

# Exploring the possibilities

at Active Aging  
Week 2016



**New experiences, teamwork, education and fun defined the week that proves many things are possible when older adults get active**

The surprise of a man riding a camel. The fun of a basketball game with preschool children and older adults. The exuberance of the winners in a cycling team competition. These are only a few of the stories of Active Aging Week®, the annual festival held in the last full week of September to celebrate aging and living well. Promoted by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), the

event is brought to life by organizers in many communities and countries.

In 2016, over 3,000 organizations hosted Active Aging Week (September 25–October 1). A multitude of activities brought people together to enjoy positive life experiences and explore the seven dimensions of wellness. This year's theme—proposed by Elim Park's Barbara Womer—was "Explore the possibilities." Adopting the theme, hosts showcased just how many possibilities there are for wellness. As a bonus,

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*A trio from Thornebridge Gardens in New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada, joined the Forever Young 8K walk/run and came away with medals. Image courtesy of Verve Senior Living*



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*The competitive spirit joined players in the pool at the VMRC (Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community) Wellness Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia, for a fast and furious game of volleyball. Image courtesy of VMRC*

October 1 also marked the International Day of Older Persons and the International Council on Active Aging's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Once again, hosts have proven that blending the Active Aging Week theme with their own creativity and skills at implementation delivers events that are fun, educational and multidimensional. You will find lots of ideas for events by reading this article, looking up past articles and webinars on the Active Aging Week website, and visiting the campaign's official Facebook page (refer to the box, "Connect with the week," on page 70). Activities, partnerships, marketing and media coverage—local hosts share them all.

So who are the people who host Active Aging Week? In addition to being creative and expert organizers, they are committed to the individuals they work with and believe they can make the world a better place. They carry job

titles relating to activities or engagement, fitness, therapy, executive leadership and nursing, to name a few. There is no single job description, and hosts are free to develop a program appropriate to their resources and local population. The only "rule" is that events be fun, educational and accessible.

Just as events have evolved since 2003, when ICAA first introduced Active Aging Week, so have the types of organizations that join in. For example, in 2016 home health agencies, medical wellness centers and YMCAs joined with "seniors" community centers, retirement communities and therapy or assisted living properties. Also participating were an advocacy group that supports age-friendly businesses, a business park, an audiology center, and websites for vision awareness and fitness. Cities and counties across the United States and Canada declared Active Aging Week, while local service agencies promoted the week, and individuals, studios and clubs hosted events.

During Active Aging Week 2016, hosts explored:

- sharing the story of meaningful events, and the value of doing so
- using social media to market activities and report on events
- adopting themes and special days to focus events
- organizing opportunities for participants to try something new
- bringing together teams for competitions and good causes

Let's look at some of their experiences.

## Stories with meaning

Doing something you never thought you could (or would) or making a connection is meaningful for participants, as well as for hosts. There are many such stories from Active Aging Week 2016; only a few follow. The element that unites them? They show you can explore the possibilities at any age.

Let's start with the camel. At the Central Washington State Fair, Richard began celebrating his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday atop a camel, along with four other residents of Highgate Yakima. As Angela Larrabee, Life Enhancement Coordinator, said, riding a camel was "something they never thought they would do." These residents also enjoyed the games, flowers, food, and other exotic wild animals and reptiles at the fair.

Shooting the hoops at the Deep Run Recreation Center in Henrico County, Virginia, were 80 preschoolers and a group of older adults. The event showcased healthy aging by bringing together "the young and the young at heart," according to the news report on the Henrico County Recreation & Parks Facebook page. Other partners included Henrico County's Advocate for the Aging, Family Lifeline, Senior Connections and Care-More Health Centers.

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*In a full room, painters channeled their inner artist during a water colors class held at an Acts Retirement-Life community. Residents explored the possibilities by combining different colors. Image courtesy of Acts Retirement-Life Communities*

Music is an important part of everyone's lives, and the week's events featured concerts, interactive music education, singing and bell choirs. Maestro David Dworkin, founder of Conductorcise, made a whirlwind tour of five Atria Senior Living communities, teaching people how to wield their batons and conduct the orchestra. Dancing, from ballroom to Zumba, also filled many halls.

Music does inspire movement. The meal service was just ending when the Los del Rio song *Macarena* began playing in the restaurant at Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services in Dublin, Ireland. Secretly planned by 24 residents and 10 staff to celebrate Active Aging Week, the individuals started moving as musical notes and beats filled the room. Patients, guests and staff joined in. Find the news story on Active Aging Week's official Facebook page, then watch the video on YouTube ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbgytmdALqs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbgytmdALqs)).

It's not possible to predict when an Active Aging Week event will have particu-

lar meaning for an individual, but it's always gratifying when it does. During a trip to the Grand Canyon organized by Highgate Senior Living in Prescott, Arizona, Life Enhancement Coordinator Carly Pruitt discovered that resident Henry Pixley hiked over 380 miles in the canyon between ages 60 and 69, including to and from the bottom. Another resident helped develop the US National Park system. Don Follows worked as a ranger, photographer, geologist and planner between 1965 and 1985 in Utah and Alaska. Don's outdoor photography, publications, geologic studies and resource management planning were highly instrumental in establishing five Utah National Parks and 10 Alaska National Parks by 1980.

## **Social media highlights events**

Over the past few years, Active Aging Week hosts have increased their use of social media, video and photography to promote the week's programming and to capture what happened. Schedules are posted to alert people to upcoming events. Photos and videos available on Facebook, YouTube and company web-

sites create a buzz around the events; they also report on the day's activities in real time. You'll find plenty of examples on the official Active Aging Week Facebook site (see the "Connect with the week" box).

In addition to previewing upcoming events and recording the activity, hosts are using media to share the philosophy of active aging. For example, a series of "30 Seconds on Active Aging with ..." videos explains how residents at the Beatitudes Campus in Phoenix, Arizona, feel about giving back to the community. Reported via Facebook, the "30 Seconds" videos are also posted online at [www.activeatbeatitudes.org](http://www.activeatbeatitudes.org).

Video is also educational. One activity at Touchmark on West Century in Bismarck, North Dakota, was a screening of a movie called *Cyber-Seniors* (as shared via the Active Aging Week Facebook page). The story shows how people in their 70s and 80s learned how to use the Internet- and computer-based option to add value to their lives.

## **Using themes to focus events**

To support hosts during the campaign, national sponsors of Active Aging Week provide free educational materials and opportunities to connect with relevant experts. Many hosts take advantage of these theme days, and add to them with their own interpretation.

The "I just called to say..." theme, sponsored by CaptionCall, inspired hosts to educate people with hearing loss that there are ways to maintain their social connections. A number of audiologists and hearing device companies registered for the week, and hosts planned lots of Skype calls, hearing screenings and educational workshops.

A slide show and talking points were available for "Get Skin Health Smart" day, provided by Nestlé Skin Health. Skin care met relaxation with a number



of spa days featuring facials, massages, wraps and assorted other treatments. Presentations by local dermatologists rounded out the offerings. “For the second year in a row, I used the Skin Health presentation,” mentioned Dawn McKirdy, Lifestyle Manager, at Meadows Retirement Community in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada.

All kinds of water-related activities celebrated the “Dive into AquaYoga” day inspired by SwimEx. For those without a pool, yoga classes were plentiful on land, too. Getting in the spirit, Highgate Senior Living in Yakima, Washington, created a water carnival in the parking lot, starting with a water balloon toss that turned into a water balloon fight. Residents also channeled their inner baseball pitcher with accurate hits to the dunk tank. “That had to be one of our funniest activities,” said Angela Larrabee, Life Enhancement Coordinator, “in part because the care team was in charge of this day and had the opportunity to relax and enjoy the activity with the residents.”

A chance to sample different types of food and learn more about nutrition is always a draw, and the “Eat Healthy, Stay Strong with Abbott!” theme was popular. There were healthy-food cook-offs, trips to restaurants using locally sourced food, and integrated nutrition education during fitness classes and demos. For example, a registered dietitian demonstrated Mediterranean cuisine, including homemade pita chips and hummus, at VMRC (Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community) in Harrisonburg, Virginia. This demonstration was part of a worldwide exploration of countries featuring music, costumes, flags and maps.

Active Aging Week hosts were invited to add the steps of their teams and individuals to those of others participating in the “WALK! with Aegis Therapies.” Presented by EnerG® by Aegis, the six-day



*Residents found their tempo at Brightview Concord River’s introduction to West African drumming. Djembe drums and shekere (a West African bead instrument) brought the drum circle alive. Image courtesy of Brightview Senior Living*

program featured a daily walk (or seated alternative) and a featured activity to support a different wellness dimension. Fitness leader Chris Freytag led walks and classes at many locations throughout the week. You can see a few of these on Aegis Therapies’ official Facebook site. Ending the week, Aegis celebrated the dimensions of wellness as well as ICAA’s 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary on October 1. In Augusta, Georgia, a special event drew hundreds of people—including ICAA CEO Colin Milner—to the Augusta Market for festivities and a walk along the Savannah River.

Also during the week, the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition—a national partner in Active Aging Week—promoted #0to60, a national public engagement campaign, website and app intended to inspire people to lead healthier lives. Launched in August 2016, the #0to60 campaign commemorates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the President’s Council. It aims to accelerate the journey to a healthier, active lifestyle with the message, “The fastest way to living healthy starts right now.” Active

Aging Week hosts were invited to use #0to60 resources to share both this message and their journeys to healthy living.

### **Try something new**

As a first-time host, Eagle View Adult Center in Brighton, Colorado, used Active Aging Week as a vehicle to advertise the center and allow people to try out the classes. There was a diverse list of activities, including a readers theater performance, back-care yoga class, aromatherapy and acupuncture presentations, and plenty of meal options. About 750 older adults in the community visited the center during the week.

Flying through the air on a zipline was a popular—and memorable—event. A zipline adventure was experienced by 27 people who engage as Active Older Adults at the YMCA of the Twin Cities in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Moving south, over 12 residents of Inverness Village in Tulsa, Oklahoma, swept through

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*Riding a camel is a different experience, and Richard explored the possibility during the Washington State Fair, courtesy of Highgate at Yakima. Note the Active Aging Week T-shirts. Image courtesy of Highgate Senior Living*

## A word of thanks

Active Aging Week 2016 gained valuable support from a national partner and national sponsors. Thank you to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition, which partnered with ICAA on the campaign for the second consecutive year. Many thanks also go to the following sponsors: Abbott Nutrition, Aegis Therapies/EnerG<sup>®</sup> by Aegis, CaptionCall, Nestlé Skin Health and SwimEx.



the air on a zipline. What leads a person to try this activity? As resident Mary Bristow said in the television news report, “just the thrill and excitement and seeing the world, looking down on the earth.” Another group of residents took to the air by skydiving. Find photos and a news clip on the Active Aging Week Facebook page.

With the goal of encouraging more residents to become physically active, Roland Park Place in Baltimore, Maryland, featured new challenges and prizes. Eight new people joined in for the Balance Challenge Course; and over 25 residents came out for “Pack the Fitness Day,” which launched the community’s walking club. “It was a great way to gather socially and chat about the future of the fitness center,” commented Fitness Manager Alexa Lavery on the community’s website. “The residents were so kind and supportive of each other and encouraged each other to try activities that may have been out of their comfort zones.”

To attract more participants, Trinity Lodge Retirement Community in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, moved its morning exercise classes from the multi-purpose room to the main lobby so all who walked by could see, and be invited to engage in, fitness fun, explained Emily Johnson, Life Enrichment Manager. This new approach was followed by a Zumba Gold party, a staff-versus-resident balloon badminton tournament, and other special events that included students from local schools.

Also popular were Olympic games-type events as 2016 was an Olympic Year. Combining the Olympic theme with a specific goal, 10 Vi communities joined in the “Minutes in Motion” challenge. Residents’ minutes of activity were tabulated to determine gold, silver and bronze medalists. “Communities planned special events each day to encourage residents to try something new, be active in a different way each day, and simply have some fun being active,” shared Jolene Moore, Corporate Director of Lifestyles. Vi at the Glen was on board, adding two new fitness classes, and hosting 30 residents who competed in the Challenge, added Steven Samson, Community Relations Manager.

Offering two 30-minute fitness classes each day led to a doubling of the number of participants in classes at Ritchot Senior Services in St. Adolphe, Manitoba, Canada. “The greater majority of the newest members are now experiencing group fitness classes for the first time of their lives and are getting hooked on the fun,” said Janice Burnett, who coordinates the classes.

## Competitions and good causes

A variety of competitions also took place during Active Aging Week. Teams were formed (some on the spur of the moment, others spending a month or more practicing) for physical and cognitive challenges, with spelling bees



and trivia contests popular. Individuals tracked their own progress to achieve a goal. Partnerships were formed between older adults and students, staff and clients, and competitors challenging their peers in similar organizations.

Staff and residents from 34 Verve Senior Living communities in Canada were challenged to “virtually” walk across the country, a distance of 8,749 kilometers. They accomplished this goal and beat it by traveling a total of 35,350.55 kilometers (21,965.8 miles), twice crossing from Victoria, British Columbia, to St. John’s, Newfoundland.

Remember the exuberance of the team that won the cycling competition? The 36-member CyberSams team at The Samarkand in Santa Barbara, California, rode a combined 968 miles to earn first place in the 2016 Active Aging Week CyberCycle Challenge, Lone Wolves Division (sharing time on a single cycle). Logging 1,087 miles, the team at the

Council Bluffs Senior Center (Council Bluffs, Iowa) won first place in the Wolf Packs Division, with 44 riders sharing time on two or more cycles. Overall, 68 teams rode a combined 6,339 miles.

A record number of 20 Presidential Active Lifestyle Award recipients were honored at Atria Canyon Creek in Plano, Texas. At Atria Paradise in Paradise, California, 26 residents successfully completed the challenge to win the award, including 16 people who doubled their amount of exercise time (reported via Facebook). To earn the award, participants tracked their minutes of daily physical activity and chose a healthy eating goal each week for six out of eight weeks. As the author of the Facebook item about Atria Canyon Creek remarked, “Together we will break the stereotype of what it means to be aging in America.”

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*Former park ranger Don Follows made his 74<sup>th</sup> visit to the Grand Canyon with a group from the Highgate community in Prescott, Arizona. Image courtesy of Highgate Senior Living*

## What does healthy aging mean?

Participants in the Boomers & Beyond program at the Gold’s Gym in Linglestown, Pennsylvania, were invited to write, in 200 words or less, what healthy aging means to them. With permission, excerpts from their stories are printed here, with thanks to Jan Capen, a veteran host of Active Aging Week, who solicited the stories.

### What I’ve learned

I’ll tell you what has propelled me along the challenges of my life. Treat people the way I want to be treated. Communicate with people with an attitude that says, “I like you, I think you are worthwhile.” Have good eye contact. Give a good handshake. Be a good friend. Develop friendships that are positive and supportive. Be a good

listener. Be aware and observant of your surroundings; a lot is missed if you are not paying attention.

Learn to make decisions, small and large. Learn to make changes and adapt to them. Changes happen throughout life—rise to the occasion. Work to have balance in life: work, play, spiritual, mental, physical and social. Be curious, be interested and interesting. Meet new people, see new places.

**Joan Hamilton, age 79**

### No fear

Who would think that in the ninth decade of my life I would be participating and enjoying group exercise, like Zumba Gold, Classic Cardio & Core, Circuit and Yoga, three and four days weekly?

It did take about 50 years to overcome fear of falling, drowning and injuring myself. My dear late mother always reminded me of the danger and consequences of doing anything too strenuous.

I was over 50 when I overcame the fear of falling, drowning, etc. I learned that even seniors can keep bones and muscles in good shape by exercise. My eating and sleeping have improved and my mind is occupied with reading, connecting with old and new friends and, of course, my dear family. When asked, “Hi, how are you?” I am happy to respond, “Thank God, I’m here!” and thanks to Gold’s Gym Linglestown.

**Beatrice Kessler, age 92**

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Military veterans living at The Holmstad strapped on goggles and climbed into a World War II-era biplane. John Faust took the opportunity to soar above the Chicago area. Image courtesy of The Holmstad

Sharing that sentiment, residents and employees of Legacy Retirement Communities set a goal to accumulate over 25,000 chair stands in one week, reported Katie Johnson, Wellness Director. Chair stands were chosen because they are “an excellent way to build overall strength, and aid in balance and fall prevention.” CEO Greg Joyce added an incentive: If exercisers met the goal, the company would donate USD\$1,000 to a charity that serves the aging population. By the end of Active Aging Week, 29,623 chair stands were performed and Joyce signed a check to the National Parkinson’s Foundation.

During the Wild West Grandparents Celebration at The Holmstad in Batavia, Illinois, more than USD\$300 was raised for the Resident Council by Executive Director Amanda Gosnell and Associate Executive Director Ryan Hust, who took turns being dunked in a tank of water at a rate of \$1 per attempt. The dollars will be used by the Resident Council to support life enrichment, employee appreciation, library and computer services, fellowship and more.

Food banks also benefitted during Active Aging Week. Each person was asked to bring two cans of food to use as hand weights during a 30-minute chair

exercise organized by the Rainbow Retirement Community in Clifton, Texas. One hundred people joined the class and afterwards the cans were donated to the local food bank. “It was a great community event and a wonderful activity for our residents,” said Andrea Hikel, Marketing/Community Relations Director. Across the country, the food bank in central Pennsylvania also benefitted from donations provided by the Boomers & Beyond at Gold’s Gym, Linglestown.

Finally, organizers at the Sunnyvale Senior Center (California) joined forces with presenters from Stanford University, the Alzheimer’s Association and Osher Lifelong Learning (among the partnering agencies) to offer a full week of 15 workshops and demonstrations. For a Partner Resource Day, 12 organizations shared an overview of their services. The result? A total of 185 individuals attended, clocking 587 hours of participation, stated Gerard Manuel, Community Services Manager for the City of Sunnyvale. The most popular workshops focused on brain health, memory and travel.

## Exploring the possibilities

This article can report on relatively few of the many activities, events and suc-

cesses that brightened the last week of September. It seemed like half the world went for a walk or roll during Active Aging Week. Afterwards, hosts provided demonstrations, lectures, arts and crafts classes, fitness experiences, brain games, competitions, tours and trips—and participants laughed, socialized and left better educated. Assessments, safety checks and screenings were available as stand-alone events or parts of large-scale health fairs. As participants joined in different activities, there were lots of “passports” stamped, raffles held and prizes awarded.

All the success of Active Aging Week is due to the hosts. They individually and in teams plan their events, with the goals of fun, education and accessibility—and meaning for the participants—always at the forefront. Thank you!

Now it’s time to start planning for 2017. Keep checking the campaign website and look for articles in the *Journal on Active Aging*® to get ready. Let’s join together for another memorable week next September, when we celebrate Active Aging Week’s 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. 🍷

## Connect with Active Aging Week

Plan now to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Active Aging Week.

### Dates

September 24–30, 2017

### Website

<http://activeagingweek.com>

### Official Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/ActiveAgingWeek>

### Twitter account

#activeagingweek