2012 Programs of Excellence Awards

February 2013

NISCO Senior Center Programming Award Winners
2012 Programs of Excellence Awards

The National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) Programs of Excellence Awards are designed to honor and promote outstanding efforts made by senior centers throughout the nation to offer innovative, creative, and replicable programs for older adults.

An eight-member NISC Committee selected the award winners from 62 nominations. Six award winners were chosen, along with six honorable mentions. This complete listing of the 62 submitted programs is a NISC member benefit. The 12 top programs are included in an additional booklet that is available to the broader senior center community. Each program is proof of the important work happening at senior centers today.

Imagine hosting an event that featured Dr. Andrew Weil and other nationally renowned speakers, where attendees learned about integrated medicine, healthy aging, meditation, mindfulness, and the importance of sleep—and your center raised $55,000. This program hosted by the Klein JCC Senior Center in Philadelphia was our Fundraising Award Winner.

In this booklet, you’ll find inspirational programs where senior centers give back to their communities in a big way. They brought care packages to VA hospital residents, raised funds for fuel assistance, gave holiday gifts, and delivered donuts to emergency personnel in memory of 911.

You’ll also find some “tried and true” senior center programming choices that may sound familiar. We hope you view this as validation and affirmation of your choices. Take a close look, you may find subtle differences that you can incorporate into your program, or you may want to connect with the contact person to share your successes and strategies.

Entries were accepted in the following six categories:

1. **Educational**: Programs designed to educate seniors. Examples may include new and unique classes, technology, legislative, or literary programs. Nutrition and health promotion activities were not considered in this category.

2. **Expressive & Creative Arts**: New classes or activities such as drama, dance, music, or visual arts.

3. **Fundraising**: Programs designed to generate revenue for the senior center.

4. **Leadership, Civic Engagement, & Community Development**: Efforts to increase community involvement through partnerships with colleges, businesses, and schools and creative programs instituted to develop strong leaders and volunteers within centers.

5. **Nutrition, Fitness, & Health Promotion**: Programs designed to improve the physical well-being of seniors and/or the general health of seniors through health-related programs, lectures, and screenings.

6. **Special Events**: Programs designed as one-time events that promote the social well-being of seniors (intergenerational, musical, artistic, thematic, seasonal, and patriotic events).
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There is a big need for senior citizens to bring their technical skills up to the modern day, and there is a big need for youth to get back to the basics in leisure activities. Here at the FB Senior Center, we put them both together in a weekly summer program where both groups could teach each other what they knew best and learn valuable information that would help make their life better. The teens were available weekly to teach seniors how to use their cell phones, computers, digital cameras, and Kindles, while at the same time, the teens learned cooking, crochet, sewing, yoga, line dancing, cards, and dominoes. Both groups competed in a Wii bowling tournament, too. Senior volunteers taught all of the classes for the teens, and the teens came over during their summer youth camp each week. There was no expense, and all time was donated.

It was an amazing joint effort with both groups learning quite a bit about each other while learning particular skills to make their lives better. They found out that each group wasn't as bad as they originally thought and that each had valuable information and skills that they were more than happy to share. Great friendships were made and future programs will spur off from this summertime adventure.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 recreation programmer to organize, handful of senior volunteers, and 2 teen staff

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $0; **Net:** $0

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Passport Around the World was a planning theme where each month of 2012 focused on the heritage and culture of a different country. January – Egypt, February – Mexico, March – Ireland, April – Ukraine, May – Jamaica, June – England, July – USA, August – China, September – Brazil, October – Italy, November – Germany, December – France. Four to eight programs per month allowed our members to learn about the geography, history, and culture (music, dance, celebrations, and cuisine) of each country. Members received “passports” that were stamped by a “customs agent” at each event. In December, the passports were collected and prizes awarded to the “most-traveled” members.

Programs included travelogues, cooking demonstrations, educational seminars, cultural performances, concerts, parties, and celebrations. In addition to the programs, members loaned artifacts or souvenirs from each country to create a monthly display. Program highlights include: Egyptian belly dancing; Intergenerational Latino Night with local high school Spanish club featuring communal meal and Mariachi entertainment (Mexico); Irish archaeological dig presentation; Ukrainian folk dance ensemble featuring authentic music, dances, and costumes and Ukrainian dessert breads; St. Luke’s Steel Drum Band concert (Jamaica); British Invasion dance party with guest appearance by Hilton Valentine, original member of The Animals, singing "House of the Rising Sun" (England); Chinese buffet dinner and performances by Chinese cultural group, including singing, dancing, live bamboo painting demonstration, and fashion show of Chinese clothing; and Brazilian Independence Day celebration featuring a Capoeira (martial arts/dance) demonstration.

The enthusiasm inspired by this program has been invigorating to both staff and members. Many of our members have offered to share their skills, travel experiences, and collectibles with us, which has proven meaningful to them and their fellow members and most helpful to staff. This program has generated unprecedented amounts of positive feedback from folks who are enjoying exploring our world, as well as an overall increase in monthly attendance. A significant outcome of this program has been the identification and use of previously unrecognized community cultural resources.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 2 staff members and several member volunteers

Revenue: $1,700 plus $3,600 used from our café fundraising program; Expense: Varied by month; January-September total = $5,300; Net: $0

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Have you heard people say, "I don't have a creative bone in my body?" In a recent article in The Wall Street Journal, it states, "...creativity is not magic, and there is no such thing as a creative type. Creativity is not a trait we inherit in our genes or a blessing bestowed by the angels. It is a skill. Anyone can learn to be creative." Julie Ellis, facilitator, walks us through this six-week series of one-hour sessions of exploration on how to become more creative. "How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci" by Michael Gelb and Sir Ken Robinson readings are inspirations and guides for this class. Hedge away those negative thoughts against non-creativity and pursue the quest for continuous learning through journaling; following Seven Steps to Creative Living a la Leonardo da Vinci; Play Lab with warm up sessions including doodling, collage, and drawing upside down; finding the Artist way through inspiring artists exploration according to Leonardo; seasonal taste testing to nourish your Palette by cooking creatively; including Yoga, Reiki, Wabi Sabi, and Hokey Pokey.

"...Throughout your life there's a voice that only you can hear ... a call to make a difference ... if you never hear it something magical will be lost. But if you hear it ..." OOO, LA-LAH! Creatively explore a new way of seeing and thinking in the sessions. Challenge our aging population; acknowledge those "old negative" messages from youth. This six-week session generates improved positive thinking by learning a different and CREATIVE way of thinking with the willingness to let go of the "I Can't do this" to thinking "If I could never FAIL, what would I do?"

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 staff member; guest speakers; 5-6 volunteers

**Revenue:** The class is free, but you must be a member of the center which has an annual fee of $48;

**Expense:** $50- $100 for journals, food, handouts; **Net:** ($50- $100)

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Expressive & Creative Arts Honorable Mention

Moving Minds

Mercy Hilltop Center, Erie, PA

This program is a kinesthetic learning class that incorporates breathing techniques, yoga, eye yoga, movement pattern memorization, and dance to increase strength and flexibility for seniors, as well as giving them a social experience. Moving Minds reenergizes, rejuvenates, and re-oxygenates the body. While understanding that seniors often lead stressful lives and spend many hours working or sitting, the class gives one a social, emotional, physical, and cognitive experience.

The class was designed by educator and performer Tiffany Kraus of New York City who believes movement should be a permanent part of education for all ages. The participants began with gentle stretching and yoga that could be done from a chair if necessary, then proceeded into a social exchange during free movement on the dance floor. Memorization was challenged through the teaching of choreographed steps to five popular Broadway shows. Those movements were incorporated into vignettes, flowing one into the other, sometimes changing the arrangement of the music. Of course, the performance ended with a great kick line.

Because of the importance of measurable outcomes, this specialized class was assessed by a nurse who took blood pressures, pulse rates, and personal self-assessment surveys both before and after participation. Results reflected pressures down, self-esteem and confidence up, and stress levels eased. Most importantly, participants left with a healthy mind, body, and soul.

With senior centers struggling to find programs and activities for the "boomer" generation, this particular program attracts a wider range of age groups, acting as a great social mixer, sharpening minds and memory, encouraging flexibility, and at the same time, boosting a lighthearted spirit. This was presented as a one-time class, but the students are all anxious to have it repeated because of its success. They were mentally and emotionally in a good place after the session. Isn't this our mission in serving our older adults and their well-being?

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 1 staff coordinator, 1 guest instructor

Revenue: $1,900 through community foundation grant; Expense: $1,300 for guest instructor, $400 for RN outcomes assessment; Net: $200 under budget = gain

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Klein JCC hosted *Forever Young*, a unique event providing hands on, experiential activities to motivate and empower people to adopt healthy living strategies into their daily life. This all-day event included 60 live demonstrations, tastings, interactive seminars, exercise demonstrations, and educational sessions. Hosted at the Sheraton Hotel, utilizing over 40,000 sq. ft., this was an event like none the region had ever experienced. Featuring Dr. Andrew Weil and five other nationally renowned speakers, attendees learned about integrated medicine, healthy aging, meditation and mindfulness, importance of sleep, how to keep sex erotic as you age, and more. Dr. Andrew Weil spoke to over 1,500 people through the day inspiring healthy living in mind, body, and soul. In addition to the booths, vendors, and special speakers, attendees participated in different stages featuring hands-on activities, including the Healthy Eating Stage (cooking demonstrations), Active Living Stage (demonstrations including pole dancing, Zumba, yoga), Healthy Minds (meditation, memory screens), Community Book Store, and Social Media Lab. *Forever Young* raised funds in four ways: an admission fee ($15 per person), resource program book with ads, program sponsors, and a special luncheon ($200 per person). The event was open to everyone, targeting baby boomers and active adults looking to retain health, independence, and activity as they age. *Forever Young*’s first debut engaged more than 20 sponsors and 40 exhibitor booths, with 80% of the contacts being new to the development department.

*Forever Young* had three goals: 1) raising money for the center, 2) reaching out to baby boomers as a new demographic, 3) increasing the perception of Klein JCC as a cutting-edge, fun nonprofit whose focus is healthy living. It is imperative that centers think out of the box, engaging baby boomers. To do this, they must build rapport and change community perception. This event brought fun, interactive experiences to the boomer population and built a new donor base for us. It also enabled us to engage a new group of volunteers who are younger, have financial capacity, and are interested in healthy aging. The program introduced the concept of aging in positive manner, a way to be “hip, happy, and healthy.” It is replicable, innovative, and creative and can be adapted on different levels in other communities.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers required:** 3 staff; 150 volunteers  
**Revenue:** $284,000; **Expense:** $229,000; **Net:** $55,000  
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Fundraising Honorable Mention

Via Community Partner Program

Via Health, Fitness and Enrichment Center, Mobile, AL

The Via Community Partner Program was launched in September 2011 to generate revenue for the senior center by providing opportunities for area businesses (senior service providers) to market their programs and services to our 700 members and thousands of other senior citizens that utilize the senior center’s programs and activities. The Community Partner Program was designed to provide exclusive opportunities for access to potential customers and maximum benefit to participating businesses. Benefits to partners include: center signage; listing on website, newsletter, e-newsletter; spotlight newsletter articles; Senior Expo Booth (no charge); banner recognition at all center special events; information booths at center to display information on services; 2 free fitness memberships; meeting space at no charge; and discounts on special event sponsorship. Community Partners pay $1,200 for a 12-month membership. The return-on-investment for Community Partners (value of marketing benefit we provide) is $1,276. The expense to Community Partners is $1,200 for an annual membership. The ADDITIONAL benefit to our center is the Community Partner Program also increases our capacity for providing SERVICES to our members and area senior citizens. Because Community Partners are given special access to our membership/users they provide many valuable services at no charge, such as:

- Blue Cross/Blue Shield provides seminars on insurance education.
- AARP provides driving safety courses and tax preparation services.
- Odyssey manages Alzheimer’s Caregiver support groups.
- Beltone provides hearing screenings.
- HealthSprings holds Medicare Part B update seminars.
- All Community Partners participate in our annual Healthy Living Expo.

This program is significant because it allows our Center to identify and recruit business partners and further develop the relationships for additional in-kind support and direct services to seniors. Anytime a new partner learns about our center and joins, they become ambassadors for us in the community. Staff time is limited, and we provide our partners with excellent benefits at virtually no cost. The program is innovative because it generates revenue and provides additional services/resources for members and area seniors. The process of prospect identification, the program, and materials are all easily adaptable and replicable.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 2 volunteers; Program Director and Resource Development Director work 4 hours per week on the program

Revenue: $21,400; Expense: $3,432; Net: $17,968

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Several years ago, a need among our seniors came across my desk. It seems in our county, as in many across this nation, women outlive their spouses by a rather large percentage. With that comes a need for assistance with basic home repairs and maintenance in an effort to promote independence and keep them in their home. This basic maintenance consists of replacing kitchen and bathroom faucets, installing lights and switches, replacing sink drains, building handicap ramps, and more.

This program is unique in that it utilizes trained and certified volunteers to facilitate the work. We have partnered with our local community college to provide the training and certification in electrical, plumbing, and carpentry. Services are provided for the cost of materials alone, labor is free. Volunteers, affectionately known as "Hard Hats," receive a mileage reimbursement. Accounts are established at two building supply places in our county. Since it began in January 2010, I have received numerous "thank you" cards from our deserving seniors. One lady, whose husband passed away following a lengthy illness, called me on the telephone and was moved to tears as she attempted to thank me for the service. The task my Hard Hats performed for her? They changed the water supply lines to her washing machine. Her family had moved away, and she had no one to help. This agency exists for these individuals. We are here to help.

The program works to provide greater economic security. It provides peace of mind and allows seniors to know that this agency is there to help.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 2-3 staff; 7-9 volunteers

**Revenue:** $883.05 for materials, paid by clients; **Expense:** $195.05 mileage for workers; **Net:** $688

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Leadership, Civic Engagement, & Community Development Honorable Mention

Heritage Park Senior Facility Volunteer Docent

Heritage Park Senior Facility, Henderson, NV

New registrations jumped from fewer than 500 per year to over 2,500 per year after the opening of the new center. We needed help! We started the Volunteer Docent (Greeter/Tour Guide) Program in April 2011. To date, Docents have logged 2,144 hours, given 1,413 tours, made 427 referrals, handed out 3,417 forms, and helped sign up 1,627 new patrons.

Some shy Docents have increased their confidence and social skills dramatically. Docents now have a sense of purpose and accomplishment. They turn first-time visitors’ anxiety into feelings of welcome and acceptance. The program helps to banish the loneliness that so many seniors feel. Docents free up staff’s time for more complex tasks. The program costs the city nothing.

Docents love their jobs. They run the program with very little oversight. The program gives Docents a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and pride. They make visitors/patrons feel welcome, and they love the individual attention. It’s a WIN-WIN-WIN-WIN situation; the Docents win, the visitors/patrons win, the on-site employees win, and the city wins!

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 17

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $0; **Net:** $0

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Nutrition, Fitness, & Health Award Winner

EarthBox Giveaway Program:
Container Gardening for Seniors

Rancho and Lakeview Senior Centers
Irvine, CA

The EarthBox Giveaway program increases senior access to healthy and nutritious food options and physical activity. By providing the initial equipment at no cost, this program allows seniors with physical and strength limitations, as well as space limitations, to produce homegrown fruits and vegetables and seasonal plants and flowers. The program was made possible by the Healthy City Healthy Planet (HCHP) initiative. A total of $40,000 in funding was allocated by the City Council to begin HCHP and was to be focused on programs and materials that furthered the HCHP goals. HCHP is the embodiment of the City of Irvine’s commitment to providing information and resources to support the health, fitness, well-being, and sustainability of Irvine’s residents and communities.

A total of $6,500 was provided to purchase 65 EarthBox planters, 195 bags of soil, and 42 fruit and vegetable seed packets. Participants receive the reusable EarthBox container with an aeration screen, fill tube, mulch covers, and instruction packet to grow their own crops. The EarthBox is easy to use; participants only need to monitor the water reservoir. To reuse, participants remove the old plants, the used fertilizer strip, and some of the soil. Participants are currently growing numerous plants, tomatoes, peppers, and herbs and record their progress in an EarthBox journal. Trained volunteers and staff provide monthly support by reviewing journal entries, monitoring the growth of crops, answering questions, and providing feedback to gardeners during the six-month time commitment.

In addition to providing healthy food, this program offers the benefit of increased mental, social, and physical activity through gardening. This program instills pride for seniors when they able share their crops with friends and neighbors, which provides the opportunity to develop new friendships and stronger ties within their community. The Earthbox can be reused for many growing seasons. The structure of this program is collaborative in nature and can be easily replicated by other communities.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 2 Staff; 3 Volunteers
Revenue: $0; Expense: $6,500; Net: ($6,500)
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Nutrition, Fitness, & Health Promotion
Honorable Mention

Balance and Fall Prevention Fair

Rufty-Holmes Senior Center, Salisbury, NC

Rufty-Holmes Senior Center held a Balance and Fall Prevention Fair in August 2012. Unlike other health fairs, this event featured interactive stations for practical assistance to older adults and their loved ones or caregivers. Thirteen different organizations provided hands-on activities, including a balance test; balance exercises; and evaluations of walkers, canes, medication, ears, eyes, balance disorders, and more. Our local hospital, Rowan Regional Medical Center, co-sponsored the event and provided a balance machine, bottled water, balloons, and advertising for the program. Local home health organizations provided a bathroom safety display, a variety of walkers and canes to test, and experts to educate the participants in proper use. The Matter of Balance team from RHSC set up a mock room with a quiz for identifying fall risks. Physical therapists, clinical nurses, an occupational therapist, massage therapist, optometrist, hearing specialist, exercise leaders, and a de-clutter expert were present. Exercise classes provided tai chi and yoga demonstrations. A local retirement community provided food and door prizes. Participants had the opportunity to register for upcoming fall prevention programs A Matter of Balance and Fall’s Around the Corner. Approximately 120 people attended this free event. Many requested that the event be offered again.

This program arose out of a need among senior center participants. Staff noticed that many participants at the center fear falling and are using walkers or canes that may not be appropriate for them. One out of every three adults 65 years or older is injured by a fall each year in the U.S. One-third to one-half of community dwelling older adults acknowledge a fear of falling. The significance of the event is evidenced by the need, the large turnout, and the collaboration among health care professionals, service providers, caregivers, and older adults.

Number of Staff/Volunteers Required: 6-10 staff/volunteers

Revenue: $0; Expense: $0; Net: $0

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A center member who grew up in Lutherville, MD, created this program and it was held during February, Black History Month. Many people perceive Lutherville as a place where only “whites” lived. The volunteer’s brother had been writing and researching black history in Lutherville. This member is carrying on his work following his death. She recruited a few other center members who also lived there at the time.

They set the program up as if a number of friends were having tea in the parlor. They talked about the history in stories as they would at home. The stories and memories were rich and at times from direct experience in addition to researched facts. Members commented how much they loved the format and how much it held their attention. They also brought photo boards, artifacts, and copies of information from the books. One of the things members enjoyed the most was that the presenters had photos from times when they were younger. Many of the places talked about such as College Manor are still standing. We learned what attracted folks to the area and what kind of work they came for such as tending to the horses at the local Manor. It was a day of learning not only facts but the stories of fellow members, the hope for a future museum, and the awareness that all of our histories are connected in many ways.

The program highlighted and educated center members on a subject that many did not know about. Bykota Senior Center is made up of mostly white members, not very familiar with the history of this mostly white neighborhood. Because the history was told in a storytelling narrative, it created a warm and artistic atmosphere in addition to giving historical information. It raised awareness and created openness in addition to teaching history.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 Staff person coordinated; 6 members implemented  
**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $100 for photo copies and refreshments; **Net:** ($100)

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Special Event Honorable Mention

Living Legacies

South Brunswick Senior Center, Monmouth Junction, NJ

This is an annual intergenerational event that is the culminating feature of several months’ of preparation between high school students and senior citizens. Every spring, an original theatre performance, “Living Legacies” created and performed by high school students, brings different themes to the seniors at the South Brunswick Senior Center. Each year, it features a different theme such as: The Veterans’ Stories; Immigration, Our Common Bond; People, Places & Events: South Brunswick’s History; and for 2013 - Celebrating Our Cultural Diversity.

The school gathers students and the senior center and their volunteer partner organizations to identify seniors within the Township to participate. They use the theme as the starting point for conversations and begin to meet regularly. Wonderful conversations are held, new things are learned, perspectives are shared and a bond begins to form. Seniors are interviewed by the high school students during their English classes. The students then translate what they learned from all these interviews into monologues and then finally into the theatre performance piece presented at the senior center for all seniors in town. A reception follows, so seniors can then mingle with the students and discuss the show, which continues to foster the learning experience. Volunteers are used to take photos and video. Photos of each participating senior are exhibited at the center and remain the record of the “Living Legacy.” In some instances, a video adds to that “Legacy.”

“Living Legacies” is innovative, replicable, and low cost. It is intergenerational, educational, and creative. It is participatory and experiential and promotes a sense of worth and well-being while informing their peers and younger generations. It recognizes the generation’s place in history validating their contributions. It provides a constructive, positive opportunity for seniors and students to work together through this shared intergenerational program where they each gain new perspectives. Equally important is the program’s reflection of cooperation and collaboration with diverse township resources including Board of Education, Library, Senior Center, Assisted Living community and the Aging in Place PARTNERSHIP.

**Number of Staff/Volunteers Required:** 1 teacher and about 30 students; 2 senior center staff; 1 volunteer to take photos and 1 to video

**Revenue:** $0; **Expense:** $0; **Net:** $0

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Thank you to the following National Institute of Senior Centers Best Practices Work Group members who served as judges for the 2012 NISC Programs of Excellence Awards:

**Ann Adrian**, Center Manager, Lake Oswego Adult Community Center, Lake Oswego, OR

**Olivia Andreas**, Outreach Coordinator, Kronkosky Place, Boerne, TX

**Mary Brymer**, Senior Programs Supervisor, Fayetteville-Cumberland Senior Center, Fayetteville, NC

**Susan H. Gregory**, Heritage Director, Murray City Corporation, Murray, UT

**Linda Kopping**, Coordinator, Iowa City/Johnson County Senior Center, Iowa City, IA

**Peter Thompson**, Executive Director, Senior Center Inc., Charlottesville, VA

And a big thank you also to **Jill Hall**, Chief, Senior Centers and Community Services Division, Baltimore County Department of Aging, Baltimore, MD, for chairing the Program Awards Committee.