



# *enriching* Lives

THE HISTORY OF OASIS





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At the end of the day,  
Mann told Cervantes,  
**“We can do better**  
for older adults.”

Marylen Mann clearly remembers the day three decades ago when Father Lucius Cervantes, St. Louis commissioner of aging, took her and her friend Margie Wolcott May on a tour of the city’s senior centers.

By then Mann had already established a reputation as an innovator in curriculum development at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a federally-funded educational laboratory known as CEMREL. Though her work up to that point had been mostly with schools and cultural institutions throughout the St. Louis area, Cervantes thought Mann might have some ideas for program improvements for older adults.

Mann spent a day in church basements visiting with older adults as they made crafts, played bingo and sat idly around the rooms. Although the centers were meeting important basic needs, Mann saw a world of potential going to waste. Why should the people in these centers, who had raised families and held productive jobs, have such limited opportunities as they aged?

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Mann spent many more days in senior centers, talking with older adults and center directors. She drew up a grant proposal for arts and humanities classes and trips to cultural institutions. Early in 1978, Mann got an \$8,000 grant from the Mid-East Area Agency on Aging to provide programs for its 48 senior centers in four counties.

Mann and May formed an advisory committee for programming ideas and support. Instructors from local colleges taught poetry, painting and drawing. Lecturers led book discussions, conducted history classes on the times in which their students had lived and facilitated conversations about current events. The best of the classes were intergenerational—events that brought together older adults and adolescents.



The program, titled Arts for Older Adults, won wide acclaim from those who participated. But Mann thought she might be able to do even better.

How much better? Even Mann could not have envisioned what grew from the program for seniors she started so many years ago. She is now chairman of an organization called OASIS with programs in 27 cities serving 365,000 people.

OASIS began 25 years ago with Mann's vision and determination to turn the aging process into a creative process. But Mann will tell you that the organization is fueled by its members—thousands of older adults who do more than just turn out for the programs, they drive them with their wisdom, enthusiasm and new ideas.

At OASIS centers and in schools, colleges, community organizations, museums and cultural institutions of every sort, you will find members engaged in pursuits that make their lives and those of others meaningful in ways that hardly any of them could have imagined. OASIS members write plays and poetry. They visit far-flung places from Cuba to Katmandu either through books and lectures or by getting on a plane or a boat and actually going there. They learn how to stay healthy and active. They work with children in urban centers and rural outposts to get them excited about learning. And they support their peers, getting them through the tough times as they confront loneliness with the loss of a spouse or a pet, or because of a relocation.

OASIS programs now are so popular and widely accepted that it may seem hard to believe that starting such a program a quarter of a century ago was an uphill battle. But America was a different place in the 1970s—most particularly for older adults.



## A revolutionary approach to aging

In starting OASIS, Mann defied what was then the conventional wisdom about older adults—that they were finished making their contribution to their families and civic life and that inevitably they would grow increasingly infirm and dependent on others for their needs. Their circle of friends would shrink and their days would be filled with trivial activities.

### Mann defied

what was then the conventional wisdom about older adults.

Mann and her colleagues organized OASIS around three concepts that were once considered revolutionary, but are now widely accepted among those who work with older adults:

**Lifelong learning**—the need to challenge the mind and continue personal growth.

**Civic engagement**—the desire to devote one’s time, energy and experience to meet community needs.

**Healthy lifestyles**—the importance of physical activity, nutrition and managing health risks to sustain an independent, active life.

Resources in the early going were scarce. Mann and others had to be energetic in raising funds and creative in the ways in which they used them.

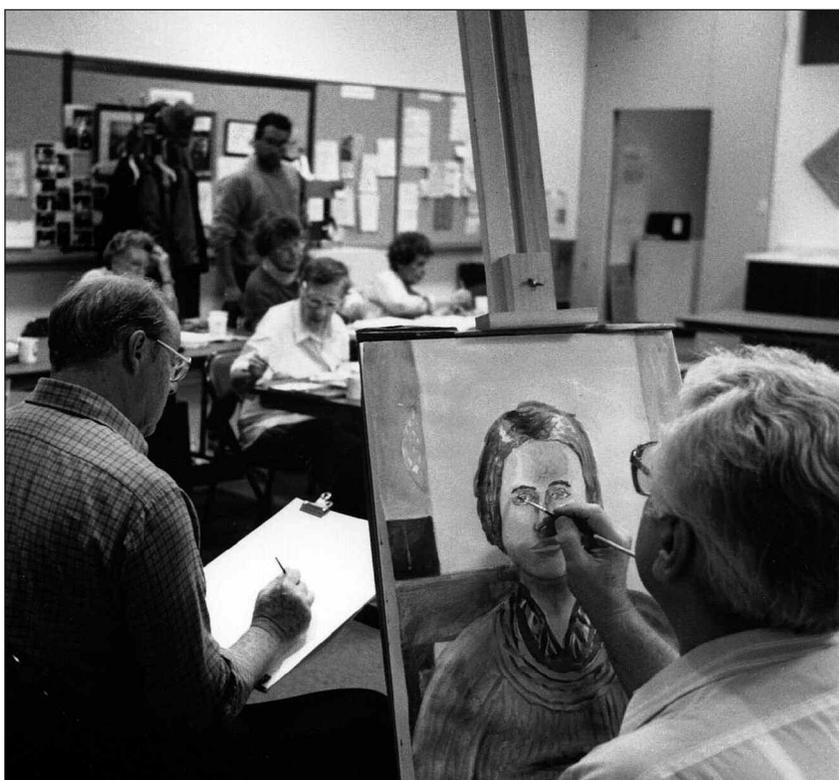
A template evolved. OASIS would find a partner in each city, creating public-private partnerships by raising funds and getting in-kind donations from government, private foundations and corporate sponsors, including the May Department Stores and health care providers. It would rely on a small paid staff and the extensive use of volunteers, most of them older adults, to organize programs and teach classes.

And it would get older adults involved as much as possible in reaching a diverse audience by offering a variety of services, from peer counseling to tutoring programs for children, to serving as jurors at mock trials at law schools.

OASIS launched its program in the fall of 1982 at a May department store in St. Louis before a crowd of 200 civic leaders, media representatives, and future participants. Registration for classes filled, at that store and another, as word traveled across the community. Soon OASIS would expand to other sites in the area and draw dozens, sometimes hundreds, of participants at a time. Within ten years, OASIS was replicated in 20 cities and served a national membership of 171,000. Since then, programs have been established in seven more cities and the membership across the country has more than doubled.

In hindsight, it would seem that the success of OASIS was inevitable. It offered so much that was interesting at so little cost and in ways that were convenient and accessible for a growing population of older adults. But that would overlook how difficult it was back in the 1970s for a young educator to fight for people who were a low priority for decision makers in government, business and philanthropic organizations.

**OASIS launched its program** in the fall of 1982 at a May department store in St. Louis.



## Stirring the pot—and the community

The inspiration for OASIS came not just from the programs, but also from where they were held. Not all of the Arts for Older Adults classes were held at senior centers. Some were at community colleges. And some were held in the auditorium of Famous-Barr, a St. Louis department store owned by the May Company. Margie May was chairing the advisory committee of Arts for Older Adults, and she suggested using the store as a venue for large lectures.

Once a month, guest speakers came to Famous-Barr to talk on a variety of topics; one great idea for a program led to another. Men turned out to hear a local sports historian talk about baseball or an expert discuss deep-sea fishing. Everyone delighted in a local professor's discourses on local history, in part because so many of them had actually lived it. Within a year, there were capacity crowds in the 250-seat auditorium. The program expanded to a second Famous-Barr store—and then a third—in the metropolitan area.

Just as Mann had advocated for years, the best attended of the educational programs were those that included local cultural institutions. In 1980, 2000 people showed up at the St. Louis Art Museum for a special showing, supported by the Monsanto Fund, of an exhibit of Japanese art, tea and lectures by museum docents. The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra drew a capacity audience for its special performance for seniors. Many of the older adults had never been to the art museum or the symphony.

## National attention

Mann was so successful in reaching out to older adults that by 1980 the U. S. Administration on Aging awarded a grant to fund the development of a handbook for creating and implementing older adult arts and humanities programs



**From the beginning,** OASIS programs drew people in for engaging discussions on books, film, history and current issues.



throughout the country. In 1982, representatives of seven Midwestern states came to St. Louis to attend a three-day workshop on developing arts and humanities programs in their communities.

Lennie-Marie Tolliver, U.S. Commissioner on Aging, came as well. Tolliver's presence validated the accomplishments of Mann, May and the many volunteers who made the programming a success. Mann and Tolliver discussed the large crowds at the programs held in the Famous-Barr stores. Mann pointed out that these programs drew a distinctly different crowd than the programs held at senior centers. And she emphasized the importance of serving this wider, more diverse senior population. Tolliver relayed to Mann that programming at the stores fit neatly with the interest of the Reagan administration in public-private partnerships. Immediately, Mann knew this was a funding opportunity to pursue.

Mann went to work on another proposal for the U.S. Administration on Aging. She convened informal focus groups to assess the interests of older adults. The responses she received were enthusiastic and consistent: people wanted programming on healthcare and healthy aging, personal finances, arts and the humanities, and current events. They loved the opportunity to meet new people. And they were very enthusiastic about meeting in the department stores. The stores were familiar to them; it's where many of them had their first restaurant meal as children in the tearooms. The store-based programming drew people who did not feel that they needed the services provided by the senior centers.

The surveyed groups also wanted opportunities to be useful in the community. They were used to working and volunteering, and they wanted to continue to do for others. Mann was convinced. She wanted to expand the class offerings she had initiated through Arts for Older Adults, and offer all of those classes in department stores.

### **Men turned out to hear**

a local sports historian  
talk about baseball  
or an expert discuss  
deep-sea fishing.





Administration on Aging

The **Older Americans Act of 1965** stated that it was the responsibility of the Administration on Aging to serve all elderly.

## Finding a home

Mann sought a commitment from the May Company to house the programs so she could make that relationship a central component of the grant proposal. Mann needed more than monthly use of the auditoriums to expand the scope of the programs. She required dedicated space in the stores. Mann asked the department store company to donate space, furnishings, and the printing of all handout materials. Because she wanted to confirm that the need for enhanced senior programming was a nationwide concern, and to demonstrate that the St. Louis program could be successfully replicated in other communities, Mann wrote the two-year proposal with St. Louis as a test site, and expansion to May stores in three additional cities during the grant period.

Mann got her request for dedicated space in the stores.

Mann was emphatic in her argument for federal funding: the Older Americans Act of 1965 stated that it was the responsibility of the Administration on Aging to serve all elderly. And it was clear from the focus groups that the older population that attended Arts for Older Adults classes would not participate at the senior centers where the administration dollars were currently being directed. Mann was asking for support to reach a group of older adults never before served by the program. She got it.

## OASIS is born

Under the two-year, \$84,000 demonstration grant, a paid director and volunteers were called on to staff the centers and teach the classes. The expanded program got a new name: OASIS, Older Adult Service and Information System. The organization has since dropped the longer name and goes simply by OASIS.

At a celebration marking the opening of the centers on September 28, 1982, Mercia Decker, special assistant to the U.S. Commissioner on Aging, participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony. More than 300 people turned out for the program's launch, and for the first opportunity to register for classes.



More than 300 people came to register for classes at the opening of the first OASIS center in 1982.

As OASIS was beginning, CEMREL closed its doors. Mann and OASIS needed a new home for administrative operations. At the beginning of January 1983, OASIS moved to the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The university promoted the affiliation as an expansion of its programming for older adults and as an opportunity for its gerontology students to work with older adults in the community.

## Empowering volunteers

Engaging people in service was a key component of the initial grant to OASIS. In the early going, OASIS created the Older Adult Peer Leadership program (OAPL) with the idea that OASIS participants would be leaders in their own communities. People would sign up for certain classes knowing that they would also be trained to teach others what they had learned. Using curriculum materials developed and tested for the older adult learner, participants would be educated in the subject matter and in leadership techniques. They would then teach classes in senior centers and assisted living facilities.

Mary Dee Schmidt joined OASIS as the director of curriculum in 1983. She remembers looking at programming across the country for other examples of training older adults as peer teachers. None existed; OASIS would lead the way. She would frequently remind the volunteers that they already had the knowledge. She would train them on teaching strategies, and then their most important job was to make the people in their classes feel at ease approaching new subjects.

She recalled telling the volunteers that it's like making guests in your home feel comfortable; the trainees understood that analogy. The volunteers went to senior centers and settlement houses in impoverished city neighborhoods. They traveled an hour outside the St. Louis metropolitan area to small, rural communities. They brought creative writing and arts classes to older adults who couldn't get to the OASIS centers. By 1988 they offered classes in 85 locations reaching more than 3,000 participants. Schmidt said she never had to persuade the trainers to go into the community. Once they were trained, they were eager to reach out to others.

**Engaging people in service** was a key component of the initial grant to OASIS.



**Mayor Tom Bradley**  
at the opening of  
the OASIS Center  
in Los Angeles  
in 1984.



Ralph Schmidt dropped out of school at the end of eighth grade to earn money to support his nine younger siblings. He was 78 years old and retired when he took his first course at OASIS. He was an eager learner, but he never considered teaching a class. Three years later, after taking many OASIS courses and OAPL training, he was teaching *Humanities: American Life Then and Now* to older adults at retirement centers, senior centers, and churches. “I’ve always been interested in history—it’s one of my passions,” he told a local newspaper reporter. “It’s very satisfying to get a group to enjoy the class and to respond to you.”

## Expanding to new cities

At the same time that Mann was running three OASIS centers in St. Louis, she was traveling to other parts of the country, looking for staff and center sites to expand OASIS.

OASIS opened centers at May stores in Baltimore and Cleveland in 1983. The fourth location chosen was Los Angeles. It was the start of a long-standing relationship with the Los Angeles Department of Aging. OASIS’ first California center opened in May, 1984, in a downtown Robinsons-May store and moved two years later to the Wilshire Fairfax store in a beautiful art deco building. OASIS partnered with Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles, a century-old social service agency with deep roots in the neighborhood. At the same time that the Wilshire center was opened, OASIS opened a center in the Baldwin Hills—Crenshaw Plaza Robinsons-May store. Its partner was Delta Sigma Theta Life Development Center, an organization with a long history of supporting the African-American community in the area.

It was not always smooth sailing in Los Angeles. Mann was convinced that more intellectually-stimulating course offerings were needed. Sandra King, the former executive director of Jewish Family Services, said, “Marylen wouldn’t lower her standards...she kept pushing us to broaden our horizons and create a place where people could grow, not a place where people play bingo...Her passion was contagious.”

Mann’s dreams have come true in Los Angeles. In 2006, more than 4,000 people participated in OASIS classes in the area.

## Good Humor

Los Angeles presented unique program opportunities for OASIS. Perhaps the best loved was “Television Comedy Then & Now” taught by Ed Simmons, an Emmy-award winning writer best known for his writing on The Carol Burnett Show. Victoria Neal, the former director of Los Angeles OASIS, met Simmons at a West Hollywood Senior Advisory Committee meeting in 1990. She suggested that he come talk at OASIS about what it was like to write for Carol Burnett and many other famous comedians. After some serious arm twisting, Simmons agreed.

Sixty-five people filled the room for his first lecture. Simmons, a tall, thin, gray-haired man, casually-dressed, always spoke his mind. He was very funny and entertained the group with behind-the-scenes stories of Imogene Coco, Louis Nye and Harvey Korman.

Simmons agreed to speak every week. The audience grew to 100, more than the OASIS center could accommodate. Simmons added guest speakers. Each week, a new guest would appear with Simmons: Cesar Romero, Cyd Charisse, Steve Allen, Red Buttons and Audrey Meadows. These well known guests were never announced in advance. Simmons shared television clips and pilot shows that never made it to the air.

When OASIS moved to a new location at Westside Pavilion, it could accommodate 175 people—and Simmons continued to fill the room. Volunteers built a stage. Neal recalls that the staff offices were across the hall from the large meeting room, and whenever Simmons’ class was

**Norman Lear** dedicated the Ed Simmons Memorial Computer Lab at the West Los Angeles OASIS center in 1999.

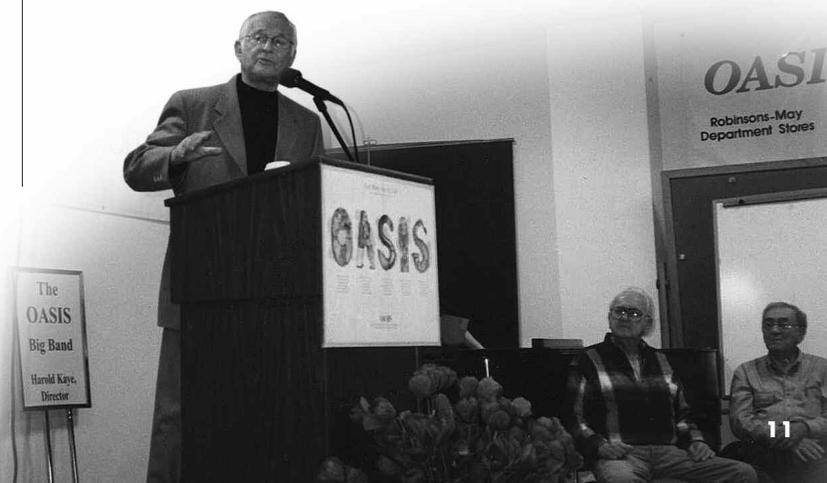


**Ed Simmons** filled the room with his weekly comedy show.

in session, they’d hear the crowd roar with laughter throughout the hour. It was hard to get work done; all of the staff wanted to see Simmons’ show.

When Ed Simmons died in 1998, Norman Lear donated \$25,000 to OASIS in his memory. In a fitting tribute to a man who loved to entertain others, the Los Angeles center bought new audio equipment so its members could better hear their guest speakers, and equipped a new computer lab.

Visitors to the center can see a memorial to Simmons, one of his Emmys and a photograph of the writer in a case outside the “Simmons Room.” It’s a loving reminder of one of OASIS’ very best friends.





Mann continued to believe that **OASIS should be a national program.**

## Blossoming: OASIS takes off

By the mid 1980s, with several successes under her belt and the two-year demonstration grant from the federal government coming to an end, Mann began fundraising in earnest for OASIS. Earnest, actually, doesn't begin to describe it.

Mann was swamped by the logistics of start-up activities in the three new OASIS sites; at the same time she had to scramble to find replacement money for the demonstration grant that was coming to an end. And she continued to believe that OASIS should be a national program.

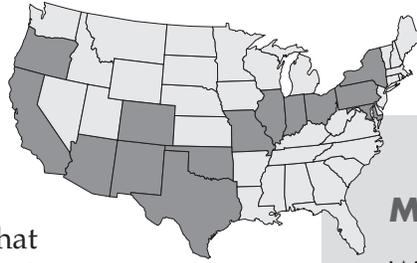
## Securing a national sponsor

A friend of Mann's from her days on her local school board reminded her that the May Company had a charitable foundation. She suggested Mann approach them for funding. Mann submitted a proposal to the foundation and got an interview with Jerome Loeb, May's chairman.

Loeb challenged the financial assumptions in the OASIS proposal. He called the budget "unsustainable" and told Mann that other potential sponsors wouldn't support it either. Years after the meeting, Mann said she came to understand that Loeb was testing her commitment and depth of understanding of the project before he would put money into it.

What Mann didn't know then was that Loeb liked what he had heard. He was convinced that she would do whatever it took to continue the OASIS programs and become a nationwide presence.

In 1985, The May Department Stores Company Foundation became a national sponsor of OASIS. May provided space in its stores with reception areas, offices for staff members, work space for volunteers and classrooms. The Foundation provided partial funding for up to 20 percent of the overall costs. In addition, the stores provided publicity and support for all the openings. It was a generous and groundbreaking commitment.



Jan Kniffen, former treasurer of the May Company and a member of the OASIS Institute board of directors, commented that May never tried to quantify the value it received from its relationship with OASIS. Everyone believed it was good for business, but Kniffen knew that giving up floor space, the most precious commodity in any retail establishment, for OASIS classrooms always created tension for the stores. Regardless, Kniffen, whose job required him to be accountable for every penny spent by his company, had no reservations about May's generous support of OASIS.

"There are other people trying to do pieces of what OASIS does, but no one is doing all the pieces of OASIS," he said. Kniffen knows that as people retire, their children move away, or a spouse dies, "you reach out to fill your life" and OASIS is there to meet that need.

## Support from the healthcare field

Mann had a national sponsor. Now she had to scramble to find local partners. In St. Louis, that partner was Jewish Hospital and the Washington University School of Medicine.

Mann needed instructors for OASIS health education classes. Friends from the local medical schools and hospitals had been drafted to teach classes—physicians, therapists and social workers. But she knew that this was a temporary fix. So Mann, along with Carolyn Baum, who was then the director of occupational therapy clinical services at the Irene Walter Johnson Institute of Rehabilitation at Washington University Medical School, began calling on doctors at Barnes and Jewish hospitals.

David Kipnis, M.D., chairman of the Department of Medicine at Washington University, suggested she contact William Peck, physician-in-chief at Jewish

## Marching across the country

With the commitment of support from The May Department Stores Company, OASIS began to open centers nationwide. The opening dates for current OASIS centers were:

Saint Louis, Missouri	September 1982
Portland, Oregon	October 1985
Los Angeles, California-Westside	May 1986
Hyattsville, Maryland	June 1986
Los Angeles, California-Baldwin Hills	August 1986
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	September 1986
Akron, Ohio	November 1986
Phoenix, Arizona	October 1987
San Diego, California	November 1987
Rochester, New York	October 1988
Lakewood, California	July 1989
Houston, Texas	October 1989
Tucson, Arizona	October 1989
Chicago, Illinois	November 1989
Indianapolis, Indiana	February 1990
Escondido, California	April 1990
Washington, D.C.*	October 1993
Cleveland, Ohio	October 1983
Denver, Colorado	December 1985
San Antonio, Texas	February 1991
Albuquerque, New Mexico	November 1991
Alton, Illinois	February 1994
Eugene, Oregon	February 1995
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	November 1995
Gaithersburg, Maryland*	September 1997
Syracuse, New York	June 2001
Albany, New York	February 2002

\*Merged to open Montgomery County center in 2007

**Marylen Mann** (front, center) developed OASIS with a unique collaboration, represented by **Jerome T. Loeb** (left) of The May Department Stores Company, and **William Peck, M.D.** (right) of Washington University School of Medicine and Jewish Hospital.



Hospital and director of the hospital's Program on Aging. Peck agreed to provide lecturers for OASIS classes. He remembers being impressed by the OASIS audiences he addressed. The people in attendance were enthusiastic, and asked "profound and relevant" questions. Many came well-prepared on the topics under discussion. "I got a bigger kick out of being there than the students did," he said.

The problem of finding a steady source of healthcare lecturers was solved, but Mann was dissatisfied with the scope of the health care programming that OASIS offered. She was talking to hospitals in the other OASIS cities and she kept thinking OASIS could do more to address the health education interest and needs of older adults. But she also knew that expanded programming meant an even greater need for financial sponsors. She would puzzle over this concern with Carolyn Baum.

As an occupational therapist, Baum understood the importance of continued physical activity and intellectual stimulation for older adults. C. Everett Koop, the U.S. Surgeon General, was coming to St. Louis. Baum knew that he had a great interest in aging, and suggested that Mann seek a meeting with him.

Koop was thrilled to hear about OASIS because its mission dovetailed neatly with his own philosophy on productive aging. He invited Mann to come to Washington, D.C. to discuss it further. She made several trips to Washington, talking to people at the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institute on Aging, and to her many contacts at the Administration on Aging. And she came back from Washington to discuss with Dr. Peck the interest of Dr. Koop in a falls and hip fracture study. She knew that Peck was eager to investigate this topic, and Mann was confident that Peck's study would get federal funding—and OASIS could get a share of the grant. Peck and Mann went to Washington to meet with Koop, who confirmed his enthusiasm. The proposal would include a request for funding for OASIS health education programming, incorporating investigation findings. OASIS participants would be solicited for voluntary participation in the study.

In the fall of 1984, Jewish Hospital invited Mann to move her offices from the University of Missouri-St. Louis to their campus. She was given an appointment at the Washington

University School of Medicine and was included in hospital medical staff meetings and grand rounds. She had new access to the professionals who were caring for older adults as patients—and she had an opportunity to change their minds about the aging process. Just as importantly, she now had a formalized relationship with a nationally-respected hospital and medical school.

## OASIS in the national spotlight

The National Institute on Aging funded the fall and hip fracture study for five years and five million dollars—the largest award given to Jewish Hospital up to that time. Thirteen hundred OASIS members signed up to participate. OASIS recruited, trained and encouraged them to remain in the program for the duration of the five-year investigation. The members served as a healthy control group, giving medical professionals a closer view of the well elderly. Dr. Stanley Birge, clinical director of the Jewish Hospital Program on Aging, viewed the affiliation as an opportunity. “We need to have a better idea of what is the normal process of aging,” he told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1985. The relationship with OASIS gave the medical school and the hospital an extraordinary opportunity to acquire this knowledge.

Meanwhile, Koop continued to tout the creativity and accomplishments of OASIS. In 1988, OASIS was recognized as a successful private sector model by the U.S. Surgeon General’s Conference on Health Promotion and Aging. In 1991, OASIS was featured in the PBS series, *Forever Young*, hosted by Koop.

This national recognition, including a 1995 Distinguished Volunteer Service Award awarded to OASIS and The May Company by Margaret M. Heckler, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, propelled OASIS into the national spotlight. This increased OASIS’ credibility as it sought new funding sources and sites.

## Broadening Support

To open each new OASIS center, Mann and her staff established partnerships with local organizations to secure financial and operational support. Generally, a non-profit

**C. Everett Koop** featured OASIS in the 1991 PBS series, *Forever Young*.



**Margaret Heckler**, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, presented The May Department Stores Company with the Distinguished Volunteer Service Award in 1985 for its sponsorship of OASIS. From left to right are C. Everett Koop, surgeon general; Marylen Mann, founder of OASIS; David Farrell, CEO of the May Company; Heckler; Charles Wells, deputy commission of aging; and Jerome T. Loeb, executive vice president of the May Company.

organization served as administrator of the program, employing the staff and providing fiscal management of the center and its funding. A health care partner provided financial support and professionals to lead health classes. The department store provided classroom space.

In each center an advisory council worked with the director to create the catalog of courses, helping to identify community and cultural resources. The opportunities at OASIS were never static. Both national and local staff continually worked to reinvent the class offerings. Classes were added, amended or eliminated based on the interests and response of participants.

## Strengthening leadership

By 1998, OASIS was serving 340,000 members across the nation. In response to recommendations from sponsors, partners and its own advisory council, the leadership at OASIS formed a separate organization, the OASIS Institute. The Institute recruited a national board of directors, initially led by Sanford Zimmerman, a businessman with decades of experience in the retail industry and extensive service on the boards of non-profits.

With the creation of the Institute, national leadership and support staff, such as development, communications, and administration, became a central resource, separate from the St. Louis OASIS center, formalizing a trend that had been occurring during years of national expansion. The newly-created board was charged with overseeing the continued growth of OASIS while planning for its future.

Grass roots support has always been critical especially as OASIS grew. But the Institute's board also insisted on strong direction for the centers from its headquarters to maintain a high standard of quality. At the same time, Mann and the board understood the importance of giving each center enough room to adapt OASIS initiatives to their local audience and the freedom to invent new programs—programs that could serve as models for other cities. And, of course, they continued to encourage and inspire support and volunteerism from their members.

**Grass roots support has always been critical** especially as OASIS grew.

## OASIS Major Partners

as of September 2007

The OASIS Institute



<b>Akron, Ohio</b>	Mature Services, Inc.
<b>Albany/New York State Capital Region, New York</b>	University at Albany
<b>Chicago, Illinois</b>	Evanston Northwestern Healthcare North Shore Senior Center
<b>Cleveland, Ohio</b>	Mature Services, Inc. MetroHealth System
<b>Escondido, California</b>	Aging & Independence Services of San Diego County City of Escondido Palomar Pomerado Health System
<b>Eugene, Oregon</b>	PeaceHealth Gerontology Institute at Sacred Heart Medical Center Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon Quality Financial Group
<b>Hyattsville</b>	Doctors Community Hospital
<b>Indianapolis</b>	Clarian Health
<b>Lakewood, California</b>	Talbert Medical Group Garden Grove Hospital and Medical Center Los Alamitos Medical Center Tenet Healthcare
<b>Los Angeles, California</b>	Los Angeles Department of Aging Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles Delta Sigma Theta Life Development Center Pierce College

<b>Montgomery County, Maryland</b>	Suburban Hospital
<b>Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania</b>	Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging Brashear Association Duquesne Light Equitable Resources
<b>Portland, Oregon</b>	Legacy Health System Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon
<b>Rochester, New York</b>	Lifetime Care Monroe County Office for the Aging Valley Manor Monroe Community Hospital
<b>San Antonio, Texas</b>	The City of San Antonio Warm Springs Rehabilitation Foundation WellMed
<b>San Diego, California</b>	Aging & Independence Services of San Diego County
<b>St. Louis, Missouri</b>	BJC HealthCare
<b>Syracuse, New York</b>	University Hospital
<b>Tucson, Arizona</b>	TMC HealthCare

When Gladys Barker retired in 1982 as an occupational therapist, she began looking around for ways to stay active in the community. Mann asked her if she'd consider a job at OASIS. No, Barker said, she didn't want full-time work, but she'd like to volunteer.

Twenty-five years later Barker, now 90 years-old, is still volunteering though it sometimes feels like full-time work. Barker has done many things over the last quarter of a century for OASIS, but her Contemporary Issues Forum is the centerpiece. Since its inception, the program has created a buzz in the community and demonstrates that OASIS isn't serving up milque-toast sessions.

**Gladys Barker** has planned the Contemporary Issues Forum for 25 years, drawing civic leaders and capacity crowds for provocative discussions.



Barker brought in an attorney who argued abortion rights before the U.S. Supreme Court. She invited a Christian Scientist to a forum, who made pronouncements so provocative that it nearly got her thrown out of her church. And she has invited Muslims to speak alongside Jews.

Her first Contemporary Issues session attracted all of 21 people, she remembers. Now, she says matter-of-factly, "We only take 100 and there's a waiting a list."

OASIS serves tens of thousands of older adults across the country, but among that group is a cadre of volunteers like Barker who are a continuing source of strength and vitality for OASIS. They provide the ideas that lead to new programs or simply invent ones themselves and run them. The buzzword for this is empowerment, but this is how Barker puts it: "It has just been the making of me."

### Responding to local interests

If it's Thursday, Linda Kimball knows that at least 40 people will be waiting for her to open the doors of the OASIS center in Northbrook, Illinois. The Thursday Men's Group always has a turnout of 160. Kimball knows this, because every seat is filled every week, and there are another 180 men on the waiting list hoping to join. The Thursday Men's Group started in 1990, when 20 men decided to get together

for a topical lecture and some camaraderie with “the boys.” The Men’s Group is the kind of program that you’ll find at some OASIS centers—but not all. It demonstrates how each center has the autonomy to work with its members at the local level to create the kinds of programs they want.

Over the last 17 years, the Men’s Group has expanded to fill the meeting room to capacity. For those who didn’t want to wait for a Thursday opening, a Wednesday Men’s Group has been formed. This suburban-Chicago crowd knows the ropes. They are aware that about a third of the group are snowbirds, heading to warmer climates during the winter, and there’s a crowd that fills their chairs during their absence.

## One topic, many perspectives

Who among us hasn’t read a mystery novel, watched an episode of *Law and Order* or read a crime story in the newspaper—and then second-guessed a detective, judge or criminal?

Priscilla Minster, director of OASIS in Rochester, New York, understands the public’s keen interest in the criminal justice system. Before coming to OASIS she was responsible for overseeing community service sentences for offenders in Monroe County. Minster was confident she could find many representatives of the system who would be willing to talk to interested citizens.

In 1996, Minster began a *Crime and Punishment* class series with three classes. By the fall of 2006, the series was comprised of thirteen classes. Enrollees could participate in a mock trial. They could attend lectures by police officers, an FBI agent, county, family and state supreme-court judges, a probation officer and the commissioner of jurors. They could hear from forensic experts, a representative of the Bar Association, a clinical psychologist with expertise in the insanity defense and a professor of philosophy who discussed why Americans are so fond of the death penalty. They could tour the office of the county Medical Examiner. They could sit in on a trial and talk to representatives of the District Attorney’s office.

The first Contemporary Issues session attracted all of 21 people.

**Now, we only take 100 and there’s a waiting list.**



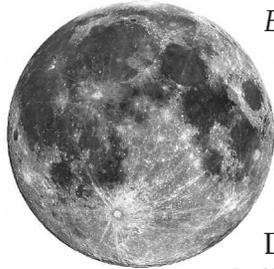


Class series in Rochester range from forensics to food. Did you know that Jell-O was invented in Rochester? OASIS members who participated in *A Taste of Rochester* visited the Jell-O factory, in addition to cheese, sausage and ice cream factories. Rochester has also offered country-specific series, including the history, food, movies and language of Germany and Italy.

Class series in Rochester **range from forensics to food.**

In fact, OASIS centers all across America offer classes organized around a theme. In 2004, former Lakewood director Monica Dunahee planned a full day of classes dedicated to *Chocolate: Food of the Gods*. A local professor led the class through the history of chocolate, from its discovery to our current passion for this treat. A zookeeper from the Santa Ana Zoo addressed the rain forest, where chocolate is one of the most popular crops. A medical representative gave suggestions on how to enjoy chocolate in moderation. And following the discussion on eating responsibly—a member of Trader Joe’s food emporium conducted a chocolate tasting and offered some advice on cooking with chocolate.

The Lakewood center has also offered class series on tea, gold and early settlers of the West. On the occasion of a lunar eclipse, speakers from local universities and the Aquarium of the Pacific participated in *Moonstruck: A Total Lunar Eclipse Event*. Participants heard about the current state of research about the moon, folklore and mythology of eclipses, the moon and the tides, the affect of the moon on people’s behavior and the mechanics of an eclipse. The grand finale of the day was watching the eclipse with the chair of the Department of Astronomy and Physics from Cypress College. “The wide variety of perspectives presented at these events attracts new people who want to learn more,” says Dunahee, who moved on in 2007 to become director of the West Los Angeles OASIS center.



In Albuquerque, the OASIS center distinguished itself with a series of classes on Cuba. In addition to studying the country’s history, economy, food, music and films, the class took a 12-day *Culture and History Seminar to Cuba* in the spring of 2001. Director Michele Boccia planned an armchair “trip” to India in 2006 that thrilled participants with the content and depth of study. “I have always wanted to go to India,” exclaimed Gilda Floersheimer, a long-time OASIS member, “and this gave me a chance to learn more about this fascinating country.”

## Learning by doing

From its earliest days, OASIS has emphasized experiential learning. It stands to reason that world history, arts, language and cooking all come alive when they are paired with travel to the places being studied.

In July 1993, 130 passengers from OASIS centers in Los Angeles, Lakewood, San Diego, Escondido, Albuquerque, Portland, Tucson, Phoenix and Scottsdale left on a seven-day cruise to Alaska. Before leaving their hometowns, OASIS members and accompanying directors studied Northwest native peoples, their history and culture. Each OASIS member boarded the ship with a notebook of background material. As they toured the Alaskan wilderness and stopped in the cities, they expanded their studies through observation and discussion with an anthropology professor.

Day trips, national travel and international explorations are a very popular part of OASIS programming. Members have traveled together to Russia, Greece, Turkey, England, Scotland and Ireland. They've visited the French Riviera and Scandinavia. They have river-rafted in Alaska and Colorado, and explored Anasazi ruins in Ute Mountain Tribal Park.

The trips are not only terrific learning experiences. They are a chance to meet new people and make new friends. For many OASIS members, the international tours are their first trip out of the United States. Some explore destinations they've always longed to see. Others get to know their own cities and states in greater depth. It can be a life-altering experience. But it can also seem overwhelming to set out alone. Travel with OASIS is never lonely. Participants study together before and after the journey, sharing interests, impressions and memories.

Donna Toro, OASIS director in Escondido, California, says that these trips would never happen without the hard work of volunteers who work with OASIS staff and faculty, as well as travel professionals, to assure that everyone's intellectual and physical needs are attended to. (Taking 115 people out to dinner in France is quite a logistical feat.) But Toro says she is confident that all the work is worth it. When the travelers return, everyone is regaled with stories, and it's always clear that the travelers have returned with a wealth of knowledge and a lifetime of memories.

A group of hearty Albuquerque members ventured out onto the Athabasca Glacier in **Jasper National Park, Canada.**



A Russian guide prepared the OASIS group to experience the **Moscow Metro**—each stop a work of art with marble, mosaics and crystal chandeliers.

# Creating challenging, but approachable, programs with the National Endowment for the Humanities

When it came to providing educational programs for older adults, OASIS set the bar high and then frequently raised it.

No one recognized this and appreciated it more than Bonnie Gould, a senior program officer with 30 years at the National Endowment for the Humanities. NEH funds educational projects in the humanities such as documentaries and museum exhibitions. It's their goal to engage people in lifelong learning in the humanities.

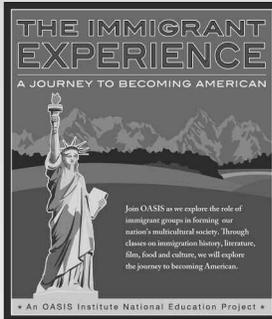
Gould got to know OASIS in the mid-1990s when the organization applied for a grant to develop a program that revisited the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and the prospects for that nation's future. NEH awarded OASIS \$170,000 for *Reemerging Russia: Search for Identity*. Gould was struck by the professionalism in the way that OASIS built the program.

Max J. Okenfuss, associate professor of history at Washington University, was project director. He recruited a group of national scholars to work on curriculum for a series of ten discussions on Russian art, history, literature, religion, and culture. Mann recalled that it was a struggle getting the assorted experts to understand who their audience was as they compiled an anthology for the program. While more than half of OASIS members have college educations, OASIS founder Marylen Mann wanted the course to be approachable for every member, regardless of educational background.

The Higher Education Channel taped the class sessions as a video series accompanied to the course materials in other cities. OASIS created book discussion groups and film festivals to augment the experience. Consistent with its commitment to intergenerational learning, OASIS added companion curriculum for both older adults and middle school students. The program was piloted in St. Louis and enthusiastically received. There were always some Russian immigrants at each session, and they both challenged and validated the theories offered by the faculty.

Gould, the NEH program officer, remembers contacting Mann in the wake of extensive budgetary cuts at NEH. Gould was so impressed with the quality of the OASIS Russian program that she wanted to assure Mann that NEH would continue to welcome proposals from OASIS. It was a reversal in roles; the funder was encouraging the applicant to ask for more funding.

And ask they did. OASIS received funding from NEH for three more programs. *The Peoples of Russia and China: Facing the Dawn of a New Century* in 1998, and *Lewis and Clark: Journey to Another America* was funded in 2002. OASIS offered the Lewis and Clark program to Elderhostels affiliated with Learning in Retirement Centers, thereby extending its educational reach to people outside OASIS service areas. OASIS received funding to develop its fourth program, *The Immigrant Experience*, in 2005, and will introduce it nationally in 2008.



Several years ago, Gould visited the OASIS facility in Hyattsville, Maryland. She walked into a

spacious multipurpose room to find a Washington-based journalist speaking to the assembled crowd. It was one of the last lectures in the ten-session Peoples of Russia and China series.

The audience was rapt; they had come prepared, having read the course material with its suggested questions for discussion and its comprehensive bibliographies. They didn't hesitate to offer their own opinions. Once again, Gould was impressed. This was exactly what NEH was hoping to accomplish with its grants: new understanding of human experience and culture.

But the most moving aspect of her visit was the personal response she got from OASIS participants.

"I was struck by people who came up to me and said they were thrilled to have such a program," Gould said. "They thanked me as if I was personally responsible. I'm just one person at a federal agency that responds to them. I have to remind people this is your taxpayers' money at work."

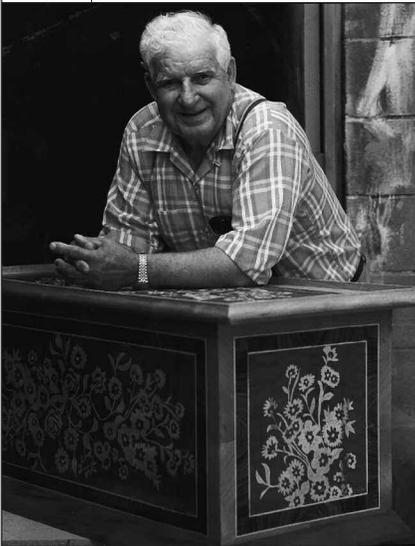
The people at OASIS "are very thoughtful, skilled people," Gould said. "I'm looking forward to hearing more about OASIS programs as a near retiree who might also benefit."

OASIS has published three books of readings for its humanities courses **supported by NEH grants**. A fourth course, The Immigrant Experience, will debut in 2008.



## Tapping into members' creativity

**Living Treasures: Preserving Our Ethnic Heritage** showcased folk art by 25 artists with origins in 13 countries.



St. Louis was an incubator for new programs. In 1985, OASIS sponsored an exhibition of folk art by 25 artists and craftsmen at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Called *Living Treasures, Preserving our Ethnic Heritage*, it showcased work from OASIS members with origins in 13 different countries. The artwork was photographed and the photographs, along with recorded interviews of each of the artists, were archived in the permanent collection of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. After the exhibition, four of the artists taught their crafts to OASIS members and children in intergenerational art classes.

Across all the OASIS centers, the opportunities for learning were seemingly endless. For example, in Cleveland, in 1985, the OASIS Theater Group presented four one-act plays written and performed by its members.

In 1987, OASIS members in Los Angeles contributed a 30-minute documentary film, *Old Wise Tales*, to the citywide Cultural Heritage Week celebration. The film focused on the personal stories of individuals from the various ethnic groups in the Los Angeles community. Spaulding Gray served as the on-camera interviewer.

**St. Louis was an incubator** for new programs.

In early 1994, the Tucson OASIS center celebrated its fifth anniversary by producing a mural—a traditional art form in the southwest—for the third floor hallway of the Foley's store, where the OASIS office is located. Working with local artist Marianne Cracovaner, as many as 30 OASIS members participated in a class to research, conceptualize, draw and paint the 15-by-7-foot mural. Participants contributed oral histories, personal photos and mementos of their lives in Tucson. The five-panel panorama, entitled "We All Celebrate the Day Together with the Ancient Ones that Rise Up from the Valley"

**To celebrate the fifth anniversary** of OASIS in Tucson, members created a mural portraying local history and culture.



includes civic, religious and cultural leaders from the early history of Tucson, as well as scenes of OASIS participants engaged in classes and activities.

The image of Catholic nuns teaching students during the early days of the territory is echoed in the depiction of a contemporary OASIS tutoring session. The mountains contrast with historic landmarks and modern-day buildings. Rows of corn and Aztec pyramids are reminders of days long past. Funding came from the Arizona Commission on the Arts, Foley's and Tucson Medical Center.

In 2005, one of Tucson's artistic volunteers, Carolyn DeMott, created a shadow box to display a three-dimensional depiction of the mural with a legend identifying each element. The box is displayed in the lobby near the mural. Director Prindle Gorman-Oomens says "Many times a week, I will walk through and see people looking at the shadow box and the mural and I know that it is still helping to teach our members a little bit about Tucson history."

In 1998, OASIS started a music program at the St. Louis Symphony Community Music School with support from the Whitaker Foundation and Emerson. Music, the German author and poet Berthold Auerbach once wrote, "washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." It has done that and more for members who have been offered many options depending on interest and musical skill: Chamber Chorale, Back to Broadway Chorus or the OASIS Intergenerational Band, which practiced and performed with local high school band members. For those who didn't perform, a class in *Musical Knowledge for Our Listening Pleasure* was offered.

"More than any other activity, music unifies people," said Kathleen Weathers, who initially coordinated the program for OASIS. "It calls them to a common ground and creates a sense of community, in many ways a symphony of people."

Through the years, the music offerings at OASIS have expanded throughout the country. Music classes are an integral part of the OASIS curriculum, varying from beginning five lessons to wind ensembles, advanced guitar and concert band. There are classes on opera and Broadway musicals, and class excursions to professional performances. There's always music in the air.

**The Chester Whitmore Jazz Band** performs at the Baldwin Hills OASIS Center in Los Angeles.



**The West Los Angeles OASIS Big Band** is a frequent performer in the area.

"Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."

"OASIS was one of the first organizations to focus on the vast majority of older adults interested in lifelong learning and service."

Storytelling is one of the many ways **Verna Smith** contributes her talents. Her experience as an Olympic Torch-bearer in 1996 is one of her favorite stories.



As OASIS progressed, Mann took all that she had learned and shared it with others. In the late 1980s, Mann lectured at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University. Professor Nancy Morrow-Howell remembers OASIS as the first organization to focus on the well-elderly, the 80 percent of older adults "who are ready to learn, serve, and go."

Morrow-Howell is a researcher on the value of civic engagement in later life, and has followed OASIS participants in her studies. She asserts, "OASIS was one of the first organizations to focus on the vast majority of older adults interested in lifelong learning and service. They continue to set the pace, providing meaningful new opportunities for people to serve."

### Ask Verna

In 2003, the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* published a study confirming a belief that has been widely held at OASIS since its founding: Older adults who volunteer just two to three hours a week live happier and healthier lives. The eight-year study, conducted by researchers at Adelphia, Florida State and Washington Universities, supported the observation that volunteering is an important aspect of successful aging.

No one is a better example of that than Verna Smith. Smith, 88, has lived in St. Louis since 1946. She grew up in rural Montana "with no electricity, no running water, no indoor plumbing; just a kerosene lamp and love."

She began her career as a journalist in Glasgow, Montana, working for her hometown newspaper. Later she moved with her husband to St. Louis where she got a job as director of communications for CEMREL and got to know Mann.

After CEMREL closed in 1982, and as Smith contemplated retirement, Mann offered her a job at OASIS. She accepted, but soon found the salary was complicating her Social

Security benefits. So Smith resigned from the OASIS staff, and in 1985, she became a full-time volunteer.

Twenty-two years later, Smith is still volunteering at OASIS. She's in the Institute office four mornings a week and has enjoyed a front-row seat as OASIS evolved from Arts for Older Adults to a national organization with 365,000 members.

When Mann can't recall a particular detail in the history of the organization, she advises, "Ask Verna." When records of the earliest years are needed, someone always says, "Ask Verna." She wrote the Institute's newsletters. She wrote its press releases. She edited the curriculum for the first tutoring program at a St. Louis youth organization.

If you ask Smith why she does it, she looks surprised to be asked. She calls it fulfilling to help in the community. She cherishes the friendships she's made. She does it for the enrichment to her own mind and soul. Then she pauses and says, "All of my children, except one grandchild, live in far-flung states. OASIS is my family."

## Volunteers take the lead

One hundred new people walk through the doors of the San Antonio OASIS center every month. When they do, they are greeted by one of six volunteers working every day in its lobby. There are 364 OASIS volunteers in San Antonio with 50 working in the center. The others are out in the community, tutoring or teaching classes.

One is Tom Chowning, who retired in 1998 after spending ten years in Saudi Arabia with the U.S. Customs Department. Now he works at OASIS, registering new members and entering class information for the course catalog in the OASIS online database. He likes the work because it gives him, and the other volunteers, "the opportunity to use the skills that we've collected over the years, and not just toss them out the window." Chowning says he has enjoyed a lot of classes at OASIS but likes the volunteer work most of all, knowing that his work is valuable to the organization.

**Brenda Schmachtenberger  
and Tom Chowning** welcome  
visitors to San Antonio OASIS.



**One hundred new  
people** walk through  
the doors of the  
San Antonio OASIS  
center every month.

## Question: Who's a hero? Answer: An OASIS tutor.

The temperature was in the low teens on a Wednesday morning in February 2007. It was a good day to stay inside, bundled in a warm sweater, and to have another cup of coffee. Instead, 24 OASIS members gathered in the board room of the Kirkwood School District in suburban St. Louis. People walked into the room chatting with each other, enjoying some time to socialize.

This was the monthly meeting for tutors, their chance to get new ideas for discussion with the kids they tutored, and to talk about their successes and failures. Judy Kamper, the district's tutoring coordinator, distributed handouts on "What's a hero?" Presidents' Day is in February, and Kamper thought it would be a good time to encourage kids to think about the heroes in their lives. "I would venture to say that there are people who consider you heroes," Kamper offered.

She must be right. OASIS tutors, 5400 of them nationwide, walk into elementary

school classrooms, week after week, year after year. It's not unusual for a tutor to stay with the program for ten to 15 years. They love working with children, and the schools love them.

"The experience is so substantive that the teachers create the time and space for it," said B.R. Rhodes, principal at Tillman Elementary School in Kirkwood.

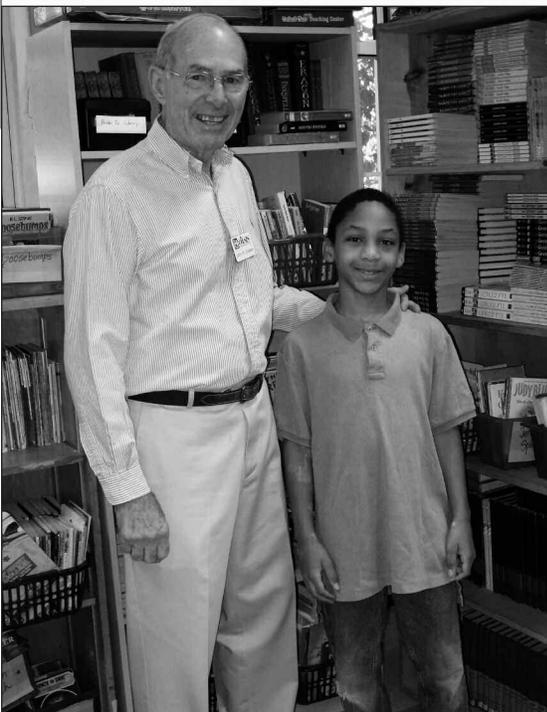
Rhodes remarked on the increasing need for one-on-one work with children as classroom size grows and socio-economic diversity increases. Intergenerational relationships are at the heart of the tutoring experience. Oftentimes the child has no grandparents. Oftentimes the tutor's grandchildren live out of town.

John Dodson, a tutor at Tillman, knew he was making a difference when he began working with second and third graders. The night before tutoring, he would think through the activities for his students. He didn't want to push too hard, but he wanted the time to be well spent. The tutors know that a child's attention span is short, and they are prepared to move on to a new activity when a child's interest flags.

Dodson worked with Nicoles, a second grader at Tillman that year. On one afternoon they reviewed a list of sight words, then read a story about a dog in a book that Nicoles particularly enjoyed. Nicoles and Dodson took turns reading sentences, and then paragraphs. Dodson encouraged Nicoles and helped him sound out the words that stumped him.

Dodson pulled a Life Magazine out of his OASIS bag. In the back was a challenge to identify the differences in two similar pictures. Dodson gave Nicoles hints on how to compare the pictures. Nicoles

OASIS tutor **John Dodson** with Nicoles, one of his students.



found all the differences and moved on to a book of riddles. Then Dodson pulled playing cards out of his bag of tricks. They played “go-fish.” Nicoles clutched his cards close to his chest and struggled to match the sets. He smiled shyly whenever he told Dodson to “go fish.” “This is like a remembering game,” Nicoles exclaimed, as his enthusiasm and confidence grew.

In the most recent program evaluation, teachers reported that 94 percent of their students who are tutored show gains in confidence, and 90 percent show improvement in academic performance. In 2004, Kamper set out to document that improvement.

Kamper, who holds a doctorate in education, conducted a study of reading scores for 173 students in three St. Louis County school districts, 98 of whom worked with OASIS tutors in the 2004-05 school year. The results were gratifying.

- **95%** of students working with OASIS tutors showed improvement in reading achievement
- **65%** of the students increased their scores by one year, a rate that is considered accelerated beyond the normal classroom experience
- **27%** of the students achieved scores that would be considered above the 50th percentile nationally

Children who have difficulty reading often cannot improve their scores by one year, Kamper states, so these improvements are significant.



**U.S. Representative Richard Gephardt** attended a celebration of the pilot project of OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring.

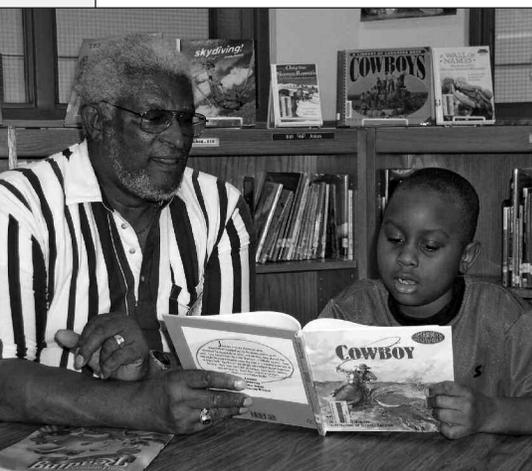
## Linking generations

When Mann was approached in 1988 by the director of an inner-city St. Louis youth organization, requesting help in staffing its summer program, Mann felt certain that OASIS could help him. A call went out for volunteers. Child-centered curriculum was developed, with simple handouts.

The volunteers were enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with children. What Mann wasn't prepared for was the continual feedback from volunteers that the teaching materials didn't work. The children couldn't read, no matter how simple the worksheets. Mann's response was typical: we need to train people to be tutors for kids; children need to know how to read.

Mann went to experts at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Webster University to develop a reading and language curriculum. With her experience in education, Mann knew that if the program was to be successful, it had to be institutionalized within the participating school districts.

She went to area superintendents and made her case. OASIS would provide well-trained volunteers who would be reliable and consistent. They would work with the children weekly, using a professionally-developed curriculum that included activities on a theme appealing to their interests. It would be the tutors' job to help the children practice reading; they would not usurp the schools' role of teaching children how to read.



Tutors would meet monthly with a representative of the school district to discuss any concerns, and to seek advice and direction. These monthly meetings not only gave the tutors professional support, it afforded them the opportunity to bond with each other, an important reason for tutors to continue with the program.

By and large, Mann was well-received when she pitched the tutoring program in district after district. Most school districts were grateful for the additional help. Sometimes though, the reception she received from the superintendents was tepid. They weren't sure the curriculum developed by OASIS would be consistent with their own curriculum. It always was. They were worried that the attrition rate for OASIS tutors would be high and the school would be left without the promised support. It never was.

Anheuser-Busch was the first sponsor of the OASIS tutoring program, and it has remained an enthusiastic partner since the program's inception in 1989. When the tutoring program was launched in St. Louis, it garnered a lot of media attention—and the attention of Jerry Loeb at the May Company. Loeb was eager to see the program in other cities, and OASIS responded by starting one up in Denver where May had just acquired another group of stores.

The Denver center planned a graduation ceremony for the tutors upon completion of their training, with elementary students present to give each graduating tutor a certificate and a red rose. Television and print media turned out for the event. One experienced tutor was interviewed on the evening news, with his student by his side, saying that he had no grandchildren and that the little boy next to him filled that role. As he talked to the camera, tears rolled down his cheeks. The public loved it. And the state supported it. The Colorado Department of Education volunteered an intern to help staff the OASIS tutoring program.

## Scaling up and reaching out

By 2007, the program spread to 20 cities, through 109 districts and 902 schools. OASIS tutors had worked with more than 250,000 children, helping them learn to read and be successful in school. More than 5,400 tutors are currently serving.

Since its beginning, the tutoring program has expanded beyond urban centers to small towns and rural areas.

Eugene, Oregon is not a big metropolitan area, so it doesn't take long to transition from a bustling town to rural areas. The Eugene/Springfield area is a desirable destination for active retirees, eager to take advantage of its natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and the numerous cultural and educational opportunities of a cosmopolitan university environment. Many sign up to tutor; they are eager to work with children.

Elizabeth Scholze Schmidt, the director of OASIS in Eugene, Oregon, understands this inclination. Before becoming the center's director, she was the local coordinator of tutoring for OASIS. She, too, is committed to helping the region's children. Like so many other areas of the country, Oregon has struggled with a reduction in education funds. Schools are struggling with staff consolidation and service cutbacks. Through the generosity of a number of local foundations, and matching contributions from OASIS members, in the 2003-2004 school year, OASIS members began tutoring in two rural communities outside of Eugene: Harrisburg and Junction City.

Many families in Harrisburg have lived there for generations. Everyone knows everyone—and everyone's children. Older adults from Harrisburg had been driving the 20 miles into Eugene for OASIS classes for years. They were thrilled with the chance to give back to their own community, to help "their" children.

Although Junction City is very close by, it's a world apart from both Eugene and Harrisburg. It has a large immigrant population. The schools in Junction City struggle with

## Tutors and Educators Report Success

Each year, OASIS conducts an evaluation of the tutoring program with principals, teachers, tutors and district coordinators. Their surveys report overwhelming success. Results from the 2007 evaluation showed:

- **100% of principals** felt that OASIS tutors added a positive element to their schools
- **98% of schools** planned to participate in the program next year
- **94% of teachers** reported improved confidence and self-esteem in students who were tutored
- **90% of teachers** reported improved academic performance by students who were tutored
- **99% of tutors** felt the program has added a positive element to their lives
- **96% of tutors** perceived positive changes in their students
- **97% of tutors** planned to participate in the program next year

## OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring Program Awards

- 1993** Recognized by **U.S. Senate** as a successful national model for intergenerational programs
- 1995** San Antonio, TX—**Best of Texas Award**
- 1996** Chevy Chase, MD—Montgomery County **Outstanding Volunteer Program**
- 1997** Recognized as commitment maker at **President's Summit** in Philadelphia
- 1998** San Antonio Area Mentoring Association **Outstanding Mentorship Program**
- 1998** Phoenix **Mayor's Partnership Award**
- 1999** **Governor's Conference on Aging** Outstanding Intergenerational Program in Missouri
- 2000** Illinois State Board of Education's **Those Who Excel in Education Award**
- 2003** Selected as one of five **Best Practices** for student support in New Mexico by the Governor's Task Force
- 2004** St. Louis Suburban Council of the International Reading Association **Celebrate Literacy Award**
- 2004** Pittsburgh **Champion of Literacy Award**
- 2005** Oregon Governor's Commission on Senior Services **Intergenerational Award**
- 2005** Selected as a **Best Practice** for student achievement by the Ohio School Boards Association
- 2005** Dominion Foundation 2005 **Community Impact Award**—Pittsburgh
- 2006** Greater San Diego Reading Association, **Celebrate Literacy Award**
- 2006** National Association of Area Agencies on Aging—One of **Ten Best Volunteer Programs**
- 2006** Beach Cities Reading Association **Celebrate Literacy Award**
- 2007** **This City Reads—Literacy is Life Award**—Akron

language differences, poverty and transience. OASIS tutors volunteer in two Junction City elementary schools, one in town and one in a remote area of the district.

The pilot program in Harrisburg and Junction City reinforced the belief of the OASIS tutors that supporting a young learner's self-esteem is critical. OASIS members now tutor in two more rural communities, Pleasant Hill and Cottage Grove. Data tracking the achievement of tutored students compared to students who are not being tutored support the importance of this effort. Students who are working with OASIS tutors are learning faster, learning more, and learning more, faster.

But, as in any volunteer program, it's not just the recipients who benefit. "The things the kids say just blow me out of the water," said Dawne Dougherty, a tutor who volunteers in Harrisburg. One child guessed Dougherty's age at 20. Let's just say it's a little north of that.

Dougherty says she tries to be her kids' "best cheerleader...we try to be their best givers of 'atta boys'."

"We feel like part of the family here at school," says **Ila Dickson**, one of the first OASIS tutors in the rural community of Harrisburg, Oregon.



## Science Across the Generations

Members consistently cite their work with children as what they most enjoy about OASIS. *Science Across the Generations* offered a new option for mentoring, with workshops where children and adults explored together how science, math and technology affect their worlds.

With funding through a grant from the National Science Foundation to the SPRY (Setting Priorities for Retirement Years) Foundation, OASIS worked with SPRY in 2002 to implement a pilot program in ten cities: Akron, Chicago, Escondido, Gaithersburg, Indianapolis, Phoenix, Portland, San Antonio, San Diego and St. Louis. By late 2004, the program was available nationwide to all OASIS sites.

The program offers interactive, experiential learning activities on 20 topics, such as “Kitchen Science,” “Birds and Beaks” and “Math and Money.” Everyone’s curiosity is piqued while studying science concepts in music and flight by making a fiddle or flying a whirligig. Day trips to local zoos, science centers and museums gave the children and volunteers a stimulating way to learn about science while taking advantage of local resources.

Julia Derry, a 15-year tutor in Hyattsville, Maryland, joined her student’s third-grade class in 2004 on a field trip to a local nursery as part of their study of plant life. Following the field trip, the class planted a “peace garden” at the school, using plants donated by the nursery. Derry chose a book on gardening for her next tutoring session with her student. She was thrilled with her student’s new wealth of knowledge. “The best part of the experience for me was when she got so excited when the word ‘bulb’ appeared in the story,” Derry said. OASIS director Karen Holk said Derry takes every opportunity to learn new ways to connect with her students.

With an increasing number of members interested in an occasional—rather than ongoing—volunteer opportunity, *Science Across the Generations* fills an important need. Volunteers can sign up for a single workshop or several at a time. They can enjoy the wonder of a child’s discovery. And it gives children the chance to explore science in an exciting and challenging way, all the while benefiting from the experience of older adults.

In the “**Birds and Beaks**” science activity, children and adults explore ways in which animals adapt to their habitat.



**Mary Wade**, left, works with students at Berwyn Heights Elementary School in Maryland to plant a “peace garden.”

## A flood leaves a gift—Person to Person

Few may recall that one of OASIS' most enduring and effective programs began with a flood. In the spring of 1993, the Mississippi and its tributaries overflowed their banks, devastating the Midwest and particularly St. Louis. Thousands were left homeless.

The Washington University School of Medicine recruited OASIS volunteers to read to children in regional shelters. The volunteers read, but they also listened. The children and their families wanted to talk about their losses, their fears, their plans for the future. The volunteers came back to the OASIS center talking about the experience. An idea for a new program began to germinate. What if OASIS volunteers could be trained to be sympathetic listeners? They could play a role in helping their peers cope with the challenges of aging: loss of a spouse, moving out of a life-long home, isolation from children?

OASIS submitted a grant request to the Retirement Research Foundation of Chicago, and Person to Person peer counseling was funded in 1995. OASIS worked with mental health professionals

to train volunteers in supportive listening skills—helping people talk through their problems to find their own solutions.

Marilyn Hennessey, president of the foundation, recalls her early interest in OASIS, saying that the peer counseling program both helps older adults in need of support and builds on the strength of the life experiences of the peer counselors. She also felt the OASIS membership broadened the older adult constituency typically served by social service agencies.

With the multiplicity of OASIS locations and its proven track record in test piloting and then refining and replicating its programs, Hennessey was confident that the foundation's investment would seed a vital, ongoing program.

She was right. The program eventually expanded to Tucson, San Diego, San Antonio, Syracuse, Los Angeles and Akron. In 2003, The Missouri Foundation for Health funded an initiative to reach more people in urban St. Louis neighborhoods who needed support. OASIS expanded its approach to offer peer-led discussion



**Marietta Ross**, (right) and **Pat Bell** (center of photo above) lead support groups at community and residential locations.



and support groups in more than 20 locations including residential facilities, churches and community centers.

“One of our greatest challenges has been to overcome the cultural barriers in the minority community that prevent people from requesting help when they need it,” said Elizabeth Nelson, MSW, former program manager. “This population places a high value on privacy and reliance on family and faith. We build trust by speaking their language, learning what issues they are interested in and presenting our services in a non-threatening way. The group meetings have been more readily accepted by people who are not comfortable with individual counseling.”

“The peer-led discussion groups give people a way to meet one another, resolve problems and lead healthier lives,” says Barbara Turkington, St. Louis OASIS director.

In 2006, Person to Person Peer Support was recognized as a Program of Excellence, the highest award given by the RespectAbility Program of the National Council on Aging through its “Promising Practices in Civic Engagement” initiative.

“This award recognizes OASIS’ success in mobilizing volunteers and community partners to meet critical social needs. OASIS’ approach to developing cultural competency in engaging and serving diverse populations sets a standard other organizations should aspire to meet,” said Tom Endres, RespectAbility program director at NCOA.

## Active Generations— a new way to connect

When many people think of programs that pair children with older adults, they picture adults reading to the children...or the children reading to them. Many OASIS programs emphasize reading, but in Pittsburgh and San Antonio, volunteers do that and more.

Gail Weisberg, the director of OASIS in Pittsburgh, says her center’s tutoring program has grown from 12 to 100 trained volunteers, working with more than 150 children in 27 elementary schools. With so many OASIS members in area schools, it didn’t require much to expand their volunteer efforts to working on childhood obesity.

OASIS volunteers are trained to participate in *Active Generations*, an after-school program that promotes healthy eating and physical activity. Using a nationally-developed curriculum, the seniors teach the elementary-school children the importance of good nutrition and exercise.

They play games together, like trying to find a name for a fruit or vegetable for every letter of the alphabet. Each week there’s a group physical activity, such as jump rope or gardening. They always share a healthy snack.

It’s one more activity to bring the generations together. Weisberg says that OASIS is the braid that ties together many different parts of her community.

Participants were encouraged to **set goals for changes** in their health behavior.

## OASIS as greenhouse

In some respects, the OASIS Institute in St. Louis served as a greenhouse where the seeds for new programs were planted and fertilized and where hybrids were developed. Then they were transplanted to centers around the country.

By 1996, Mann turned her attention to the health component of OASIS and began to explore a more comprehensive approach. Always aware of the importance of well-founded curriculum, she called together a group of health experts from across the country to seek their advice.

The committee encouraged OASIS to develop a comprehensive approach to its health programming, and to expand its activities and courses to sustain or increase the physical, intellectual and social activities of its members. With this guidance, OASIS collaborated with Washington University School of Medicine's Program in Occupational Therapy and its Division of Health Behavior Research to develop and pilot a health promotion program in Portland, St. Louis and Tucson.

Seven key areas of health were included in the course offerings: physical activity, nutrition, mental health, disease management, memory, sensory health and overall health promotion. Participants were encouraged to set goals for changes in their health behavior, and the program provided them with information, skills and support for making those changes. In a survey of participants in the pilot program, two-thirds reported setting a specific health goal, and of those, 71 percent made progress toward meeting that goal.

In 2001, *HealthStages*, as the program became known, was disseminated to all OASIS sites. Emerson and its Senior Vice President, JoAnn Arnold, were instrumental in providing financial support for the development of the program. Additional funding came from Merck.



## OASIS becomes “a passion” for healthcare executive

The late 1990s brought tough financial times for the nation’s hospitals, and Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis was no exception. Steve Miller, then vice president and chief medical officer at Barnes-Jewish, remembers scouring the budget of the hospital’s foundation for unnecessary expenses. The foundation’s contributions to OASIS were substantial. Miller wanted to know if the hospital was getting value for its investment. He started to investigate and liked what he saw. “OASIS became a passion of mine,” he said.

Miller is interested in the big issues in healthcare, and the aging population is clearly one of the biggest. “I have a long-standing respect for the generations preceding me,” he said. “Seeing people

age successfully is an important part of my belief system.”

Miller believes that the nation’s healthcare system puts too many resources into treating end-stage disease. Not enough goes into health promotion and disease prevention. “OASIS is all about preventing disease,” he said.



**Steve Miller**

At a meeting of OASIS directors in 2004, Miller said, “We have an epidemic in our elderly community where declining physical activity and increasing obesity are resulting in serious health problems. *Active Living Every Day* has the potential to revolutionize their lives by teaching them how to make critical changes in their lifestyle and supporting them in making those changes. We have a moral obligation to provide opportunities, such as *Active Living Every Day*, that will enable older adults to remain active and healthy.”

Miller joined the board of the OASIS Institute as a representative of Barnes-Jewish Hospital. He remains on the board, even though he’s left the hospital for a leadership role at Express Scripts, a pharmacy benefits management company.

Miller is excited about the organization’s focus on diversifying its membership and documenting outcomes. He knows that innovation has been a hallmark of the organization, and believes that OASIS is positioning itself well for the future.



## Changing habits, changing lives

Almost half of American adults do not meet the U.S. Surgeon General’s recommended guideline for a healthy lifestyle—at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity most days of the week. Research has repeatedly shown that physical activity can help older people maintain independent lives and improve the quality of their lives.

**The group setting opens doors for people** to get support and reinforcement from each other as they lead more active lives.

Recognizing that older adults need more than an exercise class—they need support to change their daily habits—OASIS applied to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for funding through its Active for Life initiative. In 2003, OASIS received nearly \$1 million to offer the program for four years in Pittsburgh, San Antonio and St. Louis.

*Active Living Every Day* is a behavior change program facilitated by trained leaders who teach older adults skills to make physical activity part of their daily lives. Participants set goals, monitor their progress and reward themselves. The group setting opens doors for people to get support and reinforcement from each other as they lead more active lives.

Estelle Zimmerman’s experience was typical. Zimmerman, a self-described “couch potato,” was volunteering at San Antonio OASIS several years ago when she first heard about *Active Living Every Day*. “I thought it was baloney,” she said. Even so, she gave it a try.

Zimmerman surprised herself; her blood pressure came down, the pounds came off, and she was having fun. She had to get a whole new wardrobe—and a new hairstyle.

All these changes thrilled her. “I thought, this is the greatest thing since sliced bread,” she recalls. In fact, she was so enthused that she agreed to talk to new classes about her own experience. “If I don’t get up every morning and walk on my treadmill for 30 minutes, I get mad at myself,” Zimmerman tells them.

**Estelle Zimmerman**



Nearly 2,000 previously sedentary adults have participated in the program, showing improvements in physical ability, body functioning, mood and connections with others, and going about their usual activities with increased vigor and enthusiasm.

Brenda Schmachtenberger, San Antonio director, says health is the key to everything else. “If people are healthy, their entire well-being improves,” she says. “They’re more able to participate in classes, travel and volunteer.”

## Building a model for outreach

As they began changing their daily routine to become more active, participants looked for ways to exercise safely—and enjoyably. Naturally, they turned to OASIS. *ExerStart*—a HealthStages beginning level exercise class—was an ideal complement to *Active Living Every Day*.

OASIS began to offer the two classes in tandem under the banner *Active Start*, providing a comprehensive approach to building both skills and healthy habits. Through a partnership with the City of Los Angeles Department of Aging, funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging, OASIS set out in 2004 to develop *Active Start* into an evidence-based model for a community-based physical activity program.

Dr. Jessie Jones, co-director of the Center for Successful Aging at California State University-Fullerton, worked with OASIS to develop a training program for peer leaders of the classes. Irene Lira was one of the lay people who took the training. She started leading classes at the International Institute where she was the receptionist.

## Foundation recognizes OASIS strengths

**The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** annually allocates \$1 billion for health care programs in the United States. It is widely-recognized as a leader in measurement and accountability of the investments they make.

Beginning in 2002, the foundation sought to identify the nation’s top community-based active aging programs. Once these outstanding organizations were selected, RWJF would provide funding for them to offer *Active Living Every Day*, an evidence-based program that RWJF had already identified as a best-practices model for effective physical activity programming for older adults. The foundation received 400 applications. It solicited full proposals from 70 of those organizations. OASIS was one of nine chosen to offer the program.

OASIS has been “one of our most successful grantees,” said Marcia Ory, director of the National Program Office for Active for Life which is funded through RWJF. “One of their greatest strengths is the ability to test a program in a few OASIS sites, and then spread out to other partnering organizations.”

## Houston Reaches Out

With a center that is convenient to just a fraction of the area older adult population, Houston OASIS needed to find new ways, and new places, to make its programs accessible. Beginning in 2005, the Houston OASIS staff began offering *Active Start* in three churches and a senior housing site. More than 100 new members signed up.

Marlene Matzner, OASIS director, was thrilled. She knew that the off-site classes were bringing OASIS to people who would not have ventured into the OASIS center. Transportation is always a challenge for some. But perhaps more



**Kimberly Penn**, right, leads an *Active Living Every Day* class at the East End Life Center in Houston.

importantly, leaving their neighborhood, walking into a room of strangers, or trying something never before attempted is intimidating to many older adults. When a new program is offered in a familiar,

nearby setting, among neighbors and friends, it is more appealing. That's exactly what Matzner confirmed during that first summer of outreach. And she, and the funders at the Houston Endowment, knew that OASIS could do even more.

When a new program is offered in **a familiar, nearby setting, among neighbors and friends,** it is more appealing.

In 2006, the Houston Healthy Lives Coalition was formed, composed of 16 local organizations dedicated to enhancing the lives of older adults. The coalition committed itself to increasing physical activity of underserved seniors, by offering *Active Start* in their neighborhoods. Coalition members included churches, community centers, governmental agencies, the NAACP, Texas Southern University and OASIS. These groups serve a wide variety of ethnic groups including Asian-, Hispanic-, and African-Americans.

OASIS expects as many as 600 participants to enroll in *Active Start* classes in these neighborhood locations. And that's just the start. In three of the off-site locations, OASIS *Connections* computer classes are also offered, increasing access to OASIS for Houston residents.

Lira enjoyed her role as cheerleader, saying “In the beginning, some of the people came in dragging their feet. I try to be positive and upbeat—I praise them all the time. Now they march right in!”

“This project is an important demonstration of how community providers can work together to help older adults improve their health and maintain independence,” said Josefina Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Houston and Indianapolis were the next cities to implement the model. Funding from Anthem enabled Indianapolis OASIS to offer *Active Start* for underserved adults in downtown area housing and community centers. “We’ve focused on building strong partnerships,” says director Melony Barney, “but there are still so many opportunities to reach deeper into the community.”

OASIS’ success at building and replicating the model has not gone unnoticed. In 2006—ten years after Mann called together the committee that sowed the seeds for a comprehensive

**Irene Lira** (below) is a peer leader for *Active Start* at the International Institute in Los Angeles.



**“We’ve focused on building strong partnerships, but there are still so many opportunities to reach deeper into the community.”**



## OASIS is a gem to hospital partners

As director for health literacy at BJC HealthCare in St. Louis, it was Kathleen Killian's job to analyze the hospitals' health programming and weed out the underperforming programs. So in 2000, she organized a meeting with the various community organizations BJC supported, including OASIS. Steve Lipstein, CEO of BJC HealthCare, was moved by the stories OASIS members shared at the meeting. Now it was Killian's job to show him the relationship could be justified as a business, like any other department at BJC.

With its classes for adults over 50 years old, OASIS health education programs completed BJC's community health education portfolio. Killian knew that BJC had a disproportionate share of older adults in its service area; it made sense to invest in programming for older adults.

Killian called the variety of programming at OASIS "tremendous." As a St. Louis OASIS board member, she speaks to the

**Leola Arthur**, age 91; **Kimberly Rusununguko**, class facilitator; and **Elizabeth Gibson**, Arthur's daughter, at the *Active Start* graduation ceremony at the Fountain Square Center in downtown Indianapolis.



need for the organization to quantify its accomplishments. Without a doubt, Killian says, "OASIS is a gem."

Lipstein agrees. "Prevention of disease and disability is a critical issue as the population ages," he says. "Sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition are major preventable causes of disease. OASIS is literally changing lives by giving people the information, skills and motivation to make lasting changes in their lifestyle habits."

Don Deutsch feels the same way. He's the director of health promotion and community relations for Clarian Health in Indianapolis, and whenever he talks about OASIS he starts with "We." In 1989, when Methodist Hospital began looking around the Indianapolis area for high quality senior programs, it wanted an educational partner. It was interested in classes on prevention and keeping older adults healthy. OASIS was the only organization that met its standards for quality educational programming. That assessment was confirmed by Methodist's other hospital partners when the Clarian health system was formed.

About four years ago, Clarian Health looked at its geriatric admissions and its investment in OASIS, and decided to expand its senior programming. In 2007, health education classes are being offered throughout the metropolitan area. Deutsch says that the recent expansion to underserved areas of the community has been well-received. *Active Living Every Day* classes are being taught at the Indianapolis Urban League and several downtown locations. "We will build more partnerships and add more programming," he says of OASIS. He's planning for the future, and that future is tied to OASIS.



**Jim Bald**, age 76, has left his old sedentary lifestyle behind, enjoying a regular 25-30 mile spin through the San Antonio countryside with the Hill Country EZ Riders.

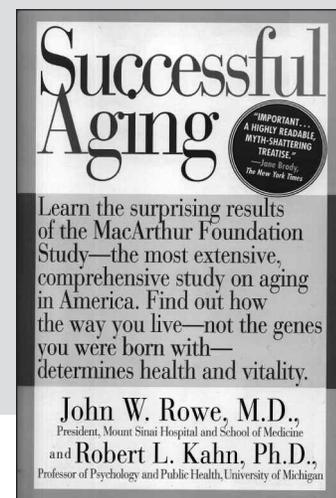
approach to health programming—OASIS received one of only nine national Innovation in Prevention Awards from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services for its leadership to promote healthy lifestyles in the community. HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt called *Active Start* “an example of how health education tailored to seniors can be interesting, sustainable and effective at creating lasting behavior change.”

The model is tested, fine-tuned and ready for national dissemination. OASIS has published a comprehensive report outlining best practices for implementing *Active Start*. The report is available through the National Council on Aging’s website. And the expansion continues, as OASIS has trained volunteer leaders from five more cities to serve a broad audience and reach ethnic populations through affordable housing sites, churches, senior centers and other convenient neighborhood locations.

## Landmark study validates OASIS

If it had not already been proven through OASIS’s experience, John Rowe and Robert Kahn, confirmed it in their 1998 book, *Successful Aging*. After a ten-year, \$10 million study funded by the MacArthur Foundation, they identified mental and physical activity, disease avoidance, and active community engagement as critical components of healthy aging.

OASIS was more than fifteen years ahead of its time.



## Reaping and sowing: plans for the future

As OASIS grew, Marylen Mann began to look for an executive who could complement her visionary approach with a hands-on, detail-oriented approach to administration. She found that person in Marcia Kerz.

**Marcia Kerz,**  
OASIS President



Kerz and Mann met each other in the late 1980s when Kerz was director of development and public relations at the Missouri Botanical Garden. They continued to cross paths after Kerz left the Garden to become vice president for institutional advancement at the Missouri Historical Society. She had been hired by the history museum to run a capital campaign. By the winter of 1999, Kerz had successfully completed the campaign and was looking forward to watching the museum expand. Instead, she found herself considering inquiries from Mann, and several OASIS board members, to join its leadership staff at a critical time in its corporate life.

The older adult market was changing as more organizations discovered what OASIS knew decades earlier—that older adults are a vibrant and engaged population, eager to learn, and committed to remaining active for years to come. OASIS, which once had the lifelong learning field nearly to itself, had to compete in an increasingly crowded field.

Raising funds to support its programming had always been a challenge, and it was getting tougher. Sponsors wanted to know more about how their investments in OASIS were paying off. There was constant talk of consolidation in the department store industry, raising concerns about the viability of a continued relationship with the May Company.

Kerz joined the staff of OASIS in the fall of 2000 as chief operating officer. It was understood that if all worked out, she would assume the role of president of OASIS when Mann became its chairman. Kerz was an excellent complement to Mann. She had strong skills in organizational management,

particularly in the non-profit sector. She had broad experience in organizational assessment and restructuring. As she learned about OASIS programming, developed relationships with its sponsors, and delved into its financial operations, Kerz was optimistic about its future. In the months that followed, she began creating systems and procedures to bring increased stability to an organization that never stops growing and reinventing itself.

## Building support

As one of her first steps, Kerz appointed a task force of eight OASIS directors to heighten awareness of the importance of fundraising in OASIS communities and to develop an annual appeal for contributions.

Kerz knew that the Institute needed to establish a broader base of funding and that the annual support of individuals would be essential for OASIS. Furthermore, donors had begun asking for more evidence demonstrating each program's effectiveness.

Kerz expanded data collection and documentation to meet the requests, actual and anticipated, of financial sponsors. Through Kerz's leadership and the work of the fundraising task force, the Friends of OASIS annual giving program was established.

Kerz was named president and Mann was elected chairman of the board of directors in 2003. It was a remarkable transition by all accounts. Mann and Kerz have a mutual respect and affection for each other.

Her work has raised OASIS' profile nationally. She serves on the Leadership Council of the National Council on Aging and is active with numerous other organizations in the national aging network. Kerz represented OASIS at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Through her presence, OASIS has a voice in the development of policies that promote the dignity, health, and independence of older Americans.

**The older adult market was changing**  
as more organizations discovered what OASIS knew decades earlier.

# Major awards received by OASIS

U.S. Surgeon General  
**C. Everett Koop** with  
**Marylen Mann.**



**Josefina Carbonell**, Assistant U.S. Secretary for Aging, visited with members and students at OASIS' 20th anniversary celebration in 2002.



**Mike Leavitt**, U.S. Secretary for Health and Human Services, presented OASIS with the 2006 National Innovation in Prevention Award for promoting healthy lifestyles.



- 1985** OASIS and The May Department Stores Company receive Distinguished Volunteer Service Award from the Secretary of the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.**
- 1988** The **U.S. Surgeon General's Conference on Health Promotion and Aging** recommends that federal and state agencies disseminate information about OASIS as a successful private sector model.
- 1990** The May Department Stores Company honored as a finalist for **Harvard University's George S. Dively Award for Corporate Public Initiative** for national sponsorship of the OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring Program.
- 1991** Business and Aging Leadership Award presented to The May Department Stores Company by the **U.S. Administration on Aging** recognizing its national support of OASIS.
- 1994** **National Endowment for the Humanities** funds OASIS public program *Reemerging Russia: Search for Identity*, the first of four programs funded by NEH.
- 2000** The **U.S. Department of Commerce** funds startup of OASIS *Connections* technology education program.
- 2003** **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** funds OASIS implementation of *Active Living Every Day*.
- 2005** **AARP's Impact Award** recognizes Marylen Mann as one of ten people who "did something extraordinary to make the world a better place."  
  
**AT&T Foundation** awards first of two major national Exceleator grants to OASIS to expand workplace technology skills training for underserved adults.
- 2006** **National Council on Aging's RespectAbility Program of Excellence Award** recognizes OASIS *Person to Person* program for "promising practices in civic engagement."  
  
National Innovation in Prevention Award from **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** recognizes OASIS *Active Start* program for promoting healthy lifestyle.
- 2007** **National Council on Aging** presents Jack Ossofsky National Leadership Award to OASIS recognizing its success at helping older people achieve vital aging.

## Continuing the commitment

Mann, Kerz and OASIS took a deep breath in February 2005 when Federated Department Stores announced it was acquiring the May Company. OASIS and May had been partners for 23 years. OASIS' geographic expansion had been tied to the cities in which May had stores. May championed OASIS programs with its financial and public support, building its own reputation as an early advocate for older adults. Would Federated—since renamed Macy's Inc.—share May's commitment to older adults?

Sharon Bateman, a former May executive and now Macy's vice president for corporate communications and corporate giving, remembers being asked by the senior management at Federated to survey store managers on their attitudes about OASIS. Bateman liked what she heard. The managers thought that traffic in the stores increased with the presence of OASIS; the seniors brought friends and family with them to the stores. The older adults grew up in department stores and had an attachment to the institutions. The managers had seen them helping other customers who didn't know their way around the stores. They brought cookies to the sales people at holiday times.

All in all, the store managers were enthusiastic about the partnership. But as a champion of OASIS from its earliest days, Bateman was concerned. She knew that the new stores built in suburban malls had no excess space—every square foot was accounted for—and the old, behemoth downtown stores were being shuttered. She, too, wondered if Federated would be willing to support OASIS as its predecessor had.

In late 2005, Mann and Kerz met with Thomas G. Cody, vice chairman, and David W. Clark, senior vice president of human resources for Macy's. They were all delighted to discover common interests: volunteerism, arts and culture, health and women's issues. Macy's has a long and award-winning history as a caring corporate citizen and OASIS was a great fit.

"We look forward to supporting OASIS' efforts to reach out further," Cody said. "The structure of OASIS is sound, with strong leadership and management. The baby boomers are a



"We look forward  
to supporting  
OASIS' efforts to  
**reach out further.**"



**Thomas G. Cody,**  
Vice Chairman, Macy's

compelling audience that is redefining the concept of retirement. We want to be part of the story.” Cody and Clark joined the board of the OASIS Institute, testimony to Macy’s enthusiastic interest in continuing the partnership with OASIS.

## Stepping up

The partnership with Macy’s has flowered. With the sale of the Lord and Taylor stores in Gaithersburg and Chevy Chase, Maryland, the OASIS leadership knew that they needed to find new homes for the two programs that had operated at those stores.

Macy’s quickly stepped up to the challenge and offered new space for both centers in its Montgomery Mall home store, located almost equidistant between the two existing OASIS centers. Suburban Hospital, the OASIS health partner for both Gaithersburg and Chevy Chase, shared in the excitement at the opening of the center in March of 2007.

It was immediately obvious to Jane Silberman and Marcy Drozdowicz, the two OASIS directors, that this was an opportunity to bring together the best of both programs. With their new offices and classrooms in the Macy’s home store, and nine off-site locations in churches, synagogues, community centers and an old movie theater, they are now accessible to adults throughout Montgomery County—and they are extending their reach to Virginia.

## New center models

Over the years OASIS has received numerous requests to open centers in new communities. With the realities of limited space in the stores, OASIS needed to find new solutions.

When Lauren Feiglin, former director of the OASIS center in Cleveland, moved to Syracuse in 1998, she took a job with University Hospital at SUNY (State University of New York) Upstate Medical University. When she’d talk about her experience with OASIS in Cleveland, hospital executives would repeatedly ask how to get an OASIS program for their community.

The **partnership with Macy’s** has flowered.



Volunteers at the opening of the new Montgomery OASIS center.

In 1999, OASIS began offering classes in Shoppingtown Mall, where the May Company had both a Kaufman's and Lord & Taylor store. Neither store had room for a center, but the interest in classes was so pressing that empty space in the mall was built out for use by OASIS—initially on a temporary basis. University Hospital promoted the classes in its publications. Newspaper coverage of this new community resource created more interest. When OASIS opened enrollment for a series of “sneak previews,” the classes filled to capacity. And community interest has never waned.

OASIS membership has grown rapidly through the years. In fact, the clamor for programming has been so constant that OASIS never moved into a store in Syracuse, because its space needs exceeded the stores' capacity. It continues to rent space in the mall. It's a valuable and highly popular community resource, serving 7,200 OASIS members throughout the Syracuse region.

The OASIS Center in Albany, New York holds a unique distinction: it has never operated in a department store or mall. From its inception in 2002, the center, which services a four-county area, has been based at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Meg McCarthy, the Albany OASIS director, says members enjoy coming to the university for classes—it reminds them of their younger years on college campuses. But from McCarthy's viewpoint, access to faculty is the biggest draw. Not only do current SUNY faculty members make themselves available to OASIS, but many

[continued on page 51]

OASIS membership  
has **grown rapidly**  
through the years.



**Erika Kirby, vice president of Kaufmann's department stores,** welcomed the crowd to the new Syracuse OASIS center in 1999.

## New Portland venues create energy and excitement

Robin Costic, the director of the Portland, Oregon OASIS program for 20 years, has learned to expect change. But she was taken aback one day when she learned that Macy's decided to temporarily close the old Meier & Frank department store where her center was headquartered, to renovate the huge downtown store. The historic building with its terra cotta facade was remodeled for retail on its first five floors, with the upper floors converted into a hotel and upscale restaurant scheduled to open in 2008.

The OASIS center was closed in December 2006, but classes didn't stop. Costic had to be her most creative and find places for all of the OASIS members to meet. A drama class moved into a community theater that rents them space during the week. In April, the 15-member class performed an Agatha Christie murder mystery, *Cards on the Table*, directed by Bill Whitney, a man in his 80s who played a child Tarzan in Hollywood. When the cast performed in the store, there was only room for an audience of 40. In the theater, they have room for 150.

Whitney and company sold tickets for \$5 and drew a larger audience than the older classroom would have been able to accommodate. The members loved being in a real theater. A folk dance class is meeting in a Parks Department music center that is a converted firehouse. Once again, the members love it.

Costic has had to scramble to keep her classes meeting. But she says they have many new members who weren't able or willing to come downtown for classes. She has found space for other classes in retirement communities, Legacy Health System locations, arts organizations and other sites. The added venues have brought energy to the program, along with the new faces.

Costic hopes the new participants will follow them back downtown, but she says that they won't all have to. OASIS is always moving forward, and moving beyond the center into the community is its future. Costic will be ahead of the curve.



emeritus professors enjoy teaching the occasional class and are particularly engaged by OASIS participants.

The New York State Capital Region OASIS is sponsored by the School of Social Welfare, Center for Excellence and Aging at SUNY. Social welfare students serve as interns at OASIS. And OASIS members are invited to all public offerings at the university, as well as many invitation-only classes.

This pairing of university- and OASIS-course offerings creates a heady mix of classes. For instance, this fall, OASIS members will have an opportunity to participate in the SUNY Fall 2007 China Semester on Campus, *Gateways to China*. Chinese geography, food, film, history, art, politics, theater, music literature, dance and sports will be covered. Members can sign up for concerts, classes, lectures and theater performances. McCarthy describes OASIS as a bridge between the university and the community.

## Going high tech

Over the last few years, Kerz and Mann looked for ways to enhance and upgrade current facilities while finding more places to serve older adults. They have been eager to build on current programs, but also want to develop new ones that reflect the challenges and demands of a new century.

In May 2005, the AT&T Foundation awarded OASIS a \$500,000 Exceleator grant that served many of these purposes. The grant would expand computer skills courses enabling people to stay in touch with their family and friends, engaged in the community and up-to-date in the workplace. It would also help OASIS expand its program locations and upgrade technology.

AT&T had begun investing in OASIS in 2001. The new grant was a huge vote of confidence. Debra Hollingsworth, vice president for external affairs at AT&T Missouri, says that one word describes OASIS and its programming: quality. OASIS calls its comprehensive training strategy on the use of computers and the Internet, *Connections*.

OASIS members enjoy programs at the University at Albany like ***Gateways to China***, a multi-dimensional exploration of Chinese culture.



The pairing of university- and OASIS-course offerings creates a **heady mix of classes.**



Hollingsworth sat in on some *Connections* classes, and was impressed by the skills of the instructors in working with older adults. She said that funding OASIS makes good business sense for AT&T. Maybe one of the OASIS-trained older adults will come to work for them; maybe he or she will be a new high-speed Internet customer, or a cable customer.

With lifespans increasing, more Americans expect to work into their 70s, both out of necessity and to stay socially and intellectually engaged in their work. AT&T and OASIS understood that staying in the workforce means older adults would need to upgrade or learn computer skills. Courses focusing on workplace skills were added to the *Connections* curriculum.

The grant also helped OASIS take its programs beyond the centers to underserved populations. *Connections* classes are now taught in affordable housing sites, senior centers, libraries, community centers and senior employment offices.

More than 5,500 people received skills training through the project. The effort was so successful that in 2007 the AT&T Foundation broadened its commitment with a \$1 million grant. This allowed OASIS to expand its computer class outreach locations in 21 cities, translate courses into Spanish, upgrade labs in its centers and increase volunteer opportunities. Volunteers are teaching classes, coaching students on-on-one in the labs and making presentations to build community awareness about the training.

**More than 5,500 people** received skills training through the first AT&T Excelerator national grant to OASIS.



# Sharpening workplace technology skills

Technology skills are becoming a must for mature adults who are staying in, or returning to the workplace. Recognizing this need, in 2004 OASIS director Harry Matheny approached Patrick Hines at Community Options, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) provider in San Diego.

Funded under Title V of the Older Americans Act, SCSEP provides job training and placement help for low-income adults age 55 and older. It promotes older workers as a solution for businesses seeking a trained, qualified and reliable workforce. Matheny proposed a partnership to provide *Connections* computer classes for SCSEP clients. Hines was immediately receptive.

“The biggest deficit older workers have is computer savvy,” Hines said. As he learned more about *Connections*, his enthusiasm grew. “The training is focused on the needs of older workers. The adult schools—technical colleges, for instance—are nice for younger people but not for older people, who may be intimidated in the setting.”

Casey Long was an early participant in the classes. Long knew she needed computer skills to remain marketable. She had missed out on some jobs because she was, as she put it, computer illiterate. At age 60, Long was intimidated by the computer. Learning with a group of her peers, she developed both skills and confidence. The class provided plenty of hands-on practice, individual help and a course book with step-by-step instructions.

Hines explained that peer instruction using the OASIS curriculum is what makes the program so attractive. Participants are comfortable learning with someone who may be going through the same life experiences and needing a slower pace.

“I remember the first day, I walked in and thought, ‘Gosh I really hate this,’” Long recalled. “But I took the course and I enjoyed it! Now I surf the net, I email my daughter, and I read the *New York Times* online.”

With Community Options’ assistance, Long landed a job in customer service. Eager to help others who were as computer-shy as she used to be, she also started coaching other students to help them overcome their fears. Looking them in the eye she would tell them, “You can do this.”

The partnership led to a “reverse job fair” at the Metro Career Center in May 2006 where job seekers 55 and older stood by as employers approached them to talk and review their resumes. A recruiter for Hilton Hotels was impressed by the candidates and called the format a great way to evaluate their qualifications. And after reading an article about the fair, a Macy’s recruiter hired several OASIS members.

Matheny continues to pursue partnerships to expand the classes through libraries, senior centers and community colleges. “You never know what will lead to future opportunities,” he says.

Employers found plenty of qualified mature job candidates at a reverse job fair in San Diego.



AT&T and Kerz shared a vision: **increasing the reach of OASIS** in the community.

AT&T and Kerz shared a vision: increasing the reach of OASIS in the community. Kerz also knew that technology training for seniors who were interested in re-entering the workforce has nationwide significance. It fills a need for OASIS partners across the country, from Area Agencies on Aging to municipalities. Furthermore, while offering classes in neighborhood sites, OASIS was acquiring experience to disperse its programming throughout the community, something Kerz feels will be essential to its long-term future.

AT&T support over the years has had another very positive consequence. It enabled OASIS to strengthen its technological capabilities. All OASIS centers use a national online database to manage information about classes, participants, donors and program evaluations. The database enables members to register for classes and sign up to volunteer through the OASIS website. Planned enhancements will enable centers to track key measurements of success.

OASIS will also upgrade its website to better meet the needs of all audiences—participants, partners and staff. And in the fall of 2007, with the additional support of Anheuser Busch and the Monsanto Fund, a new online library will provide hundreds of activities for tutors to use with their students.

## Setting the standard

In 2002, Kerz called together a task force of OASIS directors and Institute staff members to develop standards of excellence for meeting the OASIS mission of enriching the lives of mature adults. The group developed the standards, and a comprehensive assessment process to evaluate the centers and document best practices.

The Institute completed that assessment process in 2006, recognizing five centers as the 2007-2008 Centers of Excellence: Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, San Antonio and San Diego. These centers took OASIS programs to new audiences, offering the older adults in the community opportunities for learning and volunteering that they would otherwise not have had. OASIS courses were offered in churches, senior centers, libraries and youth activity centers.

## The future

OASIS and its board began a business planning process in the summer of 2006 with financial support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. Their first decision was to re-commit to Mann's original mission from 1982: to provide opportunities for mature adults to challenge their minds, improve their health, connect with others, build skills and serve the community.

As 72 million people approach retirement over the next 20 years, it's now the responsibility of its leadership to identify new ways to meet the needs of its constituency. Kerz looks forward to guiding OASIS through the five-year business plan.

"Our goals are to increase and diversify participation in our programs, maintain program excellence, increase sustainability and ensure OASIS continues to be an innovator in the field of aging," Kerz says. "We have an unprecedented opportunity to change lives. The time to act is now."

Mann can't help but smile with satisfaction as she watches OASIS change and grow. She is confident that with the leadership of Kerz, OASIS will enrich the lives of millions of people.

Looking back at what OASIS has done, Mann takes a great pride, but she repeats what she told Father Cervantes on that first visit to the senior center 30 years ago. "We can do better."

## AARP Impact Awards recognizes Mann's accomplishments

On December 5, 2005, OASIS founder Marylen Mann found herself among a cast of famous Americans as she was presented with the 2006 AARP Impact Award at a celebration at the New York Public Library.

Each year, AARP honors ten people "who have improved our world." Mann's work in founding and expanding OASIS into a nationwide program serving 365,000 older adults was cited as innovative and benefiting all generations. Other esteemed recipients of the 2006 award were: Michael J. Fox, Nancy Barry, Harry Belafonte, Governor Michael Huckabee, Naomi Judd, Jane Kaczmarek, Dr. Norman McSwain, Alan Reich and Margie Richard.



Steve Slon, editor of AARP The Magazine, Marylen Mann, and Paula Zahn, at the AARP *The Magazine's* Impact Awards in 2005.

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Enriching the lives of mature adults





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