

# AGING TODAY

VOL. XXX, No. 6

PAGE 1

November–December 2009

ISSN: 1043-1284

[www.agingtoday.org](http://www.agingtoday.org)

## The Creative Age Explores New, Uncharted Waters

By GAY HANNA

The late Dr. Gene Cohen, author of *The Creative Age* and *The Mature Mind*, often quoted from an October 2004 article in the *Harvard Business Review* about the Blue Ocean Strategy, in which paradigms shift and open up oceans of uncontested market space.

Gene Cohen's work supported this kind of paradigm shift, one where the focus on the problems of aging (signs and symptoms) shifts to the potentialities of aging (strengths and satisfactions). He understood that problems certainly accompany aging, but asserted that "what has been universally denied is the potential. The ultimate expression of potential is creativity."

Activities over the past year in the field of creative aging give evidence to Dr. Cohen's premise: Even in this year of financial difficulties, this field has seen substantial growth.

### BROADENING HORIZONS

Since the 1970s, the arts in America have blossomed. Every city has a museum, performing arts center and other outstanding arts organizations, with trained artists, to serve an array of community needs.

Now, the horizon has broadened: The arts are being used to creatively address some of today's critical topics such as education, healthcare and civic engagement. In order to build strong communities that support vital aging, new partnerships involving the full spectrum of arts services are finding fresh, innovative ways to compound and expand limited resources.

Over the past year, I and my colleagues at the National Center on Creative Aging (NCCA) have witnessed many cultural institutions, such as Ruth Eckerd Hall, a Clearwater, Florida-based performing arts center, seeking out and expanding partnerships in aging services. The Hall now hosts artist trainings, Alzheimer's programs and play readings for older participants. The Dance Institute of Washington in Washington, D.C., now hosts older adult classes in its premier studios. The Museum of Modern Art in New York is dramatically expanding the replication of their Meet Me at MoMA program, extending it to people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers who live in Florida's small citrus-producing communities and in Wisconsin's cheese-producing communities.

These types of art organizations call us wanting to know how their arts facilities can be more fully utilized; how they can expand their arts education programs to serve older adults; or even how they can be part of healthcare reform. Questions are raised about civic engagement, such as how the work of older artists can be showcased and their legacy maintained.

### CREATIVE AGING GOES NATIONAL

In 2008–2009, the NCCA received two major grants to help deepen the work of creative aging in communities nationwide. The first grant from The MetLife Foundation enabled us to produce a series of symposia on the topics of lifelong learning, health and wellness and civic

engagement in Miami, Fla., Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, Calif. Each community provided a rich context for exploring how national, state and local resources could sustain program development.

The symposia showcased national program models and best practices along with new and emerging local programs. Featured programs included Stage-bridge; Kairos Dance; IONA Senior Services; Arts for the Aged; Elders Share the Arts; Meet Me at MoMA; Time Slips; Story Corps Memory Loss Initiative; Minnesota Creative Aging Network; EngAGE; Song-writing Works; Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes; The Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts; and Pregones. This rotation of symposia will continue in 2010.

The second grant focused on building infrastructure between the arts and aging services. The NCCA held community forums in Florida, Wisconsin, Ohio and Washington, with representatives in attendance from the Area Office on Aging, the local arts council, education, health and other community volunteer and social service agencies. In bridging these sectors, resources immediately were shared and assets were mapped—from creating new training to forming new research projects.

The NCCA is pleased to see the simple act of introduction expand to partnerships that serve the needs of elders and allow them to live more meaningful lives within their communities. The next round of community forums will be held in California, Texas, Maryland, New York, New Jersey and Mississippi.

---

#### FUNDING OUTLOOK BRIGHT

In the past year, numerous other organizations have received expanded funding to support creative aging: The National Guild for Community Schools of the Arts expanded their granting program through the generosity of the MetLife Foundation; and The National Association for Music Makers expanded funding to both NCCA and the Guild to continue community training.

The Helen Bader Foundation funded replication of the Meet Me at MoMA program across Wisconsin, as well as a think tank at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center on Age and Community that would focus on using the arts to create meaningful person-centered engagement for long-term care residents. Additionally, The Rothschild Foundation funded the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, enabling them to gather thought leaders who would explore the opportunities for developing arts programs in long-term care settings.

Grantmakers now are convening groups in order to better understand creativity and aging. In New York, Grantmakers in the Arts formed a subcommittee to explore the needs of this area of philanthropy. The Atlantic Philanthropies has funded a group of Washington, D.C., grantmakers who have allied to target funding services for high-risk elders, including intervention using the arts.

Although funds have been very limited at governmental levels, New York City's Department for the Aged and the Department of Cultural Affairs have launched a shared space project in which artists are given studio space in senior centers and help to reinvent senior services. As well, the National Endowment for the Arts continues to fund and identify best practices across the country.

The NCCA presentations at the NCOA-ASA 2010 Aging in America conference (March 15–19, Chicago, Ill.; [www.agingconference.org](http://www.agingconference.org)) will focus on these recent encouraging trends in funding and partnership building and offer tools for creating and sustaining program development. And in memory of friend and colleague Gene Cohen, we will launch a research and evaluation toolkit to promote and support new projects and the replication of current research in the field of creativity and aging. Please join us as we dive deep into the unexplored depths of the potential-rich Blue Ocean. ❖

*Gay Hanna is the executive director of the National Center on Creative Aging, an affiliate of George Washington University, Washington, D.C. She can be contacted at [www.creative-aging.org](http://www.creative-aging.org) or by calling (202) 895-9456.*