

2018

Our Anniversary

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Recommended Citation

Ansello, E. (2018). Our Anniversary. *Age in Action*, 33(3).

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Our Anniversary

By

Edward F. Ansello, PhD

Our Virginia Center on Aging is 40 years old. I remember writing in the issue of *Age in Action* that celebrated our 20th anniversary: “May we all have another 20 to do the work so greatly needed.” We did and we have.

In putting together the Timeline, built upon the base that Paula Knapp Kupstas so diligently created 20 years ago, I honestly marveled at how much we have done over these 40 years. I remember many of the projects, writings, and conferences as if they were yesterday. A common thread in all was that they came to be through partnerships. Our relatively small staff at the Virginia Center on Aging could not have accomplished what it has were it not for the shared commitment to improving the lives of older adults that so many of our colleagues have.

A case in point: each year at our annual Legislative Breakfast in January, we share a listing of the partners across Virginia who made our progress possible during the just-concluded calendar year. We compile this by geographic areas of Virginia and publish the list. In meeting our mandates last year, calendar 2017, we did business or partnered in aging-related projects with 353 local or regional, and 47 statewide agencies, businesses, organizations, departments, coalitions or non-profits across Virginia, and with 49 units of VCU and VCU Health.

So, we say to them, Thank You. Older Virginians and their families are better because of these partnerships.

At the same time, there’s an energy and dedication to excellence that characterizes our own staff within VCoA and those who advise us. We enjoy having a stable core of expertise here. Connie Coogle and Catherine Dodson have been contributing here since 1979; Paula Kupstas has 20 years of service and Bert Waters almost as many. Our faculty and staff with fewer years here have nonetheless vitalized and sometimes revitalized our work. We are productive and compatible, even sharing lunch together most days. It’s been a pleasure to come to work over these years.

As for those who advise us, I’ve scrolled through the membership lists of our Advisory Committee since 1978. These contain the names of deans, directors, advocates, organization representatives, legislators, educators, business people, health care providers, aging-related program managers, faculty members, and others. Importantly, they have been more than names. They have been trusted advisors and, often, have become friends. Saundra Rollins, Paul Izzo, Mary Payne, Bob Schneider, David Sadowski, Beverley Soble, Martha Pulley, Marcie Tetterton, Ralph Small, Chris McCarthy, and Frank Baskind, for instance, each devoted over 10 years of service on our Advisory Committee, and some still serve. And far from making the Committee staid or moribund, they provided the long-view and experience that nicely complemented the enthusiasm and different perspectives of the many new members joining over the years.

And then there are our Final Four, all long-time members of VCoA's Advisory Committee: MaryEllen Cox, Bill Egelhoff (VCoA Director Emeritus), Delegate Frank Hall, and Senator Benny Lambert. These four helped us in innumerable ways. They shared their wisdom generously. Later in this issue we summarize, much too briefly and far from adequately, their contributions to us and to aging in the Commonwealth.

If you recognize the Final Four analogy, you know that preceding it in championship playoffs there is the Elite Eight and before that the Sweet Sixteen. We have benefitted from the dedication of many more than the Final Four whom we cite. We could name an Elite Eighty, and even then we'd inadvertently miss someone. Rather than listing every name, let's say that we are deeply grateful for everyone who has advised us over these 40 years.

Our VCoA has evolved because of their advice and because of skills new staff have brought to us and new opportunities to grow. Grants, contracts, coalitions, Governor's Commissions, task forces, General Assembly resolutions and mandates, colleagues at other institutions of higher education, professional associations, and others have all called us to share our expertise and to enlarge it. We have grown because of these.

A few years ago, we realized that our many productive and disparate initiatives here within VCoA could be organized into four complementary themes or programs. And so, we grouped our initiatives into four program areas, each serving older Virginians and their families but each also having implications for aging across the country and, sometimes, the world.

Now we focus on **Lifelong Learning**, with our Road Scholar programs in Virginia and our Lifelong Learning Institute in Chesterfield County; **Dementia Research**, with the Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) providing seed grants for Virginia-based researchers to follow promising leads into the causes, consequences, and treatment of dementing illnesses; **Abuse in Later Life**, with projects to combat elder abuse, domestic violence in later life, and family violence; and **Geriatrics and Gerontology Education**, through the state-funded Geriatric Training and Education (GTE) initiative and the federally-funded Virginia Geriatric Education Center. Of course, these program areas don't exclude other areas of need which we address.

Visit our website and press the tab listing Quarterly Publication (*Age in Action*) and scroll to page 19 of any issue. Here you'll see over the many years our rosters of faculty and staff. They are the agents of our successes over these 40 years.

May we all have another 40 to do the work so greatly needed.