

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

WINTER 2012

FEDERAL BENEFIT PAYMENTS GOING ELECTRONIC

The U.S. Department of Treasury now requires all federal benefit and nontax payments to be paid electronically. People applying for Social Security, Veterans benefits or other federal benefits on or after May 1, 2011, will receive their payments electronically starting with their first payment. People currently receiving federal benefit checks will need to switch to an electronic payment option by March 1, 2013.

Those who do not choose an electronic payment option at the time they apply for federal benefits or those who do not switch by the deadline will receive their benefit payments via the Direct Express® Debit MasterCard® card, so they will not experience any interruption in payment. People who are already receiving benefit payments electronically do not need to take action. They will

continue to receive their payment as usual on the payment day.

Having federal benefits paid electronically by direct deposit into the bank or credit union account of your choice or into a Direct Express® card account is safer, faster and more reliable than receiving paper benefit checks. In 2010, more than 540,000 Treasury-issued checks were reported lost or stolen, and had to be reissued.

With direct deposit, the Treasury Department sends an electronic message to one's bank or credit union account on the usual payment day with the exact amount of the benefit payment from Social Security, VA or other federal agency. People don't need to worry about their money being stolen out of their mailbox, and there's no need to make a trip to cash or deposit a check. Plus, it's better for the environment and saves taxpayer dollars.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY-TAX AIDE

Are you looking for something rewarding to do? Do you enjoy helping others?

Did you know that the AARP – Tax-Aide program assisted over 6,000 Westmoreland County residents in completing their taxes last year? Volunteers are desperately needed to assist with tax preparation for 2013. The AARP Tax Program is sponsored locally by the RSVP program. The program offers free tax preparation to low to moderate income households (with special attention to persons over 60 and/or disabled). Volunteers will receive free state and federal tax training from AARP, in conjunction with the IRS. Once trained, volunteers will assist taxpayers a few hours a week from February through mid-April. Volunteers do not need to belong to AARP or be retired.

Please call **RSVP** today at **724-925-4213** to find out more.

EYEGLASSES AT A REDUCED COST

The Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging operates a Vision Center located at Westmoreland Manor in Greensburg for county residents age 60 and older. The Vision Center is staffed by a licensed optometrist and offers cataract and glaucoma screenings. Eye exams are offered yearly. Eyeglasses are available yearly for patients whose prescription changes; otherwise, eyeglasses are available every two years.

A sliding fee scale based on income is used to determine your cost. Costs start at \$45.00 which includes the eye examination and glasses. Frames include both metal and plastic. Progressive (no-line) bifocals and Transitions lenses are also available at an additional charge. Monthly payments are accepted. For more information or to schedule your Thursday appointment, please contact the Area Agency on Aging at 724-830-4444 or toll-free at 1-800-442-8000.

THE SENIORS' FUND

Honor the memory of a loved one or celebrate a special occasion with a gift to the Seniors' Fund. You will support our mission by enriching lives of the most needy, and the honoree will be notified that a tribute gift has been received. All tribute gifts are tax-deductible and can be made

payable to "Community Foundation of Westmoreland County – Seniors' Fund". Please send to the attention of Seniors' Fund Coordinator, Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging, 200 South Main Street, Greensburg, PA 15601.

HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY CHECK

Each year, we hear of home fires occurring during the holiday season. Sometimes lives are lost. Sometimes an entire home is lost to flames, and visions of little ones whose presents are gone can generate a longing to help. Holiday fires are not inevitable; use this advice to keep them from happening.

- Have a working smoke detector just outside the kitchen, near bedrooms, and on every level of your home.
- Place a chemical fire extinguisher near the kitchen range and make sure everyone knows how to operate it.
- Degrease the top of the stove, the oven, broiler, and range hood. Grease can ignite and cause a fire.
- When preparing a big dinner, make sure only one high-wattage appliance is plugged into an outlet or circuit. If you have a microwave, coffee

pot, electric fry pan, and toaster running at the same time, you could be in danger.

- If it's very cold and you decide to use an electric heater, be sure it is not positioned near anything flammable including curtains and decorations. Unplug when you go to bed.
- Don't overload circuits with lighted decorations. Plug decorations into a power strip that will shut off if overloaded and has a surge protector.
- When opening gifts, handle wrappings with care. Never allow combustible wrappings to pile up near a heat source. Make sure no one is smoking near such flammables.
- Be smart with candles. Put them in a spot you will not be near. Don't place a candle inside a bookshelf.
- Never burn gift wrappings or a natural Christmas tree in your fireplace. It could cause a flash fire or chimney fire.

CLEARING SNOW AND ICE

Clearing snow and ice from driveways and sidewalks is hard work. To prevent injuries, follow these safety tips.

- Avoid shoveling snow if you are out of shape. If you have a history of heart trouble, don't shovel snow unless your doctor approves.
- Dress warmly, paying special attention to feet, hands, nose and ears.
- Do light warm-up exercises before shoveling. Take frequent breaks.
- If possible, push snow in front of you. If you have to lift it, pick up small amounts and lift with your legs, not your back. Do not toss snow over your shoulder or to the side.
- Don't drink alcohol before or while shoveling snow. Never smoke while shoveling.
- Use rock salt or de-icing compounds to remove ice from steps, walkways, and sidewalks. Sand placed on walkways may also help prevent slipping.

KWANZAA BEGINS DECEMBER 26

Kwanzaa is a week-long holiday honoring African-American heritage. It is observed from December 26 to January 1 each year. Kwanzaa consists of seven days of celebration, featuring activities such as candle-lighting and pouring of

libations, culminating in a feast with gift giving.

An African-American scholar and social activist, Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa in 1966 as the first African-American holiday. Karenga said his goal was to "...give Blacks an alternative to the existing holiday and give Blacks an opportunity to celebrate themselves and their history, rather than merely imitate the practice of the dominant society." The name "Kwanzaa" derives from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanzd" meaning "first fruits." The choice of Swahili, an East African language, reflected its status as a symbol of Pan-Africanism in the 1960s.

EGGNOG'S ORIGINS

Eggnog, or a very similar drink, may have originated in East Anglia, England, though it may also have been developed from posset; a medieval European beverage made with hot milk.

It is said that the drink adopted the nog part of its name from the word noggin, a Middle English phrase used to describe a small, wooded carved mug used to serve alcohol.

Another name for this English drink was Egg Flip. Yet another story is that the term derived from the name egg-and-grog, a common colonial term used to describe rum. Eventually, the term was shortened to egg'n'grog, then simply eggnog.

The ingredients for the drink were too expensive and uncommon for the lower classes, but it was popular among the aristocracy. "You have to remember, the average Londoner rarely saw a glass of milk," says author and historian James Humes.

"There was no refrigeration, and the farms belonged to the big estates. Those who could get milk and eggs to make eggnog mixed it with brandy or Madeira or even sherry."

EGGNOG RECIPE

- 6 eggs
- 2.5 cups heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup caster sugar
- ½ cup brandy
- ½ cup dark rum
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp ground nutmeg

Begin with pre-chilled ingredients for the best end result. In a medium bowl, beat the eggs together hard until they're very frothy. Add sugar and continue beating. Sprinkle in nutmeg and vanilla. Continue beating. A little at a time, add in the whipping cream and continue to beat. A bit at a time, beat in the milk. Finally, beat in the rum and brandy. Chill in fridge for 1 to 2 hours. Serve cold.

COMTEMPLATION

The New Year is a fantastic time to promote the “sound mind” aspect of health. It heralds a time of contemplation; the holidays take their place in our memories, and we contemplate what to strengthen, to tend to, or change outright in the year to come.

Cloistered by colder weather and early darkness, this is the time to focus on the elements of our lives that will “sprout” in the spring, the time to learn any number of things we have pondered for weeks, months, or years. If traveling this year, pick up the language or study the art and history of the region in depth. Have you wanted to learn a new cuisine or a new hobby? Numerous demonstrations for various arts, crafts, and cooking are free online.

If online is not your preference, libraries offer resources for all kinds of arcane bodies of knowledge. Visit a library and find books that will help you develop many of these same skills. Learning something new about things you have a passion for will improve your life and mental health throughout the year, bringing hours, days, months, or years of enjoyment.

FEBRUARY AMERICAN HEART MONTH

- The human heart weighs less than one pound. The average

weight for women is eight ounces, and for men ten ounces. As a result, women’s hearts beat faster than male hearts.

- Your heart beats with enough strength to shoot blood a distance of 30 feet.
- Your left lung is smaller than your right lung, to make room in your chest cavity for your heart.
- On average, one million barrels worth of blood is pumped through the heart in a lifetime.
- Every year, your heart beats approximately 35 million times. That is 100,000 beats per day, 70 beats per minute. Over the course of a lifetime, that adds up to an average of 2.5 billion heartbeats.
- Your heart is made up almost entirely of muscle.
- The blood vessels fed by your heart are more than 60,000 miles long. According to the Cleveland Clinic, they could wrap around the world twice.
- Clench your fists and put them side by side. This is roughly the size of your heart.
- The human heart begins to beat as early as four weeks after conception. Scientists believe that

by eight weeks, when the embryo is only an inch long, the heart is fully developed.

INSIDE LINE STAFF

Jean Healey, *Editor*

Production Assistant:
Sharon Casario

INSIDE LINE is published bimonthly by the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging, 200 South Main Street, Greensburg, Pennsylvania 15601 (Phone 830-4444), the Westmoreland County Commissioners and the PA Department of Aging.