and wisdom brought on by years of progressing through constantly evolving times. During their varied lifetimes they have experienced things like world wars, the cold war, the space age and the walk on the moon, rock and roll, the battles for civil rights and women's rights, the modernization of aviation, the start of Microsoft propelling the world into the computer age, and collective other changes and advances that have made them much more adaptable and resilient.

"And wise!", says Ellen Phipps, Executive Director of Aging Together. "Aging is often regarded in a negative way. Yet age refers to the length of time a person has lived, and that lifetime brings on a wealth of insight and knowledge that a younger person cannot have. That's a very positive outcome of aging, and one that deserves recognition because it plays a key role in the vitality of our communities."

To this point, the core of volunteers that makes up the life-line of Aging Together includes many people over the age of 50 and up into the 80s. They participate on County Teams, the volunteer groups in each of the region's counties, and advocate for resources and services. They sit on event committees and the Board of Directors. They advocate to fill gaps for the aging population at the state and local levels. They contribute to the creation of resource documents, and drive people without transportation to doctors' appointments and grocery stores. And during the current pandemic, they sew masks, provide activities for isolated individuals, and offer respite conversation to caregivers, among many other selfless acts.

"Our older volunteers have the greatest awareness of how we can best serve our region", says Phipps. "You cannot improve the lives of our aging population without including members of the aging

population. We embrace their intuition and skills every step of the way. And they readily raise their hand to help!”

And yet, COVID-19 has compelled our communities more than ever to heed the safety of our aging demographic. Many of the same volunteers who fill much-needed positions are the very people who are most highly susceptible to acquiring the COVID-19 virus, which is a big challenge all-the-way-around for Aging Together. “We need our volunteer resources more than ever, yet we are more limited,” says Phipps. And consequently, when that demographic must remain home, they become those people they are helping. They begin to feel all the symptoms of isolation, including depression and loneliness. “It’s our job and challenge to figure this out”.

Aging Together has come up with a couple answers. One is the creation of a regional resource list that includes everything from finding food and transportation, housing sources, fraud and scam alert lines, veterans resources, and signing up to get a friendly call, among countless sources of help and information. Many area agencies are included since Aging Together puts high value on partnerships and on including them to spread the word. “We are a resource-oriented agency, and this is what we do best. We know we cannot begin to provide help without including other relevant organizations”, says Phipps. The list is updated weekly and is available to download on their website.

The second organized response to COVID-19 by Aging Together is the development of the “iPads for Seniors” campaign to purchase tablets that allow connection with loved ones, launched by seed funding from the Culpeper Wellness Foundation. Since isolation is the best way to protect our elderly population, providing the capability to “see” and talk to family and friends removes some of the solitude. iPads also enable virtual doctor’s appointments and the ability to access activities such as games and movie streaming.

“Older Americans Month cannot merely be a feel-good designation or jargon”, says Phipps. By chance it falls smack in the middle of an unexpected pandemic. “But that’s an opportunity to remind ourselves not to be complacent and to keep moving toward our vision of age-friendly communities. Maybe we’ll move faster, maybe we’ll stumble upon unforeseen approaches, maybe our combined services and resources will be better because of this. That’s a really good way to honor our Older Americans!”

*The mission of Aging Together is, through partnerships, to connect people to communities and resources to improve quality of life as we age. Aging Together serves the counties of Culpeper, Fauquier, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock.
For a copy of the Resource List, or to help fund iPads for Seniors, visit www.agingtogether.org*

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