

# THE LINK



*Published by LACCOA whose mission it is to preserve and promote the health and general welfare of older persons living in Los Angeles County*

**WINTER 2009**

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

I can hardly believe that the year 2009 is well under way. As I reflect on the past year and look ahead into the current one, I realize that LACCOA's work continues to grow in a manner commensurate with the significant growth of LA County's older population—the largest in the nation. My thoughts became even more concrete when I read the outstanding interview that "LINK" Editor, Barbara Meltzer, completed with Dr. Fernando Torres-Gil, an internationally renowned expert on aging. His knowledge and perspective are truly outstanding and I urge you to carefully read and digest the information and intriguing thoughts that he presents.



Barbara Sinclair, *President*

The Commission has made great strides during these past few months as we carry out our mission to preserve and promote the overall well being of LA County's older population. We are examining ideas that will enable the County to provide additional services and programs appropriate to meet problems existing for current seniors as well as those anticipated for the upcoming generation.

We have moved forward in our commitment to form collaborations with both public and private entities. Our Work Groups have been busy exploring the issues that were chosen for this fiscal year. We are planning the annual Older American Recognition Day (OARD) event at which seniors from around the County will be honored and we are busy crafting recommendations for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

I look forward to hearing from each of you with your thoughts and ideas about how we can make LA County a better place for our aging population.

Barbara Peterson Sinclair, *President*



## **WORK GROUPS MOVE FORWARD**

Health and Long Term Care, Information and Assistance and Baby Boomers and Future Aging are the three Work Groups Commissioners voted to create for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. Each group chose a topic that would be the main priority of its efforts.

### **\*Health and Long Term Care**

Using the *LA Seniors Count!* Needs Assessment Survey as its guide, the Health and Long Term Care Work Group has been focusing on the issue of affordable and accessible dental care for seniors. With the majority of survey respondents voicing dental concerns, the Work Group has been researching and contacting various agencies and organizations involved in oral health issues, including private dentists, County departments, nonprofit and for-profit clinics, and social service agencies throughout LA County. With the assistance of County and Senior Services Department staff, members of the Work Group have compiled a list of locations throughout the County that offer dental services at low or no charge to needy individuals.

### **\*Information and Assistance**

Taking its lead from the Needs Assessment Survey, the Information and Assistance Work Group has been looking at areas that respondents noted as priorities. Several issues were considered, however, the group determined that the best action to advance its goals is to identify productive ways to notify individuals and communities about methods to obtain necessary or desired help with specific issues identified as needs among seniors.

### **\*Baby Boomers and Future Aging**

Due to the rapidly increasing number of older seniors, the projected increase in Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia, and the great number of family caregivers who are impacted, this Work Group has chosen family/informal caregiving as its focus for 2008-2009 fiscal year. Members have been talking to

and meeting with organizations and departments that are involved with the issue of family caregiving, including the Los Angeles Caregivers Resource Center, the Alzheimer's Association and directors of senior centers. The issue of caregiving has been discussed with experts in an effort to learn what recommendations might have the greatest positive impact on family caregivers and how these might be implemented.

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**FOURTH KNOWLEDGE FAIR FOCUSES ON PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

More than 200 LA County and City senior center directors, staff and guests came together to share best practices and discuss issues that are pertinent to senior centers.

“Promoting Health and Wellness” was the theme of the event held at the Cabrillo Beach Bathhouse in San Pedro. Guest speakers included Partners in Care Foundation President June Simmons who provided participants with an overview of healthy aging from a local perspective; Bonnie Hart, Food, Nutrition and Management Services, presented a “Be Well” Program; the Arthritis Foundation’s Mireya Pena shared information about exercises for seniors, and neuroscientist Dr. Gary Small, Director, UCLA Center on Aging, talked about his five week memory training program.



A collage of Knowledge Fair activities

The Knowledge Fair was co-sponsored by LA County Community and Senior Services, the Area Agency on Aging and the LA City Department of Aging. It was produced by a large collaborative committee, including LACCOA Commissioners Marilyn Fried, Nate Riddick and Bernie Weintraub.



**LACCOA SADDENED BY THE PASSING OF TWO COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Ida Kinney (District 3) was 104 years old when she passed away in December. A longtime resident of Pacoima, she was appointed to LACCOA by Supervisor Zev Yaroslavky, 12 years ago.

The granddaughter of slaves, Commissioner Kinney was a civil rights activist who worked and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One of the first African Americans to work at Lockheed during World War II, Commissioner Kinney launched a successful drive to integrate its union.

Her determination resulted in a much-needed multipurpose senior center. Affectionately known as “Mother,” Commissioner Kinney was an elementary school teacher who helped to launch California’s Head Start program.

On her 103 birthday, Commissioner Kinney said, “I may not be able to walk or attend meetings, but I



Commissioner Ida Kinney

can still write letters and I will continue to write letters for the cause of equality and justice for all.”

Commissioner Don Hokanson served on LACCOA for only few months before he died. Appointed by Supervisor Gloria Molina (District 1), Commissioner Hokanson had been a longtime community activist. A resident of Pomona, he was a Chamber of Commerce Ambassador, a member of the LA County Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council and a former administrative assistant to LA City Councilman John Ferraro. A chaplain in the Army, he was a retired Colonel. Commissioner Hokanson leaves six children and 16 grandchildren.

We send our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of Commissioners Kinney and Hokanson.



## LACCOA WELCOMES TWO NEW COMMISSIONERS

Appointed by former Supervisor Yvonne Burke, (District 2) Lavada Theus recently retired from the Los Angeles Unified School District after 38 years of service, 20 of which were spent as an elementary school teacher and 18 in a variety of administrative positions. The culmination of Commissioner Theus' experience was that of Assistant Principle at 118th Street School. The mother of two and grandmother of two, Commissioner Theus looks forward to her role on the Commission as an advocate for older persons after a lifetime committed to taking care of children.

Appointed by Supervisor Don Knabe (District 4), Commissioner Mary Ann King has a long and successful background in television. She has hosted many TV broadcasts including parades, Toys for Tots Toy-A-Thon, beauty pageants and fashion and entertainment shows. The Hacienda Heights resident, however, is most notable for the many years she spent as Miss Mary Ann on the long-running children's program "Romper Room." Commissioner King has been a Puente Hills Area Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year, named Woman of Distinction by State Senator Hilda Solis and Woman of Achievement by the San Gabriel Valley YWCA.



## SEAMLESS SENIOR SERVICES

In an effort to create seamless services for LA County's aging population, the County's Chief Executive Office launched an initiative bringing 20 departments together to identify all existing programs and resources for seniors. Nearly 100 were identified by this first-ever collaborative effort, Seamless Senior Services (S3). Led by Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services (CSS), the task force is comprised of County departmental representatives who meet regularly. Four work groups have been established to move the project's objectives forward. They are:

**Prevention and Intervention** - law enforcement, investigation, prosecution, fraud detection, and prevention.

**Supportive Services** - housing, transportation, case (care) management, caregiver services, and social services.

**Income Support & Volunteerism** - government benefits, employment, volunteer activities, and civic engagement.

**Health and Well-Being** - health care services, nutrition, mental health, recreational activities, and in-home/day care support.

Stakeholders include service providers, representatives from unincorporated areas in LA County, educators, County volunteers, business people, and health and human care service decision makers.

In the coming months, immediate and future collaborative activities will be identified and prioritized, the usefulness of and interest in collaborative projects will be determined, and methods of engaging stakeholders in the S3 initiative will be recommended.



## COMMISSIONER OV SMITH STEPS DOWN FROM LACCOA

Commissioner Ovarie (OV) Smith has resigned from the Commission after serving for nearly three years. Appointed to LACCOA by former Supervisor Yvonne Burke, (District 2) Commissioner Smith served on the Health and Long Term Care Committee.

After a long career in the catering business, Commissioner Smith founded a day care center, Willing Workers, for developmentally disabled individuals in 1975. Now 94 year old, Commissioner Smith will continue in her role as the center's president.



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT RECOGNITION CEREMONY



Supervisor Yvonne Burke (l) presents Cynthia Banks, Director of LA County's Community and Senior Services Department (CSS), with a special recognition from the Board of Supervisors for the award winning LA County Needs Assessment Survey, *LA County Seniors Count!* A joint effort of CSS, the LA City Department of Aging and LACCOA, the survey won the 2008 National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A) Aging Innovation Award in the category of "Community Plan."

## NADIA POWERS LEADERSHIP AWARD



(Left to right) LACCOA Commissioners Doreen Moore, Marilyn Fried and Mary Helen Cruz congratulate Chip Hazen, ADA Compliance Administrator for the LA Metropolitan Transportation Authority, on his being honored with the LA County Commission on Disabilities first-ever *Nadia Powers Leadership Award*.

## ONE ON ONE WITH DR. FERNANDO TORRES-GIL



*Dr. Fernando Torres-Gil is the Associate Dean of the UCLA School of Public Affairs and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. He holds appointments as Professor of Social Welfare and Public Policy and is the Director of the Center for Policy Research on Aging. A former Professor of Gerontology and Public Administration at the*

*University of Southern California, Dr. Torres-Gil continues there as an Adjunct Professor of Gerontology. He was appointed by President Clinton as the first Assistant Secretary for Aging in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

**Q: In 1992, you published a book, “The New Aging: Politics and Change in America,” about trends and changes that would complicate how we are all growing older and would ultimately set the stage for the retirement of the baby boomers. Have most of your predictions and premises come to fruition?**

**A:** I believe that most have been on the mark. I talked about the coming need to rethink our public programs and our policies regarding how we are going to serve an aging nation. Today, that need is more urgent than ever. There will be no retirement for baby boomers, at least not the one they have “fantasized” about. The pending old age of those 75 to 80 million boomers comes at the very time the U.S. is confronting serious crises. Many of these have been ignored for years and the crises have occurred far faster than I ever imagined.

For many years, I talked about the fact that baby boomers will awaken when they turn 65 or 66 to find that they have not saved, there is no social safety net, the equity in their home, which for many is their retirement plan, will not exist, and the reliance on the free market will turn out to have been an illusion.

**Q: That didn’t even take into consideration the economic situation that we are facing now.**

**A:** The current financial meltdown on the financial system, the decline of 401K program and the collapse of the housing market—crises that are not just facing this country—will be with us for the remainder of the baby boomers’ old age. They may find themselves forced to work, or living on a lot less than they had planned. However, therein lies a great opportunity for something.

**Q: How would the fear and discontent of millions of boomers generate a great opportunity?**

**A:** If this continues, I think that we may well see the baby boomers become the next generation of gray panthers—a whole new generation of senior citizen activists and advocates. Whereas our parents and grandparents faced their great adversity when they were young—during the great depression, WWII and the cold war—baby boomers who’ve had it relatively easy throughout their lifespan will face their great test of adversity when they’re old. The country has been unable to prepare for increased longevity.

The great question for the boomer generation is, whether it will be prepared to meet the adversity that it is going to face. Secondly, can that adversity be used as an opportunity to provide leadership and advocacy, not just for older baby boomers, but also for all individuals regardless of age? The nation is going to need a whole new engaged citizenry to address essential issues.

**Q: One of the great challenges, I think, is that baby boomers have not yet admitted to the fact that they’re aging.**

**A:** Therein lies the existential crisis of the moment, although I think that is starting to change. If there is any silver lining to the absolute mismanagement of the Federal government in the last eight years, the state government in the last couple of years and the meltdown of our financial system, it is that it will finally force those of us who are aging to understand that we can no longer deny the fact that we are growing older. In addition, there is no safety net and we have not prepared for our retirement. So I am hoping that these crises will finally wake up a generation of boomers to begin asking what can be done to turn things around.

**Q: What is the impact of the nexus of diversity and aging that you discuss in your book?**

**A:** During the next 20 years the current minority

will become the new majority. We will expect them to be productive and to pay sufficient taxes to cover whatever it is that we as older baby boomers may demand from government. Los Angeles County is already ground zero. The minorities are the new majority and if we don't invest in these young immigrant minority ethnic communities, we may not have the taxes, (income, property and sales) to fund the programs that will be needed.

**Q: It seems that Los Angeles could be an epicenter of such changes.**

**A:** Yes, in many respects, LA County has been a great model for the rest of the nation and we need not fear these demographic changes. We have struggled with the tension and the conflicts that sometimes occur from such demography, but we have managed somehow to rise above it. I believe that LA County probably has the highest rate of intermarriage among ethnic racial groups and the highest degree of tolerance, co-existence and acceptance of this diversity and plurality of any part of the country. Also, it continues to remain economically viable specifically because of the influx of Armenians, Persians, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Central Americans and Latinos. LA County has really shown that it can benefit and prosper from this diversity and as a result will be a kind of role model for the rest of the country for that nexus of aging and diversity.

**Q: What do you think will happen to LA County's programs for older adults as the baby boomers age?**

**A:** Both LA County and City have tremendous challenges. For example, in the last 30-40 years, a system of services and programs for older adults was created that may turn out to be obsolete for the next generation of older persons. We also created programs and services targeting a few specific minority ethnic groups such as African Americans and Latinos that may no longer suffice for a population of many more diverse and ethnic immigrant groups.

**Q: What can we do to best serve this new generation of seniors?**

**A:** LA County and City need to revamp/reform programs and services for older adults. For example,

aging baby boomers will most likely avoid using senior citizen programs, senior centers and senior discounts. Secondly, with a whole new slew of ethnic racial groups, the current programs focusing on African Americans and Mexican Americans may not be viable and relevant to this greater diversity. Also, can we even afford to target our programs toward 30-40-50 different languages, traditions and cultures? So we must come back to the bottom line — what are the basic needs that all seniors have regardless of race, ethnicity, religion and country of origin? I would suggest that we go to income, health, and retirement security as opposed to boutique types of senior programs, and the planning must start now.

I think that in the next few years our elderly population will face higher levels of poverty with greater numbers being homeless, disabled or isolated. We, in LA County, have to ask ourselves, what's the best use of limited dollars? Perhaps we should think about targeting programs based upon income and physical disability?

**Q: We have a very large population of family and informal caregivers, a situation that is already considered a crisis. How do you think LA County might provide assistance to this growing population?**

**A:** Thank you for raising that. It's an excellent example of going back to the basics for a new generation of elders. Caregiving may be the preoccupying priority, given the difficulties faced by loved ones. It is not only about identifying individuals but also enabling them to have needed services in their homes and in their communities. It also deals with the huge and frequently invisible sacrifices that caregivers make whether it's an inability to keep working, the pressures of caregiving, or the higher stress levels that can cause associated health problems.

What is absolutely needed is to recruit and build up a caregiver work force, which in this County is made up of immigrant minority low income workers. We have a huge challenge. I have often said that with the aging of the population, especially baby boomers, caregiving will be the great equalizer that will cut across race, income and political affiliation.

**Q: It was recently announced by the Department of Public Health that the incidence of Alzheimer's disease will increase tremendously. Will this not also increase the need for both family and professional caregivers?**

**A:** Alzheimer's and other dementias will be our AIDS/HIV crisis for the older generation. We certainly have made great strides in addressing the issues of AIDS and HIV and responding to the needs of that population. We must develop an equally effective response to the increase in dementias and Alzheimer's as well as to the growing numbers of older persons that are physically unable to care themselves. All of this, of course, is about caregiving and how we respond to the caregiving needs. We are seeing only the beginning of this crisis.

**Q: Employers continue to lose millions of dollars as employees take time off to care for older family members. What can we do to mobilize the workforce to help with the issue?**

**A:** Currently there is a great deal of literature and attention regarding cost to employers and workforce from individuals who take more time off to care for parents, grandparents and disabled children than they do for personal sick leave. Various academics show that this is taking a big toll and we must be more creative in how we deal with it. For example, the workforce responded during the early years of the baby boomers with day care and childcare centers. Maybe employers now need to think about adult day care centers attached to their programs.

LA County depends heavily on small businesses, manufacturing and retail sales tax to provide County services. I think the County needs to look at the connection between promoting economic development and what the losses occur in economic development and productivity because of aging and family caregiving. However, I do believe that there are too many mandates on businesses to respond to social needs. Because we don't have a universally funded long-term care program, for example, it puts all the pressure on families and other caregivers. At the same time, we will probably increase demands that employers step in and provide care and support. Businesses large and small have only two roles—create jobs and make money. Make a profit and pay taxes to support public financing. That is really what we should demand and expect of the private sector. It's a long way of saying that ultimately the federal and the state governments must provide programs that take the burden off of employers and such programs may be beyond the possibility of LA County. Even so, certainly employers will have a role in terms of supporting workers who have caregiving needs.

**Q: I know that you have a particular interest in the issues of land use, housing and transportation. What are your thoughts about the County's land use planning?**

**A:** I think the planning has been the exact opposite of what it should be. It's true for LA City, but especially so for the County, both of which have promoted urban sprawl for the last 20-30 years. They continue to approve developments in areas like Santa Clarita or the high desert, Antelope Valley, and Palmdale. The County has continued to respond, not to the needs of a diverse aging population, but to the needs of developers and the continued illusion by potential home owners that what they want is a large single family home with a swimming pool as far away from the core city as possible.

So what does that mean? We are destroying what little remains of LA's natural environment, we are enriching developers and we are creating housing for individuals who are going to age in precisely the wrong place. When these individuals grow old, can no longer drive and are homebound or isolated in their community, they are not going to have the transportation options, the social services, and the healthcare services that they need. The decisions will further disperse and isolate an aging County population when, in fact, it should be promoting smart growth, high density, affordable, accessible housing in places that provide social, health, transportation and housing options.

**Q: Can you give us some examples of that kind of development?**

**A:** Downtown LA, West Hollywood, and Park LaBrea are good examples. Another is downtown Alhambra, which is very vibrant. You can be without a car. Some of these urban enclaves do exist for our aging population who would most likely not want to be stuck in the suburban sprawl of the high desert.

**Q: What can LA County do about this?**

**A:** It's possible for LA County to rethink its land use decisions by providing incentives to developers in those areas that are more amenable to an aging population or to those who may have some level of disability. It's done all the time. But that would be the responsibility of the LA County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Too often, for too long they have responded to the needs of developers.

**Q: States like Nevada and Arizona seem to be getting many of our more affluent retirees. How can we reverse that?**

**A:** We aren't doing anything to keep those retirees in Los Angeles County and we are losing the tax dollars of these more or less affluent retirees who had choices. Those who stayed behind tended to be more needy and require expensive public services. The County must ask itself, how retirees with assets and retirement resources can be enticed to stay in LA County. I believe that many of these retirees may return because they have found a lack of support systems in these other states, but we need to be more creative about how we can keep them here.

**Q: You co-wrote a book with experts in aging from Israel and Australia that was published in 2007, called "Lessons From Three Nations." What do these two countries have in common with the United States?**

**A:** We picked those three countries because they are experiencing similar demographic changes—the nexus of aging and diversity. The US, Australia and Israel are all nations that have aging populations, a history of immigration and are tackling the same dilemma—how do we respond to a growing older population? How do we respond to diversity? Each has done so in different ways. Israel, of course, has a more intense history with immigration because it actively sought out Jewish refugees from around the world. All refugees who come to Israel have automatic entitlement to what is a universal system of health, long-term care and social benefits, thereby reducing the burden on the private sector. Israel addresses the needs of their immigrant elderly far better than US or Australia.

Australia opened up a very generous multicultural policy in the 1970s that welcomed immigrants from around the Pacific basin. It gave them tremendous economic vitality. Now however, they have a large influx of immigrant elders and do not have the national policies to respond. So they are having to find a balance.

The US on the other hand has a much longer history of absorbing immigrants and a successful record of second and third generation immigrants being assimilated and acculturated. What we lack is universal health, long-term care and social services. We are still very much an individualistic society and we are going through deep conflicts over reforming immigration policies. The three countries have different experiences,

but ultimately what they all have in common is that populations are getting older and each country needs immigrants and minorities to replace an aging workforce.

**Q: Do you have any final thoughts about LA County and our aging population?**

**A:** LA County is a nation state. It's huge and would be like the 13th or 14th largest economy in the world. I would say that we must accept the reality that we are growing old and becoming more diverse. Furthermore, we should see these two situations as a set of opportunities to find ways to keep the elderly in the community. We must find ways to make cities and municipalities user friendly and accessible, so that individuals can choose to age in place—individuals who have given the best part of their working careers to LA County and to the community.

At the same time I would encourage public officials to do all that they can to invest in the younger immigrant and minority communities because they will be the workers and the taxpayers. LA County has already shown that we have tremendous tolerance, and despite the negative media coverage we do many more good things than we do bad things. So, I would encourage everyone in the County to look at aging and diversity as a tremendous asset and to always remind ourselves that we are the trendsetter for the country and it will be fun.

I remain quite optimistic about Los Angeles County and growing old in this incredibly vibrant and diverse region, where people recently showed that they are willing to invest in this area and even to tax themselves for the betterment of others. For example, the passage of Proposition R (supporting the high speed rail in California) will inject billions of dollars into our transit systems. In addition, the passage of the vast majority of school bond measures in LA City and the municipalities of LA County demonstrates the willingness of the voters to spend their dollars for children of our diverse populations. These are indeed the best testimony to the future prospects of living and growing older in L.A. County.

*Interview conducted, condensed and edited by  
Commissioner Barbara Meltzer*

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