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Foster grandparent program allows older adults to mentor kids

By Jennifer Learn-Andes
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Many children know Back Mountain resident Mary Ladish as “Grandma Mary” because she has served as a foster grandparent in a Luzerne County-run program since 2015.

“The children are just the joy of my life, and I hope I’m making a difference in some of their lives,” said Ladish, a 67-year-old retired social worker.

As a participant in the federally funded program managed by the Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Area Agency on Aging, Ladish gets paid a small stipend to tutor and mentor children at the Lake-Lehman Early Learning Center in Lehman Township.

Ladish said she gets to play with the children indoors and out, read and sing to them and provide frequent hugs and compassion on demand.

“They need that,” she said of hugs. “A lot of them are leaving home without their parents for the first time.”

A total 120 residents 55 and older from both counties currently serve as foster grandparents, but another 10 to 20 are needed, said aging agency worker Mary Lou Zerfoss, who has been involved with the program for decades.

Nationally, the foster grandparent program will mark its 55th anniversary in 2020, and it was implemented here 47 years ago, she said. Despite continued efforts to spread the word, Zerfoss said many are still unaware it is available or mistakenly think it has something to do with foster parenting through county Children and Youth.

“We’re one of the best kept secrets. A lot of people don’t know about us,” Zerfoss said.

In addition to the over-54 age limit, foster grandparents must fall under income limits because the stipend is federally funded, she said. She advises any interested applicants to contact her at 570-822-1158 because some expenses, such as those for prescriptions and medical treatment, can be deducted to calculate the net income.

Applicants also must be willing to work 20 hours per week and be in good physical and mental health. Extensive criminal background checks are required, but the program covers the cost and assists with the paperwork, Zerfoss said.

Participants receive a free lunch where they are stationed, specialized training and a tax-free stipend of \$2.65 per hour, she said. The program also provides transportation assistance or reimbursement and payment on snow days and holidays, she said.

The current 120 foster grandparents assist 692 children in several area school districts and at various nonprofit preschools and day cares, Zerfoss said. Each facility identifies children with “special or exceptional needs” likely to benefit from the foster grandparenting.

When assigning foster grandparents, Zerfoss chooses the location closest to their home that meets their preferred age group, if they have one. Some want to work with infants, while others choose preschoolers or students at the elementary, middle school or high school level.

Those assigned to infants spend much of their time cuddling, rocking, singing, talking and feeding the babies, Zerfoss said.

Toddlers and preschoolers receive the type of assistance provided by Ladish, which also includes help with letter recognition, art projects and following rules — although Zerfoss stressed discipline is



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Mary Ladish, 67, of the Back Mountain, helps mentor children in a foster grandparent program that has openings for others 55 and older.

handled by school staff and not foster grandparents.

School-aged children may receive help with homework and studying, while high schoolers benefit from the same life skills advice traditionally provided by many grandparents, including help with budgeting money and cooking, she said.

Nine current volunteers are 85 and older, Zerfoss said. She encourages men to apply, saying there are only six in the program at this time.

Real-life grandparenting experience is not necessary, she said.

“People with no grandchildren work out beautifully as well,” she said. “You don’t have to be a grandparent to love a child.”

Zerfoss said she has heard many examples strong connections between program participants and the children they help.

One child praised a foster grandparent for knowng

Artist of the Month: Joan Chisarick

SWOYERSVILLE – Joan Chisarick has been a member of the Wyoming Valley Art League for 50 years.

But the 79-year-old Swoyersville resident has been creating art for much longer than that.

“I started out by going to college part time, and I got hooked,” Chisarick said. “I started out with one course and then I did more and more.”

Chisarick works in water colors, antique rice paper, acrylic, pastels and even “a litt bit of oil” paintings. The subjects of her paintings vary.

Some are based on photos she has taken, others on photos friends have given from vacations. Those photos allow to paint places she has never been.

“I like the old type,” she said sitting in her living room which features several of her paintings, “Old farm houses, landscapes, still lifes.

“I get inspired by nature and just looking around me.”

She’s picked up a lot of knowledge through her time with the Wyoming Valley Art League.

“We used to have a professional artist come in every month from some place in the country, and I learned a lot there,” Chisarick said. “But I learned the most from Georgiana Cray Bart. I studied with her for 12 years.”

Cray Bary, like Chisarick, was a graduate of Wilkes University’s Fine Arts and Arts Education program.

Chisarick has no plan on slowing down when it comes to painting.

“Because it’s in me,” she answered when asked why does she paint. “You have to get it out or you are not at peace. You have to keep growing as an artist.”

In addition to painting, Chisarick has plenty of other activity to keep her busy, including taking care of her 10-room home, exercising regularly and serving as president of her church’s Altar and Rosary Society.

Her paintings are available for purchase.

“I started framing my own and selling them at a lower price,” she said. “If I sell it from my house it’s less because I don’t have to pay commissions.

“I have all price ranges. You have to appeal to everybody’s pocketbook.”

You can find out more information about Chisarick’s paintings and other area artists through the Wyoming Valley Art League.

She has paintings for sale in “all price ranges.”

‘FOSTER’ from 2

how to zip up coats without pinching the chin. Another said every child should have a foster grandparent, but they can’t have his. A girl told her foster grandmother she loved her as she finished reading her a book.

“The bonds that are formed are just incredible,” Zerfoss said. “This program doesn’t have any bounds.”

Ladish said she regularly receives cards from the children.

They laughed when she told them the song they were singing was also a favorite when she was a kid. She laughed when they asked her what to do with an unrecognizable toy — a pretend phone with a receiver attached by cord.

She gets attached to the children and misses them when they progress but said it doesn’t take long to “fall in love” with the next batch of foster grandchildren.

“They give so much to me,” Ladish said. “I have a smile when I go to work.”



Joe Soprano | Times Leader

Joan Chisarick, of Swoyersville, poses with one of her paintings.



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Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

James Tricarico is one of two doctors currently practicing at the Geisinger 65 Forward Health Center in Kingston. He is pictured in one of the facility's exam rooms in Kingston.

By Geri Gibbons
For Times Leader

KINGSTON – Data shows that people over 65 are more likely to have chronic medical conditions and concerns that necessitate more doctors visits.

At the same time, as people grow older, they also benefit from learning more about their health, remaining active and spending time with others.

The new Geisinger 65 Forward Health Center that opened earlier this year on Wyoming Avenue in Kingston seems to answer those needs and concerns, making it possible for patients, who must be at least 65, to address health and wellness issues.

Dr. James Tricarico, one of two doctors currently practicing at the center, said each detail had been planned out so to best serve the aging population.

A first visit, for example, is usually about an hour, providing an opportunity for him to get to know patients' health concerns and lifestyle.

Tricarico left his practice in Pittston to assume his new duties — going from a patient load of 3,500 to 450 at his new post. That, Tricarico said, results in a better continuum of care for the patients.

Tricarico, who brought with him many of his older patients from the Pittston site, said he is thoroughly enjoying his new duties.

"My patients say I look younger," he said, smiling.

The center provides opportunity for older people to get lab work and X-rays following their doctor visit.

Other staff at the center address specific needs of patients, including a health care manager, a registered nurse who assists high risk patients and a health advocate who assesses patient needs and connects them with resources.

For older patients who want to use their golden years to get fit, a wellness coordinator assess them for appropriate exercise classes, exercise programs and time on the treadmill.

The center is not meant to replace senior centers or fitness centers, but to provide information and inspiration to those who may want to increase their exercise

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The Geisinger 65 fitness area features treadmills and other amenities usually found at a health club or gym.

A world of possibilities at Kingston Active Adult Center

Eight area residents delightfully cracked jokes, spoke about their roles in next month's variety show and even discussed who would – or would not – be attending an upcoming belly-dance as they waited for lunch on a Tuesday afternoon.

And, of course, there was talk about bingo.

The image is just a snapshot of a typical day inside the Kingston Active Adult Center, located on Third Avenue between Arby's and the new Jewish Community Center.

Not long after Sandy Acornley directed the attention of more than 50 attendees to the front of the common room, where she ratted off an upcoming agenda before the group dined on a roast pork platter with all the fixings.

Acornley has been the director of the Kingston Active Adult Center for more than 12 years. The space is one of six larger, multipurpose sites throughout Luzerne and Wyoming counties.

What It Does

Those six centers, plus an additional 11 smaller centers, are run by the Area Agency on Aging in Luzerne and Wyoming counties. They are funded through subsidies from state and federal agencies, she said, as well as proceeds from groups like the Pennsylvania Lottery.

"To officially join the center, it's (\$5 for anyone) 60 years of age or older," Acornley said, adding that there are no income guidelines. "That covers everything in the center, except the meals are a \$2 donation."

One of the most popular aspects of the center are the \$2 lunches that offer a catered, hot meal that meets nutritional guidelines for the demographic each weekday. Those between the ages of 55 and 60 can also utilize the lunches at a price of \$5.07 per



Several members of the Kingston Active Adult Center pose for a photo in October.

meal.

However, the 'everything' that Acornley is referring to in that \$5 annual fee also provides much, much more than a discounted lunch and bingo.

Activities and programs fill daily schedules tailored to fit the interests and abilities of anyone. Classes like meditation and crafting are offered weekly, while other specialty groups – think Spanish classes and, yes, even the aforementioned belly-dancing – are held throughout the month.

Those wanting to power their minds over their bodies may prefer a vast selection of educational seminars. The center collaborates with local colleges, businesses and organizations to host educational programs covering everything from nutrition to an Alzheimer's support group.

Young versus young at heart

But its the camaraderie that keeps members coming back most.

See 'ACTIVE' | 6

'GEISINGER' from 4

level, or perhaps start an exercise program for the first time.

The center also provides social activities, such as board games and discussion groups.

Even the waiting area, complete with coffee, fruits and other snacks was designed to feel more like a hotel lobby than a sterile medical environment.

Patients say they look forward to visits and feel respected when they step through the front doors.

With data that shows that older people that remain engaged live longer, healthier lives, activities provide

a chance for them to maximize the quality of their lives.

Tricarico said because he can see his patients more often and spends more time with them, he is developing relationships with patients that build trust and communication.

For example, if a patient feels they need to see him soon, his staff is able to fit them into his schedule.

This, he said, often makes emergency room visits and hospital stays less likely.

If a condition can be addressed quickly, a patient can feel more confident about their healthcare and more likely comply with health directives.

Tricarico said the center sometimes has the ability to change patients' lives.

Recently, an 80-year-old patient relocated to the

area bringing with her an animosity toward health care.

At the same time, one of her only remaining relatives had recently passed away, and she was feeling lonely.

Now, not only is the patient satisfied with her health care, she is building relationships with the staff.

"When I saw her at her last appointment, I said I would see her in a month," Tricarico said. "She said she'd be back next week with centerpieces she had made for staff."

The 65 Forward Center concept has worked out so well that Geisinger is planning a dozen more centers for across its service area.

'ACTIVE'

from 5

Many who use the center may live alone or have family that can't stop by to see them daily, Acornley said, and the center fills that void by offering a way to socialize with others who are sharing the same experiences, interests or hobbies.

"They may go home and not have a lot of interaction with people but when they come here their friends are here, and they've formed lifelong friendships with some of the people here," she explained. "We want it to be a very comfortable place where they can come and just relax and be able to enjoy themselves."

Seated at her regular table, Betty Lee Frusciante was cracking jokes with her friends, revealing her talent for the upcoming variety show and patiently awaiting lunch and the bingo games that come after.

The 85-year-old Swoyersville resident is currently one of the longest attending members of the center and is the reason several others became involved with its programs as well.

Following her retirement as an accountant, Frusciante learned of the center through a friend and decided to enroll her husband and herself.

That was more than 16 years ago.

"I never knew it existed. I lived in the area for all those years, but I never heard of it before," she said.

Frusciante has continued to attend many of the programs and activities the facility offers, noting how important it is to remain social and active. She's even acted as a volunteer for a time, as many members do, by helping carry trays to those with mobility problems or helping out in the kitchen.

"I like to talk to people. I don't like to eat alone," she said.



Betty Lee Frusciante, 85, of Swoyersville, prepares several bingo cards with fellow members following lunch. Frusciante is currently one of the longest attending members of the Kingston Active Adult Center, utilizing the space for over 16 years.

Good thing, she was far from alone. Her friends Carolyn Tavella and Frank Warunek were seated next to her. They began visiting the center after Frusciante's recommendation.

Tavella said an injury forced her to retire early. With nothing to do, she reluctantly walked into the space, believing the program was geared more for her own parents than herself.

"I was so wrong," she said. "The people were wonderful. They had so many stories to tell me, so many wonderful things they had done in their lives. They just enhanced my life."

For Warunek, the center – and the people within it – provide more than enough reason to keep coming back. Although many members may not be considered "young," that doesn't mean they aren't young at heart, he proclaimed.

"We have a saying here, 'Growing old is inevitable. Growing up is optional though.' We refuse to grow up," he chuckled.

After spewing a series of jokes that were enough to bring tears to his friend's eyes, Mike and

Fran Segarra spoke about how the center has influenced them.

"I started coming, made a lot of good friends. It's nice with the friendships. ... We got to make a difference in other people's lives," he said. "It gets other people's spirits up. It gets them laughing, smiling. And they walk out of here happy."

Fran said she enjoys the special events and collaborations the center offers, describing a recent cocktail party held at Tiffany Court. Prior to that, she said the group was taken to places like the county fair and the circus.

"You're involved here, but they also take you out. They have different activities for you, different speakers," she said. "It's great for people like us, some who are probably sitting home looking at the four walls and thinking 'what am I going to do today?'"

Boomer beckoning

For all the fun and excitement the Kingston Active Adult Center truly has to offer, Acornley admitted that centers across the board are experiencing the same problems when it comes to attracting the latest demographic eligible to receive their services – the baby boomers.

There may be several reasons that the boomers aren't attracted to the spaces, she said. For instance, many boomers are still out in the workforce at 60 or 65, whereas the prior generations usually opted to retire by that time.

If boomers are in retirement, there's a strong pos-



Members of the Kingston Active Adult Center mingle over lunch in the common room on a Tuesday in October.

'Keep your brain active by being willing to learn new skills'

By Geri Gibbons
For Times Leader

At 74, Jan Lewis is intent on learning new things and developing new relationships.

According to a study at Harvard University, Lewis is doing just the right things to make it likely that she will live a long life and that she will fully enjoy it.

Lewis is a part-time employee at the Area Agency on Aging, working 25 hours a week entering data regarding health and wellness classes which are held for the consumers at various locations in Luzerne County.

Lewis believes her job is an important one, as she provides support for 21 different locations year round.

Another important part of her job, though, is getting to know her coworkers who she describes as "wonderfully supportive and understanding of the important of the work we do."

Together they help 16 senior centers across the area successfully function.

Lewis said she is always open to learning new skills.

For example, she has recently mastered designing flyers for a monthly special lunch using Microsoft Word and clip art.



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Jan Lewis works in the mature worker program through the Bureau of Aging.

The programs that Area Agency on Aging present are so important to the well-being and add a sense of worth to the older residents of the county, she said.

Lewis and her husband came to Wilkes Barre from Indiana to found and establish an Apostolic United Pentecostal Church because there was none in the area.

The church is in the Lyndwood section of Hanover Township and is called Apostolic Lighthouse Church.

"The advice I would give to seniors is to keep busy and to keep your brain active by being willing to learn new skills," she said. "I love to read which helps imagination and vocabulary skills stay sharp."

Lewis said she has no plans to retire, but is open to whatever the future holds.

'ACTIVE' from 6

sibility that they are playing the role of grandparent – either by babysitting while their own children go to work, or even raising their grandchildren themselves.

Or, they just simply don't feel they are old enough to utilize a space such as the center, likening it to a nursing facility rather than an active space.

Some of those misconceptions are the very reason many of the centers changed their name from senior center to active adult several years ago she said, even shifting focus on providing programs to better fit the wants and needs of the generation.

Richard Karlotski couldn't imagine life without the center, and eagerly awaited for the day he would be eligible to start his own membership.

When asked about the possible misconceptions of the center and what it offers, the Plymouth resident couldn't think of a reason why seniors wouldn't want to use the space.

"I'm not sure what they're thinking about the center. If they're just thinking it's for old people that just sit around and play bingo all the time ... We do shuffleboard, we do plays, we have joke Fridays. You meet people and they tell you about all types of things."

He continued, "It's an active place. Like they say, it's an active adult. We go to dances and parties. So whatever you people are thinking out there, if your thinking that, that's not what's happening here."



Kingston active Adult Center Director Sandy Acornley, left, and Assistant Director Jean Spindler.

Staying active with Dial-A-Driver program

By Geri Gibbons
For Times Leader

WILKES-BARRE – Donny Conant starts his day early warming up a Volunteers of America van to transport those with disabilities to their day programs and other appointments.

It's not what Conant thought he would be doing six years ago when, at 55, he was working for a major company doing physical labor.

But then he found out he needed a hip and knee replacement and was forced into an early retirement.

But Conant's world didn't fall apart, instead it seems to have "fallen together," quite nicely.

Having recently retired, Conant found out through a friend that Volunteers of America's Dial-A-Driver program was hiring drivers.

The program requires contact with people with disabilities and with other agencies within the community.

At first Conant didn't know if he could do it. But after two weeks, he realized that not only could he do it, but that he



Submitted photo

Donny Conant drives for the Volunteers of America Dial-A-Driver program.

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was good at it.

He's aware of the physical and emotional needs of his clients, which means knowing if a client might need a word of encouragement or if a family member might need a bit of support.

He works a split shift, taking clients to and from special programs, but his job goes far beyond simply transportation.

One of his favorite parts of the year is going to Cory's Place Christmas Party to see his clients perform.

"You know they have been practicing and then it all falls in place," he said.

Some of his clients remember his birthday and he remembers theirs.

And in spite of his successful retirement, Conant emphasizes the importance of financial planning when approaching retirement age.

"You should have all your ducks in a row," he said. "I got thrown into it though."

Conant does have a sense of financial stability, he said, but it is a result of careful financial spending and planning.

His wife still works part time, and Conant is able to hold a second job in addition to money he receives for retirement.

Conant's unplanned retirement has provided him an opportunity to spend time with his wife, Doris, and to help babysit year-old grandson.

Family and friends are very important to Conant, perhaps even more so since he was diagnosed with a blood cancer two years ago in 2017.

The diagnosis means that Conant lives every day as a gift, not really knowing if the future will mean continued health or sickness.

Up to this point, he has not needed treatment for the cancer, but he goes to the doctor regularly to make sure that the cancer has not spread or become worse.

Conant said the doctor has warned him that he will eventually need chemotherapy.

But for now, Conant is enjoying his work helping other people, his family and riding his motorcycle – a Kawasaki 1500.

Finding work after 50

Unemployment isn't easy for anyone, regardless of their age. But unemployed men and women over 50 may find it especially difficult to find work.

Whether it's a byproduct of age-related discrimination or any of a host of additional variables, jobless older workers often struggle to find work. In a 2016 analysis of government figures, the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis at the New School estimated that the jobless rate for workers 55 and older in August of 2016, six years after the Great Recession, was nearly 9 percent. At the time, the national jobless rate hovered around 5 percent.

Unemployed men and women over 50 who are struggling to find work can consider the following strategies as they look to rejoin the workforce.

- **Revisit your résumé.** Unemployed men and women over 50 have no doubt updated their résumés to reflect their most recent professional experience. But they may need to trim some of the fat in regard to their work life 10 or more years ago. Today's hiring managers may only be concerned with recent experience that illustrates skillsets that are relevant to today's jobs. Men and women over 50 may consider their experience from 20 years ago invaluable, but if that experience does not meet the specific needs of the jobs they're now seeking, then they should remove it from their résumés so hiring managers can quickly access the more relevant information from their work histories.

- **Embrace 21st century job hunting.** Finding a job in the second decade of the 21st century is unlike job hunting in decades prior, and wholly different from how men and women over 50 looked for jobs upon beginning their professional lives. Networking can mean the difference between unemployment and landing a job. Go to job fairs attended by hiring managers and join professional organizations that host events where professionals in your field can gather.

- **Turn your age into a positive.** Men and women over 50 should accept the likelihood that their new managers and/or hiring managers will be younger than them. When interviewing for a job, men and women over 50 should make an effort to showcase their enthusiasm about working with and learning from younger colleagues, while also noting their desire to commit long-term to a company. Some hiring managers may surprise older applicants, viewing them as potentially more reliable than younger workers simply looking to gain some experience in a particular industry before moving on to the next opportunity.

- **Make use of your existing down time.** Another strategy unemployed men and women over 50 can try as they look for work is to make better use of their existing downtime. Enrolling in online courses can give prospective employers the impression that applicants over 50 are both tech-savvy and willing to learn new things. Each of those things can help men and women over 50 overcome any unjustified, tech-related stigmas that hiring managers may attach to older job candidates.

Finding work after 50 is not always easy, and job seekers may need to adjust their approach before they can get back in the workforce.



Avoiding scams can be as easy as hanging up

By Geri Gibbons
For the Times Leader

KINGSTON – Seniors in Pennsylvania are the victims of \$1.2 billion worth of elder fraud each year, according to a recent study from Comparitech, an internet security website.

Not only can these scams diminish the quality of life for older people, occasionally senior lose their life savings, property and even their homes, Deborah Mozal, CEO at Community Regional Credit Union, recently said in an interview.

To battle this tide of scamming seniors, Mozal said banking staff is trained on what to look for when it comes to customers being scammed and how to educate them on avoiding them.

At one recent training, those attending were presented with the case of an 80-year-old women who believed she owed money and had transferred all of her funds to another third party.

When the woman died, bags full of wire transfers were found in her closet. It is believed that the stress of losing her money contributed to her death.

But Mozal said avoiding such a scam could be as simple as hanging up the phone or deleting an email.

One common scam, Mozal said, is someone posing as a government official demanding you send money to avoid arrest.

Government officials, especially the IRS, do not contact people by phone to alert them of a problem, Mozal said.

If you do get a phone call like this and want to check it out – hangup and then call back. It is more than likely that the call will not be answered by any



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Deborah Mozal, CEO at Community Regional Credit Union, reminds seniors that government officials – especially the IRS – do not contact people by phone.

officials.

The answer, she said, is not to argue with the person calling, either. Any bit of information that you provide during a conversation could be used in a scam – simply hangup.

Mozal also cautioned to never provide information in an email or to a site provided in an email.

One customer was transferred through a link to what he thought was an official banking sight – it looked real, but it wasn't.

Luckily, he had called the bank to get some information to complete the online form.

Mozal, despite repeated objections, convinced him that the website was a fake.

She emphasized that those who are victims of a scam are most often intelligent, educated people, simply trying to comply with those in authority.

Its also important that seniors are not overcome with shame when they make

such a financial mistake and reluctant to reach out and ask for help, according to the state's Department of Banking and Securities literature.

Once such a mistake is made, it can often be reversed if you act quickly. Reinforce to parents and grandparents that it is better to admit a mistake and reach out to correct it.

Those who have aging relatives, should regularly call or visit the seniors in their life and make themselves available to offer respectful advice.

Assist older loved ones with opting out of commercial mail solicitation and robocalls and set them up at a reputable bank that can help them monitor their accounts.

According to the Department of Banking and Securities, seniors are often scammed by people they know. Trusted banking officials can monitor questionable withdrawals or changes to accounts and have those difficult conversations with members, to prevent loss of money and property.

Seniors (and everyone else) are encouraged to monitor their credit reports at least annually.



Aimee Dilger | Times Leader

Deborah Mozal points out the chip on a bank card that helps deter fraud.

Modifications can make driving safer

Driving provides an almost unrivaled level of independence. The ability to travel beyond a neighborhood or even one's hometown without a chaperone is probably what excites new drivers so much and makes them eager to get their licenses and cars. Senior drivers also may define their independence by their ability to drive. Few things diminish senior dignity and independence faster than losing the ability to drive.

Despite popular misconceptions, seniors are some of the safest drivers around. The experts at Hartford Auto Insurance indicate that the number of accidents involving older drivers actually decreases as age increases. It's the risk factors like medical conditions, medication usage and reduced physical function that increase the risk for accidents and injuries involving older drivers. Thanks to technology and some other well-designed devices, seniors may be able to continue driving longer than the aging drivers of years past.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, a nonprofit research and education association, says roughly 90 percent of seniors don't take advantage of simple, often inexpensive features that can greatly improve safety and extend their time behind the wheel. Here are some considerations.

- **Cushions and seat pads:** Cushions do more than just alleviate hip and back pain while sitting. Cushions and pads can raise drivers up and improve their line of sight over the dashboard. Swivel pads can make it easier to enter and exit the car as well.
 - **Adaptive cruise control:** This feature can adjust speed automatically to maintain a consistent space between vehicles.
 - **Adaptive headlights:** These headlights, also known as steerable headlights, can improve visibility by changing the direction of the light beam with the movement of the steering wheel.
 - **Pedal extenders:** Extenders help short drivers reach the pedals while maintaining a safe distance from the steering wheel and potential airbag deployment.
 - **Hand controls:** Whether one has sensory changes in the feet from surgery or a medical condition, adaptive hand controls can move the "pedals" up to the steering column.
 - **Blind spot warning and other sensors:** Today's cars can be equipped with any number of sensors that can detect oncoming traffic, cars to the left or right of the vehicle, items or cars behind the vehicle when reversing, and even if the vehicle has drifted out of the lane. These are all great safety features for any driver, but may be especially helpful to seniors.
 - **Parking assist:** Parking assist technology can steer the vehicle into a space with little input from the driver.
 - **Voice control:** Avoiding distractions and keeping hands on the wheel is enhanced by voice controls, which can be set up to do things like turn on the radio or adjust climate control.
 - **Convex mirrors:** Special mirrors increase the field of vision.
- Seniors have many tools available to make driving safer and more comfortable, which can prolong their years behind the wheel.



A few simple adjustments can make driving safer for seniors.



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State offering free, objective health benefits counseling

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Department of Aging reminds Medicare beneficiaries that the annual Medicare open enrollment period runs through Dec. 7. Any new coverage selected takes effect Jan. 1, 2020.

During open enrollment, new Medicare beneficiaries can sign up for Medicare Prescription Drug coverage and health plans to complement Medicare, and current Medicare beneficiaries can review and make changes to their current coverage so that it better meets their needs.

In order to help Medicare beneficiaries sort through their options, Pennsylvania offers free, objective health benefits counseling through the APPRISE Program, which is designed to counsel and encourage Medicare-eligible individuals, their families and caregivers to make informed health care benefit decisions.

“We encourage seniors to take advantage of the

free counseling services available through APPRISE, whether they are a new beneficiary or simply revisiting their coverage, because navigating any kind of health care options can be tedious and overwhelming,” said Department of Aging Secretary Robert Torres. “Having trained APPRISE counselors walk beneficiaries through their choices allows for factual, authentic conversations that can leave them more informed and confident in their coverage choices.”

With almost 600 trained APPRISE counselors in the commonwealth, the APPRISE Program provides free, confidential, objective, and easy-to-understand information about Medicare Advantage Plans, prescription drug plans, and Medicare Supplement plans, and allows Medicare beneficiaries to compare plans and determine what best meets their needs. The APPRISE Program holds Medicare open enrollment events through Area Agen-

cies on Aging and throughout communities across the commonwealth. In 2018, nearly 200,000 of the commonwealth’s 2.7 million Medicare beneficiaries were advised by APPRISE counselors.

Many APPRISE counselors were Medicare beneficiaries with questions or concerns about their coverage and, after receiving assistance through APPRISE, wanted to learn more about how they could share that knowledge with others. APPRISE counselors receive free training about Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Advantage, Medigap, Medicare prescription drug coverage, appeals, fraud, abuse, and more. Volunteer opportunities include being an APPRISE counselor and other roles.

Find an open enrollment event in your area by calling the APPRISE Helpline at 1-800-783-7067.

Medicare beneficiaries can also complete their own plan comparisons by using the Medicare plan finder tool or calling 1-800-MEDICARE.

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