

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

MARCH/APRIL 2009

THE SENIOR 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 Denise Kummick, Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging, 200 South Main Street, Greensburg, PA 15601.

JOB TRAINING

If you are 55 years of age or older, a resident of Westmoreland County, and your income falls within the guidelines, you may be eligible for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at Westmoreland County Community College. For more information, please call Mimi Owens or Rebecca

Dunn at 724-925-4066 or toll-free at 1-800-262-2103

HONORING THE ULTIMATE COMFORT FOOD

Whether they're fine, medium or extra-wide, egg noodles conjure up images of mom's chicken noodle soup, classic tuna casserole, or even a sweet kugel. Noodles are a feel-good food. Not surprisingly, consumption of noodles increases by as much as 20 percent in January, February and March. In a salute to one of the classic types of pasta, the National Pasta Association (NPA) presents some delicious trivia followed by a short quiz to get you to use your noodle. Did you know: As legend has it, noodles were first made by 13th century German bakers who fashioned dough into symbolic shapes, such as words, birds and stars? These "nudels" were then baked and served as bread.

- Noodle consumption increases during colder months as well as during Lent, when countless people

prepare meatless meals for this religious occasion prior to Easter.

- Egg noodles contain eggs; almost all other dry pasta shapes do not. By federal law, a noodle must contain 5.5 percent egg solids by weight to be called a noodle.
- A half-cup serving of cooked noodles contains just one gram of fat, 106 calories, five milligrams of sodium, and important nutrients including B-vitamins, iron and protein.
- Noodles can be substituted for many other pasta shapes in your favorite recipes.
- As a comfort food, noodles can be soothing when we have a cold, a broken heart, burst bubble or winter-time blues.

The Mt. Pleasant Senior Center (724-547-4593) and Latrobe Senior Center (724-539-0237) make

and sell 14 ounce bags of fine and wide egg noodles for \$1.75 and \$1.50 respectively. Individual bags may be picked up at the centers between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Larger orders (10 bags or more) should be pre-ordered by phoning the center.

Test Your Noodle IQ

1. What people are on record as making noodles and other pasta as early as 3,000 B.C.?

- A. Greeks C. Egyptians
- B. Romans D. Chinese

2. "Noodle" comes from the word "nudel," which has origins in which language?

- A. Italian C. Swedish
- B. German D. Greek

3. How many quarts of water should be used to boil one pound of dry noodles?

- A. 1-2 C. 6-8
- B. 4-6

4. What ingredient do noodles contain that makes them different from most other pastas?

- A. Iron
- B. B-vitamins D. Olive oil
- C. Egg

5. Noodles and other pastas are what kind of carbohydrate?

- A. Simple C. Complex
- B. Technical

6. Noodles play a starring role in which traditional dessert?

- A. Napoleons C. Flan
- B. Kugel

7. Noodles are available in which different varieties?

- A. Fine, Medium, Wide and Extra Wide
- B. Round, Square and Triangular
- C. Short, Medium, Long

8. Noodles are best used in which dishes?

- A. Casseroles
- B. Topped with sauces of all kinds
- C. Soups
- D. All of the above

9. All pasta is noodles?

- A. True
- B. False

10. According to the Food Guide Pyramid, a single serving of noodles is:

- A. 1 ½ cup C. ½ cup
- B. 1 cup D. ¼ cup

Answer key:

1.D, 2.B, 3.B, 4.C, 5.C, 6.B, 7.A, 8.D, 9.B, 10.C

NATION CELEBRATES HUMOR MONTH IN APRIL

National Humor Month was founded in 1976 by best-selling humorist Larry

Wilde, Director of The Carmel Institute of Humor. It is designed to heighten public awareness on how the joy and therapeutic value of laughter can improve health, boost morale, increase communication skills and enrich the quality of one's life. Why this month? April begins with All Fool's Day – a day which has sanctioned frivolity and pranks ever since the 1500's.

The ideas of laughing and the use of humor as a tool to lift ailing spirits are growing. Scientific research now indicates that the curative power of laughter and its ability to relieve debilitating stress and burnout may indeed be one of the great medical discoveries of our times. In Wilde's words, "Humor is very personal. What you think is funny, someone else may not. But it's important to laugh and to get all the big laughs you can."

PREVENTING FALLS AT HOME

You certainly do not want to fall and risk an injury. Most serious falls occur in and around the home, and can be life-changing. To help maintain your independence, it's important to understand the ways you can protect yourself from falls. Some simple precautions can ensure safety and reduce your risk of falling at home.

- **Stairways** - Make sure all handrails are

not broken and are securely fastened. Both sides of the steps should have handrails.

- **Floors and rugs** - Make sure all floor boards are even and rugs, including area rugs, are secured to the floor with tacks, non-skid pads or double-sided tape. Use non-skid floor wax.
- **Bathroom** - Be sure that you can move safely in bathroom area, and in and out of the tub or shower. Remove soap build-up in tub or shower on a regular basis. Place non-slip strips in bath/shower. Install adjustable height shower heads. Mount grab bars at the toilet, bath and shower, on walls with secure reinforcements, to prevent the bars from coming loose. Secure bath mats with non-slip, double-sided rug tape.
- **Kitchen** - Items that you use frequently, such as dishes and food items, should be easy to reach. If you have to use a step stool, make sure that it has a bar at the top to hold on to.
- **Lighting** - Place nightlights in hallways, bedrooms, bathrooms, and stairways. If not

already in your home, install light switches at the top and bottom of stairs. Place a lamp (and telephone) near your bed. Keep lighting uniform in each room and add lighting to dark spaces.

- **All rooms** - Check whether hallways and rooms have obstacles that may prevent safe movement. Move newspapers, boxes, electrical and phone cords, plants, and furniture out of traffic areas throughout your home. Store clothing, bed coverings, and other household items where you can reach them comfortably.
- **Outside of your home** - Repair holes, uneven joints on walkways. Arrange to have leaves, snow, and ice removed from stairs and walkways. Use salt or sand throughout the winter months. Make sure outside lighting is working in entryways and other walk areas. Check that handrails are not broken and are securely fastened. Both sides of steps should have handrails.
- **Other essential steps** - Ask your physician or pharmacist which medications you are taking that can cause dizziness or light-

headedness. As people age, the effects of medications may change. Be sure to have your eyes checked every year. Vision problems can cause falls. Check with your physician about the physical activity and exercise appropriate for you. Stay as physically active as you can. Exercise helps to prevent falls, especially activities that enhance balance and coordination. Finally, be careful in choosing shoes and slippers as they can cause you to trip. The soles should be non-slip and not too thick.

SENIORS4KIDS EXPANDS INTO PENNSYLVANIA

*By Anne Wise,
Intergenerational
Engagement Manager
Generations United's*

Seniors4Kids (www.seniors4kids.org) is a civic engagement initiative that highlights the role older adults can play in support of issues that directly benefit children and youth. Currently, we help adults age 50+ to create statewide networks of volunteers that work to increase access to, and improve the quality of, pre-kindergarten. Joining with the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, we are thrilled to expand into

Pennsylvania and hope that you will consider joining us as a Captain4Kids or spreading the word about our efforts to your friends and colleagues. The hours and commitment are flexible – it only takes a little of your time! Some ways that you can get involved:

- Join us as a Captain4Kids
- Write letters to the editor or opinion editorials
- Visit with state policymakers
- Share stories or quotes about why you think pre-k matters
- Attend events
- Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter Captain4Kid Donna

Bailey said it best: "I am never going to have a street or a building named after me, but by trying to improve the education of the children in this state, this can be a lasting legacy for me and all of us." For more information about Seniors4Kids or to sign up as a Captain4Kids, please contact Anne Wise at (202) 289-3979 or awise@gu.org.

STAR QUALITY RATING SYSTEM FOR NURSING HOMES

For the first time in history, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released quality ratings for each of the nation's 15,800 nursing homes that participate in Medicare or Medicaid. Facilities are assigned star

ratings from a low of one star to a high of five stars based on health inspection surveys, staffing information, and quality of care measures. The ratings are publicly available on the agency's *Nursing Home Compare* Web site at www.medicare.gov.

Consulting with a panel of experts from academia, patient advocacy and nursing home provider groups, CMS developed the rating system based on each nursing home's performance in three critical areas:

- **Health inspection surveys.** Each year state and federal surveyors conduct on-site, comprehensive assessments of each nursing home's health care services and compliance with federal/state rules. Surveyors also conduct complaint investigations. Information from the most recent three years of survey findings were used to develop the ratings.
- **Quality measures.** The quality rating system uses 10 key quality measures out of the 19 that can be found on the *Nursing Home Compare* Web site. Areas examined include the percent of at-risk residents who have pressure ulcers (bed sores) after their first 90 days in the nursing home, the

number of residents whose mobility worsened after admission, and whether residents received the proper medical care.

- **Staffing information.** There is strong evidence that low staffing levels can comprise the level of patient care in a nursing home and is considered an important indicator of quality. This measure reports the number of hours of nursing and other staff care per patient per day. This measure is adjusted to account for the level of illness and services required by each facility's residents.

The Web site provides the public with a quality rating for each of the three areas listed, as well as a composite or total score. A five star designation means the facility ranks "much above average," four star indicates "above average," three means "about average," two is a "below average" ranking with a one indicating that a facility ranks "much below average." Rankings are dynamic and will be updated monthly, due to quality and conditions within a nursing home can change at any time. This system is not intended to be the only tool families use in selecting the right nursing facility for a loved one.

Nothing can substitute a visit to a nursing home. CMS has also published an updated version of its *Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home* which can help families through the process. The guide can also be accessed at www.medicare.gov.

STROKE INDICATORS

During a BBQ, a friend stumbled and took a little fall – she assured everyone that she was fine.....she said she had just tripped over a brick because of her new shoes. They got her cleaned up and got her a new plate of food. While she appeared a bit shaken up, Ingrid went about enjoying herself the rest of the day.

Ingrid's husband called later telling everyone that his wife had been taken to the hospital, and at 6:00 p.m. Ingrid passed away. She had suffered a stroke at the BBQ. Ingrid would be with us today, had anyone at the BBQ known how to identify the signs of a stroke. Some individuals won't die but end up in a helpless, hopeless condition instead.

Neurologists state that if they can get to a stroke victim within three hours they can totally reverse the effects of a stroke. The trick is getting a stroke patient recognized, diagnosed, and medically cared for within three hours, which is tough.

Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells

disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of a stroke. Now doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions associated with the first three letters in STRoke:

- **S** * Ask the individual to SMILE.
- **T** * Ask the person to TALK and SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE (Coherently).
- **R** * Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.

There is now a fourth indicator of a stroke – the tongue. Ask the person to stick out his or her tongue. If the tongue is 'crooked', if it goes to one side or the other, that is also an indication of a stroke. If he or she has trouble with any one of these tasks, call 911 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher. Knowledge is the key to prevention!

WHAT MEN DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT

Although it's an age-related condition about as common as graying hair, an enlarged prostate, also called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), is a condition shared by more than half of all men age 50 and older. In fact, 90 percent of men have BPH by the time they reach their 80s. Changes in urinary habits with men older than age 50 are mostly due to BPH; but prostate cancer can

have similar symptoms and that is why it is important that men talk with a physician.

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland located under the bladder that wraps around the urethra, just below the urinary bladder. As men get older, their prostate gland grows and presses on the urethra, sometimes causing urinary problems.

In most cases an enlarged prostate is not dangerous. However, the symptoms can be extremely frustrating and, if left untreated, could lead to a bigger health problem. See your doctor if you experience:

- More frequent urination, especially at night
 - A weak urine stream
 - Difficulty beginning urination, even with the strong feeling to go
 - Leaking or dribbling after urinating
 - Constantly feeling the need to urinate
- More serious

symptoms of BPH include having a burning feeling while urinating or not being able to urinate at all. These should be checked immediately. In rare cases, severe BPH can cause bladder or kidney damage, bladder stones, urinary tract infections or incontinence.

Mild BPH symptoms may get better without any interventions. But if urinary problems become worse,

prescribed medications can shrink the prostate or relax muscles around the prostate to improve urinary flow. More severe symptoms may require surgery, laser therapy or microwave therapy, which uses heat to destroy prostate cells.

If you have mild urinary symptoms, try these steps for relief:

- Limit coffee, alcohol and spicy foods
- Don't smoke
- Drink eight or more glasses of water a day
- Get into the habit of urinating as soon as the need arises
- Try saw palmetto, an herbal remedy that improves urine flow for some men

A man's next best defense is to begin screening for prostate cancer, typically at age 50. Screening usually involves a digital rectal exam and a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test. Don't keep silent – confide in your doctor.

SETON CENTER FRIENDLY VISITOR PROGRAM

Brighten the life of a homebound senior by becoming a friendly visitor! Seton Center is subcontracted by the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging to provide Friendly Visitors and Outreach services to the county's seniors. Volunteers spend time with seniors doing things like, reading together, writing notes or

helping to arrange appointments. They may also play games; share a hobby or a cup of coffee. They might find ways to link seniors with others in the community. Most importantly, friendly visitors listen to and talk with those who need companionship.

Friendly Visitors should possess a high level of integrity, a desire to help seniors, good listening skills and a caring and sensitive attitude. You will be required to attend a volunteer orientation and periodic training sessions where you will meet and network with other folks willing to make a difference.

Simply visit or call a homebound senior or seniors at a mutually-agreed upon time. All it takes is about an hour a week. While nothing compares to the fulfillment you receive by bringing sunshine to someone's day, our volunteers' efforts are honored every year at a recognition event celebrating National Volunteer Week.

For more information contact Dawn R. Brown, Program Coordinator at 724-837-1264 or email dbrown724@verizon.net.

RETIRE ONLINE

By Dave Ulerich, Social Security Acting Manager in Greensburg, PA

You can apply for retirement benefits from the comfort of your home or office at

www.socialsecurity.gov.

There's no need to drive to your local Social Security

office or wait for an appointment with a Social Security representative. You can complete the new online retirement application in as little as 15 minutes. It's so easy!

In most cases, after you click the "Sign Now" button and submit the application electronically, you are done. There are no forms to sign, and usually no additional documents are required. Social Security will contact you directly if more information is needed.

Award-winning actress Patty Duke has volunteered her services to let people know they can retire online. Ms. Duke has brought back the much beloved identical cousins Patty and Cathy Lane from the hit 1960's sitcom "The Patty Duke Show" for a series of Public Service Announcements that tell Americans it's now easier than ever to apply online.

If you are uncertain about when to retire, you can check out the online fact sheet, "When to Start Receiving Retirement Benefits". And if you are not ready to retire, you can plan for retirement using Social Security's online *Retirement Estimator*. It is a great financial planning tool that will give you an immediate and personalized estimate of how much your retirement benefits would be if you stopped working at age 62, age 66, age 70 or any point in between.

To learn more about retiring online as well as to

actually view the new Public Service Announcements, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/pattyduke.

AMERICA'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

"The Star-Spangled Banner" lyrics come from a poem written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key, after seeing the bombardment of Fort McHenry at Baltimore, Maryland, by Royal Navy ships in the Chesapeake Bay during the War of 1812. He was inspired by the American flag raised at the end of the war, which is on display in the National Museum of American History, a treasure of the Smithsonian Institution. Francis Scott Key entitled his poem "Defence of Fort McHenry" and his original manuscript can be seen at the Maryland Historical Society.

The poem was set to the tune of a British drinking song which was already popular in the United States and renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner". With a range of one and a half octaves, it is known for being difficult to sing. Although the song has four stanzas, only the first is commonly sung today, with the fourth ("O thus be it ever when free men shall stand...") added on more formal occasions.

"The Star-Spangled Banner" was recognized for official use by the Navy in 1889 and the President in

1916, and was made the national anthem by a congressional resolution on March 3, 1931, which was signed by President Herbert Hoover.

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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.