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THE AGING IN AMERICA CONFERENCE: A MODEL OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

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This issue of **Aging Today** went to press shortly after our 2009 ASA-NCOA Aging in America Conference in Las Vegas. I am pleased to report that the conference was a great success, with more than 3,500 participants, presenters and exhibitors attending this dynamic educational and networking opportunity. With more than 700 sessions offered, we focused on providing the very best possible conference experience. Judging from the feedback we received, I believe we did just that. Though some of you might have missed this year's conference, I hope everyone will note the dates of our 2010 annual meeting, which will be held March 16–20 in Chicago (visit our website, www.asaging.org, for the 2010 Call for Presentation Proposals announcement).

COLLABORATION IS KEY

This year's ASA conference was designed to feature nine "conferences-within-a-conference." These intensive educational programs, some developed in partnership with ASA, represented a bold and successful program experiment: nearly every one of these smaller conferences reached capacity enrollment. In two unique collaborations, ASA and the National Center on Senior Transportation designed a full-day conference, "Senior Transportation: Putting the Pieces Together" and, together with the National Council on Aging, ASA presented a National Forum on Civic Engagement, a day showcasing the best practices in civic engagement (see stories on pages 5 and 12).

The daylong National Forum on Care Coordination, a collaboration of ASA and the New York Academy of Medicine, N.Y., drew more than 125 participants who discussed strategies and approaches to making coordination of care efficient and universal. More than 400 social workers attended the National Association of Social Workers' two-day Annual Practice Conference, "The Aging Boom: Is Your Clinical Practice Ready?" Offered in collaboration with the Archstone Foundation, this gathering was a platform for research-to-practice models and featured many best practices dealing with fall prevention, and elder abuse and fraud. The conference, which was underwritten by the Foundation, featured national leaders in the field of social work, and Sandra Lopez, clinical associate professor at the Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston, Texas, gave the excellent keynote address.

Often, state-of-the-art practices are in use long before they appear in textbooks. The planning and development for the elder abuse program illustrated this truth, with effective content provided by the Center of Excellence in Elder Abuse and Neglect, University of California, Irvine. A cornerstone of best practices is that they are multifaceted: the fall prevention program was a collaboration of the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence, a public-private partnership of leading experts from the University of Southern California's Andrus Gerontology Center; California State University, Fullerton's Center for Successful Aging; the Veterans Administration's Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center; the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Medicine;

and the California Department of Public Health, State and Local Injury Control Section. I list these partners to show that it “takes a village” to bring the best knowledge, information, practices and standards to the field of aging.

A CORNERSTONE OF CARE

This year’s conference featured individual workshops on caregiving, as well as three major, full-day caregiving conferences, which attracted hundreds of participants. “Supporting Sustainable Caregiving Coalitions,” presented by the National Alliance for Caregiving and led by its president and CEO Gail Hunt, started off a day of programming on March 18. Speakers included Lynn Friss Feinberg, former ASA Board member and, until very recently, deputy director of the National Center on Caregiving at the Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA). Lynn leaves FCA to direct the Consumers for Better Care Campaign, a national program dedicated to improving chronic care for older adults and their families, led by the respected National Partnership for Women & Families. Congratulations to Lynn, who is an amazing leader.

The second session for that day was “Policy, Politics, and Family Caregiving: Federal and State Perspectives,” offered by the National Center on Caregiving at the Family Caregiver Alliance. The lead presenter was FCA executive director Kathleen Kelly, a longtime friend of ASA. On March 19, the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving offered “Evidence-Based Programs for Caregiving.” Several hundred participants attended the day, which began with a breakfast highlighting the Rosaline Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer’s Disease Caregiving Legacy Awards.

TWO INSPIRING STARS

The two plenary sessions brought conference attendees together, and the first session starred actor and community leader Louis Gossett, Jr. Gossett has dedicated what he terms “the last quadrant” of his life to community and civic engagement: in 2006, he created the Eracism Foundation to work toward eliminating racism. Gossett’s passion resonated in his inspiring examples of how generations, working together, can significantly improve lives, communities and society.

Stage and film star Debbie Reynolds graced our second plenary gathering on March 18. Reynolds has faced more than her share of life’s adversities, but she has survived and thrived. During her performance Reynolds proved to us that she has resilience, energy and talent, and is a wonderful model for positive aging.

A THOUSAND THANKS

Organizing the Aging in America Conference is a major task, and we rely on hundreds of people to assist us. My sincere thanks go out to them all, especially to our colleagues at the National Council on Aging, our conference partner. Special thanks go to our conference chairs, Fernando Torres-Gil, Larry Weiss and Molly Mettler. Thank you to Cynthia Stuen, ASA’s board chair, and to the entire ASA Board for supporting this year’s conference development. Additionally, at least 100 program reviewers, constituent group council members and chairs and 100 other volunteers ensured that the meeting had top content relevance and quality. Only 12 ASA staff members were onsite at the conference, but we were able to serve the more than 3,500 attendees with the help of dozens of volunteers who were organized by volunteer coordinator Cathy Nestoriak. Thank you to all who played a role in this year’s conference—and thank you to all our attendees.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

ASA is committed to using the new, virtual world to give our members even more access to quality education, practices and networking opportunities. We are working with the latest technology to connect our members quickly with the contacts and information they need: our new online communities, built around our eight constituent groups, are evolving, and we’ve already hosted three free online Web lectures, a benefit of ASA membership. Watch our website home page for announcements about future Web seminars and online facilitated discussions.

The ASA Board is looking to the future, anticipating the advent of ASA’s enhanced programs and strategies. This long-term view intersects with our launch last fall of a six-month strategic planning initiative. This major initiative, led by the Bridgespan Group, a nonprofit consulting organization and affiliate of Bain Consulting, has been underwritten by a generous grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. The planning process, which began at the November board meeting, has been thorough, and has included ex-

tensive research interviews, market research and a focused study of ASA's operating landscape. ASA will, of course, continue its longstanding commitment to multiculturalism, a special element of our organizational character. The strategic planning process continues through April, and the Board is collectively dedicated to focusing ASA's programs and services on what the field of aging needs most—now and in the future.