

Active Aging Week 2015:

living the adventure of life



Celebrating aging and older adults, this health-promotion campaign exhorts event hosts and participants to emphasize adventure as part of daily life

From the time “the mystery of language was revealed to” deaf and blind Helen Keller at age six,¹ the late American author threw herself into life’s “daring adventure.”² Keller, who died at age 87, graduated from Radcliffe College, traveled and lectured extensively, published 14 books, and became a fierce activist.³ Along the way, the Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient inspired millions with her work, her spirit and her life story (memorably recounted in her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, and the play and award-winning film *The Miracle Worker*).³ Supported by Anne Sullivan, her teacher, companion and friend of 49 years, Keller engaged fully in life—she

lived her adventure.⁴ This fall, Active Aging Week® invites others to do the same.

Initiated by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), Active Aging Week takes place each year during the last week of September. The weeklong campaign calls attention to and wholeheartedly celebrates the positivity of aging today. It showcases the capabilities of older adults as fully participating members of society and spotlights the role models that lead the way.

Active Aging Week challenges society’s diminished expectations of aging by showing that, regardless of age or health conditions, adults over 50 can live as fully as possible in all areas of life—physical, social, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, vocational and environmen-

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A hot-air balloon ride captured the spirit of Active Aging Week 2014 for a number of residents at Canterbury-on-the-Lake in Waterford, Michigan. Image courtesy of Canterbury-on-the-Lake

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tal. The objective of the annual health-promotion event is to give as many older adults as possible the means to experience wellness activities and exercise in a safe, supportive environment. It also promotes the benefits of healthier, more active lifestyles across the life span. In 2015, the observance will be held September 27–October 3.

Local hosts spread the positive messages of Active Aging Week, energizing their communities with experiences that fit their populations and foster well-being and growth. In settings across the active-aging spectrum, professionals, organizations and older adults “rev up” their creativity to plan and present offerings. Because the observance is a national campaign, there are plenty of resources available to help (refer to “Mark your calendar” below for the website).

For event hosts, a featured theme suggests a focus for the week’s marketing and programming. In 2015, Active Aging Week picks up from last year’s distinctive and popular theme, “Let the adventure begin,” to exhort professionals and participants to “Live your adventure.”

Adventure renews vitality, enriches life

Why has Active Aging Week returned to the realm of adventure in 2015? Adventure enriches the experience of living. French-born writer Anaïs Nin believed,

Mark your calendar

Observance: Active Aging Week 2015
Theme: Live Your Adventure
Dates: September 27–October 3, 2015

Visit www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm for information and resources. And watch for a dedicated Active Aging Week website to go live in the months to come!

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.”⁵⁵ Saying yes to something, especially something new, may mean stepping outside the comfort zone of daily routines and being open to whatever happens. By giving more prominence to a spirit of adventure in daily life, we reap the benefits of both growth and fulfillment and promote wellness.

As characterized by pioneer Donald B. Ardell, wellness includes “high energy levels, joy in living and ... healthy passions that add meaning and purpose, resilience and coping capacities”⁵⁶ (for an interview with Ardell, turn to pages 52–57 in this *Journal on Active Aging*[®] issue). Living life as an adventure helps renew vitality and well-being every day. And Active Aging Week is a perfect time to highlight it.

Campaign hosts can emphasize “adventures of daily living” with their activities and events. Active Aging Week programming can foster in participants the joy, feelings of achievement and belonging, and rewards of mastering a challenge that enhance mind, body and spirit. Sharing these experiences strengthens relationships—not only among participants, but between participants and professionals as well. A valuable outcome.

Adventure may touch any or all of life’s dimensions. Using the seven wellness dimensions as a programming framework is one way to promote success. An intellectual adventure may involve learning about local history. A hike around a lake offers primarily physical and environmental elements (companions add a social component). And a team scavenger hunt includes physical, intellectual, environmental and social dimensions.

The impact of adventure lies not just in *doing* something, however, but in *being* involved and the individual response to it. In that respect, it can be a

very personal—sometimes defining—experience.

Active Aging Week 2015 encourages individuals to live *their* adventure. Professionals can support more personally meaningful and nourishing wellness experiences for participants by uncovering how each person defines adventure. With this understanding, organizers can strive to offer activities and events that bolster personal journeys for the adventurers-to-be in their midst.

Hosts shape the experience

For those who host Active Aging Week events, one of the unique (and fun) things about the campaign is its flexibility. Hosts decide how they will participate. Will they offer one event or many? On one day, three days, or all? Will they focus on a specific wellness dimension on a specific day of the week? Or a broad mix of opportunities throughout their schedule? And will they partner with other groups to broaden their outreach, or mobilize in-house to go it alone?

Over the years, events have taken place in all kinds of locations—for example, seniors centers and senior living communities, hospitals and health clubs, malls and municipal buildings, as well as parks, YMCAs and recreation centers. Not to mention activities provided on rivers and lakes (boats, sailing ships, canoes and kayaks) as well as in the air (ziplines, hang gliders, planes, helicopters and hot air balloons).

Veteran hosts learn from each Active Aging Week experience and challenge themselves to create ever-more exciting lineups to attract participants. New activities are introduced (indoor skydiving!), with returning ones often refreshed. Some mainstays include dances, field trips, group walks, brain games, fitness classes and demonstrations, exercise challenges, health fairs and edu-

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A Garden Planting Box provided a 'green' adventure for Forum residents in Cupertino, California. Image courtesy of The Forum at Rancho San Antonio

ational seminars, all reimagined and reinterpreted by individual hosts.

ICAA gives event organizers just three key guidelines. Activities should be:

- free-to-low cost for older adults, ensuring cost is no barrier to participation
- educational
- provided in a safe, no-pressure atmosphere that's friendly and fun

Organizers are urged to register their locations as official Active Aging Week host sites by completing the short form on the campaign website (see the box on page 84 for the address). ICAA prepares a list of registered hosts. Consumers and the media can access this list online in early September.

Importantly, registration allows ICAA to know who is participating in the campaign. The association asks hosts to send photographs and to report on their activities and experiences in order to learn how the week went and to write articles

about the campaign. (An overview of Active Aging Week 2014 appears on pages 40–50 of this *Journal* issue.)

The adventure continues

Event hosts and participants “let the adventure begin” with Active Aging Week 2014, and many reported a successful week built around the theme. At The Holmstad in Batavia, Illinois, residents “had a lot of energy and excitement about the adventure theme,” observed Resident Services Director Cathy Reese. And in Cupertino, California, “the program was received very enthusiastically,” revealed Katie Mayers, fitness coordinator at The Forum at Rancho San Antonio.

It was The Forum's first Active Aging Week experience. In her post-event report, Mayers wrote that the community would begin the planning process earlier this year—the most consistent lesson learned by ICAA hosts over the years. Among organizers of 2014 events, several echoed Mayers' comment. In fact, some hosts were already considering ideas for their 2015 events. (ICAA's campaign resources can help!)

“[W]e want to set the bar even higher,” stated Britt Kane, community relations coordinator at Highgate Senior Living in Bellingham, Washington. Highgate designated a budget to make Active Aging Week “new, exciting and adventurous” in 2014. This year, the organization will strive for “more publicity and more newsworthy events.”

Veteran hosts often advise creating a team to develop Active Aging Week events. Forté Group's Lauren Witt, representing Presbyterian Village North in Dallas, Texas, credited “collaborative efforts” by multiple departments for that community's success in 2014. Past organizers have also turned to older-adult volunteers, board/committee members, and outside supporters (e.g., contractors, vendors), among others.

This year's theme, “Live your adventure,” promises to continue the adventure for hosts and participants. With an exhilarating emphasis on living the adventure of life every day, Active Aging Week 2015 seeks to inspire organizers, volunteers and participants, along with communities and the media, to celebrate aging—and to applaud the capabilities of today's older adults.☺

The sponsors of Active Aging Week 2015 include Aegis Therapies/EnerG® by Aegis, CaptionCall, Institute for Preventive Foot Health, SwimEx and Thor•Lo, Inc.

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