

Active Aging Week:

Host perspectives paint a fuller picture



A handful of host organizations share their experiences with the annual health-promotion campaign in case studies highlighting what they did, what worked (sometimes what didn't), and what they plan to do differently next time

As Active Aging Week® 2016 draws nearer, participating organizations will be busily planning schedules of events that are uniquely theirs—that's part of the fun of hosting the annual health-promotion campaign that celebrates aging and living well. Many local hosts will share their experiences and photographs with the International Council on Active Aging®, which organizes the initiative on a national level. Some of these stories will appear in the *Journal on Active Aging's* yearly article showcasing the successes and spirit of the week. But local hosts typically reveal more than their successes to ICAA.

Hosts often mention all the Active Aging Week events they offered, what really worked (sometimes what didn't and *why*), plus things they plan to try or do differently next time. This article presents some case studies based on perspectives shared by five host organizations over the last few years. These case studies paint a fuller picture that may provide pointers and spark ideas for those participating in this year's campaign (see "Mark your calendar" on page 65 for details).

CASE STUDY: A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Bozeman Parks and Recreation, Bozeman, Montana

A host report submitted in 2014 by Cheryl Bartholomew

Bozeman Parks and Recreation initiated its Active Aging Programs a little over one year ago. While best known in the community for its high-quality and di-

Continued on page 64



In September 2014, Episcopal Homes' Julie Niewald and a senior-athlete presenter embodied Active Aging Week's positive spirit. Image courtesy of Episcopal Homes of Minnesota

Active Aging Week: Host perspectives paint a fuller picture

Continued from page 62



For Active Aging Week 2014, Bozeman Parks and Recreation hosted pickleball, with 22 people participating. Image courtesy of Bozeman Parks and Recreation Department

verified youth and adult programs, the City of Bozeman recognized the need to better serve the older-adult population. While there is an abundance of preserved parks and trails, indoor space for classes and activities is limited.

The Parks and Recreation Department decided to partner with Hillcrest Senior Living (Aspen Pointe) in a joint effort to expand the variety of programs and locations to promote a more inclusive community venue for Active Aging Week. We were pleased with our first-year attendance results:

- Fitness Walking with poles (25)
- Stability for Mobility Pole Walking (27)
- Chairobics seated exercise, balance and relaxation classes (9)
- Zumba/chair (27)
- Water Fitness (21)
- Pickleball (22)

Two classes that were initiated shortly before the start of Active Aging Week and had no previous following, Juggling

and Petanque [a French boules game similar to Bocce], had zero attendance. We believe a number of factors contributed to the lack of attendance. These include the times the classes were offered and the uncoordinated scheduling of classes held at Aspen Pointe [Hillcrest's independent-living neighborhood], which conflicted with our offerings. We hope to rectify that with better planning next year.

Bozeman Parks and Recreation offered discount coupons, door prizes, and a wealth of health, wellness and fitness information downloaded and printed from the ICAA website, as well as free materials made available through the National Institute on Aging and National Institutes of Health. Our focus was on educating and engaging the older-adult population about the importance of staying active and productive members of society. Our goal is to empower this population to take responsibility for their health and well-being.

Bozeman is a popular resort area that attracts retirees who love nature and out-

door sports including, but not limited to, fishing, hiking and skiing. Due to the lengthy and sometimes harsh winters, less-active older adults often choose to live here from May to October only. That creates a unique challenge to maintaining adequate/consistent attendance for senior programs/classes throughout the winter.

Our goal for next year is to grow our community partnerships and consider sponsorships. We are looking to expand programming to include all dimensions of wellness, with fitness as the foundation for that growth.

CASE STUDY: A DIVERSE SCHEDULE **Highgate Senior Living, Great Falls, Montana**

Based on a host report submitted in 2015 by Adim ZaaZaa, Cinnamon Fuller, Jacob Sherman and Zane Bendig

At Highgate at Great Falls, participation focused on the 2015 Active Aging Week theme, "Live Your Adventure." The community developed its own events and activities, plus drew on the special theme-day topics offered by the national campaign. The result was a nicely diverse schedule of events.

Displaying their adventurous spirits, residents "at all stages of ambulation (wheelchairs, walkers)" enjoyed a scenic boat tour of the Gates of the Mountains limestone canyon on the Take the Plunge theme day, according to the community's event organizers. Plans fell through, however, for the Say Hello theme day's programming. Instead, organizers used Skype to connect residents with their family members in Alaska and on the East Coast for "very successful" video chats. Organizers planned to add this activity to the community's regular calendar "due to the cognitive and social stimulation it offers our residents."

A Golden Chef Competition proved to be the week's most successful event. ("We'll be doing it again," organizers

shared.) Taking place on the Good Things Thursday theme day, the competition featured three teams, each with two residents and one team member. “Each team had a mystery basket filled with ingredients, and upon opening the basket, had to create a dish,” organizers reported. “The Mayor of Great Falls judged the final dish, and we awarded chefs’ hats and wooden spoons [to be emblazoned with the wood-burned words *Golden Chef Champions*] as trophies. ... They all had a blast.”

Other activities included the Carnival Kick Off, which featured games, prizes, fair food, a dunk tank and a white-dove release; a fishing trip and an obstacle course for Sporting Day; and a visit to a casino following the Skype video chats, which cemented that day’s social benefits. Residents also hosted a barbeque for 25 airmen from a local air force base and presented them with personalized thank-you cards and flags to celebrate Air Force Appreciation Day. Wrapping up the week’s festivities, family members joined residents for a Western Family Lunch.

Highgate at Great Falls “didn’t partner with anyone outside of the Highgate communities” to host Active Aging Week, according to event organizers, who hoped to partner with a local health and wellness center this year. On the other hand, the volunteer program doubled during the weeklong event. “We had over 17 volunteers from different walks of life and ages—from AmeriCorps and the College of Technology to family members,” organizers said. They credited the success of Active Aging Week “to the teamwork and dedication from our team members, family members, and various volunteers from around the community.”

Would the organizers do anything differently in 2016? When asked, they said they “wanted to do something ‘outside the box.’” Soliciting resident feedback



Various vendors displayed their resources at Frederick Living’s Health & Wellness Fair, a public event held during Active Aging Week 2014. Image courtesy of Frederick Living

about their 2015 Active Aging Week experiences would help them do “some extraordinary things,” organizers believed. “We’re very much excited to see what next year shall bring!”

**CASE STUDY: A WEEK OF LIVING TO THE FULLEST
Frederick Living, Frederick, Pennsylvania**

Adapted from a host report submitted in 2014 by Jane Alderfer

Frederick Living, located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, celebrated the theme “Let the Adventure Begin!” during Active Aging Week 2014. We focused on each of the six dimensions of wellness (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, occupational and spiritual) ... which gave residents many opportunities to live life to the fullest while engaging in fun activities that promoted a healthy lifestyle.

We kicked off the week with a Route 66 Exercise Challenge, acknowledging

Continued on page 66

Mark your calendar

Observance: Active Aging Week®

Theme: Explore the possibilities

Dates: September 25–October 1, 2016

Format:

- Activities chosen and presented by local hosts
- Free-to-low cost for older adults
- Emphasis on fun, camaraderie and education

Website: www.activeagingweek.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ActiveAgingWeek

Twitter: #activeagingweek, @AAW_ICAA

Active Aging Week: Host perspectives paint a fuller picture

Continued from page 65



Episcopal Homes' residents and staff joined the Walk to End Alzheimer's, which coincided with Active Aging Week 2014. Image courtesy of Episcopal Homes of Minnesota

the importance of physical wellness. Residents participated in the four-week exercise challenge, where they traced the route of the legendary highway from the shores of Lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean on a big wall map. For each milestone they reached, they received a sticker for the map and a small prize. There was a raffle for bigger healthy-living prizes for those who completed the challenge.

Also in the physical dimension, Community Life staff hosted an open house in our fitness center, with residents able to meet instructors and check out fitness classes as well as exercise equipment. Beach-ball volleyball in the auditorium was a big hit in place of our regular exercise classes one morning.

Music is a large part of our community's culture, stimulating emotional and social wellness. During Active Aging Week, our own Frederick Choir performed in the memory care and nursing neighborhoods [Frederick Living offers continuing care]; the Soul Purpose Quartet provided an

evening program featuring hymns and gospel songs; and a Hymn Sing-A-Long took place with our CEO. Our music programs are always well attended.

To give back to the local community, residents from all levels of care baked cookies and dog treats throughout the week to distribute to organizations such as the Montgomery County SPCA and Helping Hands. This was a meaningful activity for both residents and recipients, and a great way to make a positive impact. In addition, our Alzheimer's Association Fund-raiser ... raised over USD\$500 to donate to this important cause.

One of the most popular events was a Cuisines of the World food demonstration by our executive chef. We explored the flavors of Spain, Thailand and Scandinavia while learning about food history from some of the most influential culinary markets in the world. Among the week's other adventures, residential living residents took trips to the Audubon Society, to walk the trails and visit the museum, and the YMCA to swim.

Finally, Frederick Living's Second Annual Health & Wellness Fair was our biggest event of the week. Open to residents, staff and the public, the Fair was well attended and consisted of raffles, tours, smoothies, blood pressure screenings, and a variety of vendors for all ages. We realized just how many wellness opportunities exist in our surrounding community. Those in attendance found helpful resources on stress management; home health and hospice care; hearing, vision, mental and emotional care; the importance of exercise and staying active; volunteering in the local community, and much more.

CASE STUDY: A JOURNEY TO WELLNESS

The Oaks of Louisiana, Shreveport, Louisiana

Adapted from a host report submitted in 2013 by Terrie Roberts

The Oaks of Louisiana held its annual Passport to Health Week in conjunction with Active Aging Week 2013. Our theme was "Your Journey to Overall Wellness." Our events included lectures, demonstrations and meditations to help those attending achieve physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

"Because overall wellness encompasses seven dimensions that when integrated keep the mind, body and spirit in great shape, we planned an itinerary of activities that support those dimensions," said Marian Dehan, community outreach manager for the active-adult community. "When the week was over, and the journey was complete, we wanted participants to recognize the importance of striving for physical, emotional, spiritual, occupational, environmental, social and intellectual wellness."

Events included:

- *Longevity and the Seven Dimensions of Wellness*—a presentation on the wellness concept used at The Oaks.
- *Put Your Best Foot Forward: A Woman's Guide to Healthy Feet and Com-*

fortable Shoes—an overview of the foot’s structure and how to avoid foot pain.

- *Wholehearted Health: Recipe for a Healthy Lifestyle*—an event focused on diagnosis, treatment options and other ingredients for wholehearted health, including how attendees could revitalize their plates with healthy foods and portions. A cardiologist discussed what participants could do to reduce their risks for cardiovascular conditions, and an exercise specialist demonstrated exercises to improve cardio health.
- *Team Teach and Meditation*—a sampler exercise party, where people observed or participated in a variety of class exercises.
- *Less is More: Rightsize with Style*—a session about how to make the most of less space. Tips were presented on how to choose what to keep, how to organize and optimize the space, and how to select the right furniture and make it multifunctional.
- *Floor Freedom: Up, Down and All Around*—a look at how to prolong independence through the ability to get down on the floor and back up. Attendees learned about the importance of leg strength and flexibility.
- *Smarter Grocery Shopping: Making Better Choices for Body and Budget*—a session on how to select foods that are tasty, nutritious and make good economic sense. A healthy breakfast was included.

“Wholehearted Health” and “Smarter Grocery Shopping” were our most well-attended events, with 20-plus people from the community in attendance (not counting several dozen Oaks residents).

A number of individuals also participated in last year’s Passport to Health Week, and many attendees came not just to one event, but to multiple ones—some to all of them. They particularly liked the passport theme. If attendees forgot their passports [which featured



The Oaks of Louisiana used ‘postcards’ to highlight the dimensions of wellness and connect to its 2013 Active Aging Week theme. Image courtesy of The Oaks of Louisiana

an itinerary of each day’s events], they often would go back to their cars or apartments to get these documents so they could get them stamped.

A lot of thought was given to the speaker handouts and creative ways to provide that information. It is hard to set apart Passport events from others that we offer at The Oaks. Therefore we add special touches through handouts or take-aways, and the Passport/travel theme has really done that for us. For the “Smarter Grocery Shopping” program, an informational flyer (and a recipe card for healthy pumpkin muffins) was put into a small brown sack to resemble a grocery store sack of groceries. Guests loved it!

CASE STUDY: A ‘SMASHING SUCCESS’

Episcopal Homes of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota

Based on a host report submitted in 2014 by Julie Niewald

In 2014, Episcopal Homes of Minnesota (EH) hosted its first Active Aging Week

in order “to support the Life+ Health and Wellness Program for residents and employees.” Encompassing social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical and vocational wellness, Life+ launched with events to celebrate the weeklong active-aging campaign. EH, which offers a continuum of senior living options, highlighted the week’s theme, “Let the Adventure Begin,” in posters displayed throughout the campus, brochures mailed with RSVP cards prior to the week, and brochures distributed during a campaign event.

Eight individuals from within EH formed the team that organized Active Aging Week. To support events, the team succeeded in attracting and working with several partners, including Schuler Shoes, St. Paul Midway YMCA, MacPhail Center for Music (which offers music-learning experiences), Tandem Strength and Balance, Aging Services of MN (now LeadingAge Minnesota),

Continued on page 68

Active Aging Week: Host perspectives paint a fuller picture

Continued from page 67

Minnesota Senior Games, and the Walk to End Alzheimer's.

A full week of programming offered choices for everyone. When asked which activities/events participants benefitted from and/or enjoyed the most, organizers mentioned the following five:

- Zumba (dance-style workouts)
- Savvy Snack Sampler (healthy-snack preparation demonstrations)
- Tandem Strength and Balance (customized strength-building program)
- Empowered Percussion (creative drumming)
- Motion Wellness System (senior fitness equipment for outdoors or indoors)

Approximately 50 individuals per day participated in activities.

The most popular offering proved to be the Tandem Strength and Balance program. Run by a team of physical therapists, this company tailors its strength programs to support safe mobility for older adults. What was the most fun offering? According to organizers, it was the Motion Wellness System, a “play structure” for older adults designed to promote stability, balance and coordination.

Two offerings didn't attract much interest. Organizers named Chair Exercise as one activity that had low attendance; the other was The Living Tree [used to share residents' life stories (such as their experiences during World War Two)].

EH declared its first Active Aging Week a “smashing success.” Was there anything that did not work so well, however? “We offered more than one event at the same time to accommodate different interest groups,” organizers responded. “This was confusing to the attendees.”

Organizers also recounted one lesson learned from “an attempt made on one

day to change the location of the events to accommodate other regularly scheduled campus events. All events should be scheduled in one central location on the campus for the entire week,” they emphasized.

OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITIES

Every year during Active Aging Week, thousands of host organizations offer opportunities for participants, colleagues and communities to come together to celebrate aging and enjoy positive life experiences. These wellness activities showcase older adults as role models of active aging and emphasize that we can live as fully as possible at any age—regardless of health conditions or functional limitations. For those of more advanced age, in particular, the week-long campaign reinforces the message that they continue to be valued, fully participating members of society.

Active Aging Week also promotes wellness in all of life's dimensions. In 2016, the campaign's theme—“Explore the possibilities”—urges hosts and participants to welcome each day with a mind open to the possibilities to learn, grow and live well. Elim Park's Barbara Womer suggested this theme to ICAA after being inspired by the “Why not?” attitude at her continuing care retirement community. Encouraged by enthusiastic host organizations, older adults can explore the possibilities to improve their health, well-being and quality of life by saying “Why not?” to Active Aging Week. ☺

Led by ICAA, Active Aging Week 2016 takes place in partnership with the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition. This year's sponsors include Abbott, Aegis Therapies/EnerG® by Aegis, CaptionCall, MARS Center for Cocoa Health Science, Nestlé Skin Health and SwimEx.

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Resources

Active Aging Week

Free campaign resources, theme day topics, host site registration
www.activeagingweek.com

Bozeman Parks and Recreation Department

[www.bozeman.net/Departments-\(1\)/Park-Rec-Cemetery](http://www.bozeman.net/Departments-(1)/Park-Rec-Cemetery)

Episcopal Homes of Minnesota

www.ehomesmn.org

Frederick Living

www.frederickliving.org

Highgate Senior Living

www.highgateseniorliving.com

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

The Oaks of Louisiana

www.oaksofla.com