



## ***Aging: The Possibilities*** **Interim Report - May 2006**

“Build connections to people. Build trust with others. Get involved.”

*Better Together*

*The Report of the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Collectively, we own a successful community. How do we contribute to this individually? What part will each of us take? The work of this initiative – *Aging: The Possibilities* - begins with individuals at a grassroots level, believing that there is untapped potential among individuals working together. Sarasota County has a unique population – with over thirty percent of our residents over age 65. The purpose of this initiative is to consider this demographic reality an asset and an opportunity to be explored. *Aging: The Possibilities* focuses on our population as one rich with experience and wisdom rather than a “problem” to be solved. This has been approached through community conversations held throughout Sarasota County. The process focuses on possibilities as a path to lead us to new thinking and action.

The broad intent is to identify best practices for further exploration, create pilot projects and develop strategies to help maximize our potential as a community. A vital community is one where people are supported no matter what their age, where the gifts and talents of people of different ages are shared, and the physical environment is designed in such a way that it allows people to actively participate in all areas of life.

This interim report provides an overview of the

current SCOPE study – *Aging: The Possibilities*. In the following pages, you will read about the work that community members have done over the past year. It describes the process of the community conversations, learning opportunities, best practices and ideas to be explored further. This report is not meant to review the many service providers and programs available in Sarasota County. It is meant to show the direction of the community discussions and highlight opportunities to improve our quality of life. Throughout this report are quotes from the community members who are participating in this initiative. Their words highlight some of the concerns and passions facing our community.

The first section paints a picture of our rapidly changing population. It provides the context and reasoning for choosing the topic of aging as a focus of study and community work. The second section reviews the community conversations process that laid the foundation for the work of the initiative. The third section summarizes information learned from various experts on a wide range of topics related to aging. The fourth section highlights the major areas of interest and passion that emerged from community conversations and learning sessions. It presents examples of best practices from around the nation that could serve as models for implementing such work in our community.

## THE CONTEXT – WHO ARE WE?

Worldwide, we are experiencing a tremendous shift in our population. Historically a majority of the world's population has been concentrated in the 40 and below age group; this will shift significantly in the coming decades. Some of these shifts include:

- The proportion of people age 60 and over is growing faster than any other age group.
- Between 1970 and 2025, the number of adults 60 and over is expected to increase by 694 million or 223 percent.
- In 2025, there will be about 1.2 billion people over the age of 60.
- At the same time, decreasing fertility rates and increased longevity have caused the world's age composition – the proportion of children, young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults – to shift.

Much the same is true for the United States. We are among the most rapidly-aging developed nations in the world. In 2000, there were an estimated 35 million people age 65 and over in the United States, accounting for almost 13 percent of the national population. The data suggests that this number will continue to grow in the future, due in large part to the baby boom generation, the largest demographic group in our history. Some interesting facts to consider about the U.S. population:

- In 2011, the baby boom generation will begin to turn 65
- By 2030, it is projected that one in five people will be age 65 and over, reaching 70 million by that year
- The population age 85 and over is currently the fastest growing segment of the older population.

Florida has a significantly larger population of older adults. While the percentage of people over age 65 is about 13 percent nationally, that number is closer to 18 percent in Florida. This

makes us the state with the highest percentage of people over age 65 in the U.S.

Sarasota County is well ahead of all these aging trends. Nearly 32% of the population is over age 65, making Sarasota County the oldest among counties with a population over 250,000 people. Nearly half of all households have someone over age 65 as well. Our neighbor to the south, Charlotte County, has the same designation for counties under 250,000 people. These demographic realities provide us with a unique opportunity to consider older adults as valuable assets that can make important contributions to the well-being of our community. SCOPE's *Aging: The Possibilities* initiative is committed to creating opportunities for people of all ages to share their gifts, talents, and skills in building a vibrant and vital community.

## THE PROCESS

*We have so many wonderful educated and experienced people in our community; the human resources are breathtaking.*

The *Aging: The Possibilities* community initiative began with community conversations in late 2004 and early 2005. These conversations were held throughout Sarasota County, in an effort to cast a wide net and engage residents of varying ages, races and economic status. The ideas shared during the conversations helped shape future meetings and larger community assemblies designed to explore possibilities for aging productively, comfortably and vitally in Sarasota County. To date over 400 residents have participated in this process. The community attention over the past year to this broad topic has been impressive.

SCOPE's role is a convener, helping to bring together the community, asking provocative questions and stimulating new conversations.

The initial conversations were based on a series of questions designed to stimulate thinking on the assets and gifts of all community members and the possibilities for Sarasota County. Some questions that inspired conversation were:

- What gifts do elders and young people in the community have to offer?
- What possibilities can you imagine would make Sarasota a positive place for aging?
- What doubts and reservations do you have?

The community responses from these conversations created the foundation for the first Community Assembly on Aging in April 2005. The Assembly provided the opportunity for community members to reflect, explore new ideas and connect to that which they felt most passionate. Over 120 community members worked in small groups and completed promise cards to affirm their community commitment.

Additionally, the Community Assembly discussions provided input to the Policy Committee of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. This national conference, held every ten years, helps guide policies at the federal government level.

Following the Community Assembly, action teams formed and met over the balance of 2005 to learn and explore paths of possible projects or strategies. The action teams were created around the following general areas:

- **Community Awareness**  
Shift how the community views aging and make resource information available.
- **Community Design & Land Use**  
Identify and promote design changes in our built environment (i.e. roads, sidewalks, street signs, buildings) that support healthy aging

- **Economic & Workforce Issues**  
Explore connections with businesses that can develop innovative products and services for all income levels; expand employment and volunteer opportunities for seniors
- **Healthcare & Supportive Services**  
Expand healthcare services and enrich the lives of the homebound elderly.
- **Housing**  
Explore housing models and develop options available in the community.
- **Intergenerational Opportunities**  
Develop and promote intergenerational social activities and mentoring opportunities
- **Lifelong Learning**  
Explore ways to instill lifelong learning as part of the community culture.
- **Mobility & Transportation**  
Examine issues of mobility and transportation options.
- **Neighborhood Connections**  
Explore developing the role of neighbors, neighborhoods and neighborhood associations in creating a positive environment for aging.
- **Wellness & Active Living**  
Increase prevention education and create more social and recreational opportunities.

*“Taking the time to listen to the insight of other participants; this means I was not preaching to the choir but absorbing their philosophies which did not always necessarily match mine.”*

*“I have been amazed to see the involvement of so many different people in this topic. I learned that traffic, transportation, and housing are uppermost in people’s minds. Also, that they resonate to the issue of “mattering” which indicates that they feel the need to be noticed and appreciated.”*

The action teams identified opportunities for learning and a number of professionals and experts offered their expertise on different topics. SCOPE worked with several other organizations to bring these learning opportunities to the public. Collaborative partners have included the Senior Friendship Centers, Jewish Family and Children’s Service, University of South Florida, Sarasota County Government and the Area Agency on Aging. These learning sessions helped build a foundation on which new ideas could emerge. Some overlap and connections occurred, resulting in seven major themes:

- Community awareness
- Neighbors and neighborhood associations
- Housing and physical spaces
- Wellness and active living
- Healthcare and supportive services
- Economic and workforce opportunities
- Transportation and mobility

## WHAT WE LEARNED

*“...successful aging requires much more: having adequate finances, housing that suits our physical condition, bringing balance to our life, keeping our body in shape, participating in life’s dance and I do mean dance.”*

The following section provides an overview of the learning sessions. These sessions were

designed to share information with participants and provide time for discussion of ways to use the information as a base to transform the community. The action team that prompted the creation of each session is noted in parentheses after the topic heading.

### Age Bias

(Community Awareness Action Team)

Our culture is one that generally accepts age bias even though biases based on race, culture or gender are unacceptable. Age bias plays itself out in many ways including popular greeting cards, humor about “old geezers”, and discord in the community pitting different generations against one another. Through two community workshops, participants were invited to examine their own stereotypical notions of older adults, and recognized that ageism works both ways. In other words, one can be biased towards someone younger as well as someone older. The goal was to help the community recognize this subtle bias that stymies conversation and prevents relationships that can help create a better community. Some participants experienced a shift in their thinking, recognizing that it was important to get to know someone as an individual and avoid stereotypical generalizations. Ideas were generated to help the community work together to create a culture that embraces people of all ages. Suggestions included intentional communication with people different from oneself, encouraging opportunities for multi-generational living and activities; challenging bias when encountered, and seeking out opportunities to interact with different generations.

### Arts, Creativity and Aging

(Wellness & Active Living Action Team)

Active and healthy aging was a recurring theme in many of the conversations and connections among arts, creativity and aging were readily explored. The term “creativity” has many different definitions and connotations. Creativity has been described as “the process of

bringing something new into being.” The “something new” could be an original idea, a product, or perspective. Creativity is a process and it is a basic human attribute, no matter your age. Research continually shows that engaging in the creative process contributes to good physical and mental health as we age by helping us maintain a good outlook and a sense of well-being. Research indicates that participation in artistic or creative activities results in significantly fewer falls and less hip damage, fewer doctor’s visits, diminished use of medication, diminished vision problems, and significantly less loneliness and depression. Creativity has a positive influence in helping us cope with problems, emotionally bounce back from them and enriches our relationships.

Future retirees will be better educated and in better functional condition than current retirees and will be seeking alternatives and choices regarding the use of their time and resources. Future retirees will place a higher value on creative expression and participation in creative activities. Sarasota County presents a unique opportunity with the demographic reality of an older population, the strength and breadth of our well established arts community, and the network of community programs for older adults.

### **The Invaluable Caregiver**

(Healthcare & Supportive Services Action Team)

Nationally, about 50 million people provide uncompensated care each year and this translates into \$250 billion in “free” caregiving services. It’s difficult to provide information and resources to caregivers because many don’t acknowledge that they are a caregiver until they have been providing care for six to twelve months. Caregivers have needs that fall into three categories:

- Education about the specific disease or condition of the care recipient and skills and resources to help them in the caregiver role

- Support in terms of a support group or someone to talk to
- Respite to provide some time away from the caregiving situation

Sarasota has caregiver education opportunities and numerous support groups and respite options. The challenge is to connect the caregiver with these opportunities. Acceptance of respite is also a challenge as caregivers are often resistant to accepting respite and allowing their loved one to be cared for by someone else. The action team felt that communicating the local opportunities was critical and new ways were needed to do so.

Locally, a Caregiver’s Guide was created and published in 2002. One option being examined is to update and reprint this. In September 2005 the fifth annual Community Caregiving Forum was presented by several area organizations (Senior Friendship Centers, Tidewell Hospice and Palliative Care, Alzheimer’s Association, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, Meals on Wheels Plus of Manatee, Proeger & Associates) as a way to provide information and training for family caregivers as well as professionals.

### **Neighborhood Connections**

(Neighborhood Connections Action Team)

The neighborhood connections focus began with the desire to explore the possibilities for neighbors and neighborhoods in creating a positive environment for aging. In examining their personal definition of “neighborhood”, participants learned that it has a lot to do with personal attachment and connectedness. Neighborhoods have many assets including neighbors, associations, buildings, schools and parks. Some of these are physical, some are personal and some are based on relationships. The participants explored the question “What possibilities can you imagine that would make a difference in our neighborhood for seniors?” It was profound that several other action teams identified a role for neighbors and neighborhood

associations as well. The possibilities identified included neighborly transportation mechanisms, better connections to homebound seniors, mechanisms for sharing relevant and timely community information, helping with yardwork and household chores, emergency lifelines and social gatherings.

The roles of neighbors and neighborhood associations are being explored very intentionally through several mechanisms:

- In 2006, participants attended a workshop and developed their “next steps” by creating personal action plans. This was a practical way for individuals to identify their passion for caring or supporting older adults in their neighborhood and decide how to seek out and involve others in their neighborhood.
- A path for neighborhood action became clear as participants began to learn about Asset-Based Community Development or ABCD for short. ABCD is a method of building communities from the inside out – with a focus on the assets, skills, and abilities of each individual – and provides a powerful method to answer the question: “What is the role of each individual in creating a community that supports people of all ages?” ABCD has been developed over the course of three decades and through work in over 7,000 neighborhoods across the U.S.

SCOPE is working with community partners such as Senior Friendship Centers, Sarasota County Neighborhood Initiatives, City of Sarasota Neighborhood Partnership Office, Goodwill, Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations, Healthy Start Coalition, and the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) to help mobilize the skills and talents of residents to better their communities. Invitations are also being extended to other community partners. Participants of the Neighborhood Connections Action Team are beginning to

learn the principles of ABCD and are developing ways to apply this work in their own neighborhoods.

<b>What is Asset-Based Community Development?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>ABCD is a method for building communities that begins with discovering a community’s capacities and assets, rather than focusing strictly on needs, deficits, and problems.</i></li> <li>• <i>It was developed through work and research in thousands of neighborhoods by the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University.</i></li> <li>• <i>The research has shown that a healthy and strong community is one in which there are opportunities for individuals to share their capacities, assets and gifts (talents, skills, knowledge, abilities) with others.</i></li> </ul>

**Senior Driving Issues**

(Mobility & Transportation Action Team)

More drivers over age 65 are on the road than ever before and research shows that people are driving later into life than previous generations. While this may indicate prolonged independence in later life, there are also several issues facing older drivers that participants were keen to learn more about. Statistically, older drivers are safer on the road. However, due to increased frailty, they are more likely to be fatally injured in the event of accidents. Participants learned about the prevalence and dangers of cognitive impairment and the difficulties of getting older drivers who deal with these impairments to surrender their car keys.

The 85 and over age group represents the fastest growing demographic segment of the population

and over 50% of this cohort has Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Studies show that drivers with dementia are nearly 8 times more likely to be involved in an accident than others of the same age without cognitive impairments. Participants learned about driver assessment and rehabilitation programs that exist in the community and stressed the need to learn more about senior driving issues. They decided to explore driving aids which may assist older drivers in maintaining their driving privileges and driving alternatives that would allow older individuals to safely maintain their independence.

### **Lifespan Design**

(Housing Action Team)

Research shows that a majority of older adults across the nation have a desire to "age in place" – that is, to continue to live in the communities and homes in which they have spent a significant portion of their lives. Residents of Sarasota County are no different and showed great interest in learning about the possibilities for designing barrier-free homes for people of all ages. By creating a barrier-free environment, Lifespan Design, an outgrowth of Universal Design, enables individuals to remain in their homes as they age even though mobility and other physical abilities decline. Lifespan Design is design that meets needs and extends capabilities and creates a comfortable, safe and accessible home for the rest of one's life through design features such as:

- Single floor living (either a one story home or a two story with a bedroom and bath on the first floor)
- Open floor plan (easy flow of one room to another with relatively few corners and turns)
- Extra wide doorways and hallways
- Flexible, multi-use space to accommodate home offices, grown children and grandchildren, guests, etc.
- Additional lighting for increased visibility
- Minimal or low step entries and thresholds
- Low maintenance inside and out

Lifespan Design applications can be an alternative to institutional care and can be integrated into new building plans or retrofitted to existing homes. Participants attended several meetings to hear from experts on Lifespan and Universal Design and identified the importance of increasing awareness of the benefits of this all-inclusive design philosophy in the larger community.

### **Community Planning**

(Community Design Action Team)

The ways that our communities are designed significantly impact our lives. Access to transportation, goods and services, and learning and social opportunities all depend on our ability to get around our community. Participants learned about Sarasota County's plans for growth and the ways that our aging population is being considered in the Comprehensive Plans. Such factors include: distances considered "walkable," accessibility to public transportation, and zoning issues to allow for these changes. Walking distances have been shortened, increased ease and access of public transportation are planned, and the village concept, which provides for affordable and self-sustaining town centers are being considered. Zoning regulations that define how, where, and how much to build have wide-ranging effects. Beyond transportation and walkability, there is a direct relationship between these zoning regulations and possible housing models that provide options and alternatives to our community. Development of housing options includes communal living arrangements, granny flats, mixed-use and mixed-income developments. Some of these are limited by current zoning laws. These laws may need to be revisited before Sarasota County can move forward in creating housing options that satisfy the diverse desires of our residents.

## **Lifelong Learning Opportunities**

(Lifelong Learning Action Team)

Part of active living is lifelong learning. The lifelong learning action team explored ways to create an environment where lifelong learning is a part of the community culture. There were a number of lifelong learning organizations, interested residents and the Sarasota County Library System involved in discussions. Working together they developed a logo and created a link on the Library website to “Lifelong Learning” programs and institutions. The group developed a simple application so that nonprofit organizations and programs for lifelong learning could apply to be listed on the website. This action has created a web-based one-stop for lifelong learning opportunities in Sarasota County and another way to help share information in the community. The Gulfgate Library hosted a Lifelong Learning Fair to showcase the lifelong learning opportunities in Sarasota County. The group continues to explore ways to share information about lifelong learning opportunities.

## **Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)**

(Wellness & Active Living Action Team)

One of the learning sessions focused on results from a recent local survey through the NORC Project. NORC stands for “Naturally Occurring Retirement Community” and the local demonstration project is designed to help seniors age in their own neighborhoods. Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Sarasota-Manatee, Inc. is the lead agency working with Senior Friendship Centers, Catholic Charities and the University of South Florida. The project uses strategies to empower seniors to “age in place” and offers social opportunities, services, and resources. The first phase of the project was a survey, designed to shed light on questions regarding life satisfaction, factors that cause stress, desired supportive services, and interest in activities and involvement of elders in our community. Following the survey, project

managers would work with the NORC to provide programs and resources desired. Our learning session provided us with the survey results, which set the stage for thinking about the needs of older adults in the community. While caution dictates that one not generalize to the larger population (the survey sample was small), the survey information led to a rich discussion around transportation concerns, affordability of housing and different housing options (i.e. elder co-housing), portability of the homestead exemption, employment options available past the age of 65, and creating awareness and easy connection to services, programs and information. The concerns and possibilities were consistent with other conversations we had in the community.

## **DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE**

The following are compelling issues and exciting opportunities that are currently being explored.

### **Community Awareness**

*“...the goal for all of us is to age successfully. To age successfully, means that regardless of circumstances, you are squeezing the most juice out of life possible.”*

*“I did learn that there are a lot of resources out there and they need to be brought together under one “marketing” umbrella so folks know what’s available. I don’t think people even know where to call to get information.”*

The significance of community awareness became apparent in many of the action team discussions. Participants identified information that needed to be shared more readily with residents throughout the community. Access to

comprehensive information was a concern. Participants also recognized that we assume limitations when we are quick to label others as “older adult”, “elder”, “retiree” and “senior citizen”. Such age bias interferes with acknowledging the gifts and talents of an individual.

Ideas for improved community awareness represented three areas:

- **Create a cultural shift.** It’s imperative to design messages that create a cultural shift in the way our society views aging and differences among generations. The desired result is to embrace the gifts and talents of all members of the community. We should shift how we think of aging and the “aged,” minimizing age bias between different generations. This is no small task and will require individuals from many sectors making a commitment to this change.
- **Knowledge of service availability.** Our community offers many services yet often residents are not aware of their availability. This covers a broad spectrum that includes essential needs (meals and nutrition, housing); health and wellness (health and dental care, home health and nursing care, mental health services, health education, clinics and hospitals, exercise and fitness); independence (information and referral, caregiver support and training, transportation, legal assistance, financial counseling); and civic and community engagement (employment, volunteerism, lifelong learning, cultural and leisure activities, faith-based organizations.). Making these services readily available should be the community’s ultimate goal. Some possibilities for developing multiple ways to access this information are: web-based search engines, telephone-based directories, publications, and one-stop community centers whose staff can assist

individuals in finding the appropriate resources.

- **General knowledge of issues important to healthy living and creating healthy communities.** This includes information about walkable communities, lifespan and universal design, elder driver concerns, promoting the value of lifelong learning, and opportunities for neighborhood-based solutions and initiatives.

In January 2006, the United Way of Sarasota County in partnership with Senior Friendship Centers began the planning phase of an initiative focused on building community capacity to help us age and live well. This initiative has three components: increasing public knowledge of service availability, creating a cultural shift so that our community sees aging as an opportunity rather than a problem, and increasing volunteerism of older adults. This community capacity initiative will in part, create a countywide community awareness plan which could build on the ideas and issues identified through the action teams. Topics from the community conversations will inform this awareness-raising effort which may include: news articles, editorials, public service announcements, and community events. This project will also identify other strategies for marketing this information to the public, including educating healthcare providers, hosting community dialogues, and developing curriculums for professionals in the aging field, such as caregiver support and older worker issues. There will be opportunities for volunteer participation in this project.

This United Way and Senior Friendship Center initiative also includes a volunteerism component which is being approached through work in neighborhoods. SCOPE staff is facilitating this process using the principles of ABCD and has begun initial work with several neighborhoods. (see page 6 for a description of

ABCD and pages 12-13 for more details on this neighborhood work)

### **Center for Community Aging**

*“I learned that even though we age, if we continue to participate in life, we will be healthier, happier and enjoy our Golden Years even more so.”*

Our community is rich with opportunities for older adults, including cultural and lifelong learning programs, social and recreational activities, and meaningful volunteerism. We also have institutes of higher education, (Manatee Community College, New College of Florida, University of South Florida and Ringling School of Art & Design, Keiser College) and three hospitals (Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System, Doctors Hospital, Venice Regional Healthcare) in Sarasota County. Our older demographic offers a great base for research on a myriad of issues. There is enormous potential in harnessing these resources to create leading edge programs to engage older adults. These could be part of a center for creative and active aging. This center could be a fabulous community asset and entice older adults to come to Sarasota, as well as benefit residents regardless of age. This center could provide:

- Lifelong learning programs for older adults tying into the wealth of existing programs and academic institutions.
- The opportunity to develop creative programs drawing on the rich artistic and cultural assets in Sarasota. Research shows that engaging in the creative process contributes to good physical and mental health.
- A central place to connect retirees to employment, entrepreneurial and meaningful volunteer opportunities
- A program to engage midlife and older adults in creative exploration of their next life stage. Many communities are offering programs to

help pre-retirees and newly retired adults identify and connect with their passion(s) for the post-retirement years.

- A site for rich community-based research and academic study. Both medical and social research through partnership with local hospitals and universities are possible. Examples include monitoring chronic medical conditions, exploring the relationship between wellness and civic engagement, and pilot-testing new programs, products and services.

This center may include a physical place for folks to get connected and learn as well as provide strong web-based relationships and collaborations among the many assets in Sarasota County.

Though primarily focused on services, a model for inspiration may be the Fairhill Center for Aging in Cleveland, Ohio. This 9.5 acre campus provides a three-pronged approach to successful aging (excerpt from website):

- A Care and Caregiving Center provides education, information and support available from staff and peer-led groups on Kinship Care (older adults raising children), family caregiving, intergenerational and assistive technology resources as well as a short-term emergency house for older adults.
- A Collaborative Campus as a community resource which houses lifelong learning and service provision organizations.
- Wellness and Wisdom Programs which are peer and volunteer-led, and include lifelong learning, computer and internet workshops, fitness and crafts, and workshops for exploring meaningful civic engagement opportunities.

## Housing and Physical Spaces

*“In particular I was glad to see that many folks are thinking of various housing solutions to help seniors age in place. I am hoping that the report SCOPE prepares will assist the county to begin to form policy that will help change housing codes to allow “granny flats”, shared housing, multiple family dwellings in R1, etc., especially with a focus on transportation options that are friendly to seniors and do not rely on automobiles.”*

*“Focusing on housing issues is significant to me, not only personally as I age, but all because the problem is only growing as so many of us are able to survive to truly an old age. That period of our lives needs to include some measure of independence and opportunities to continue contributing to our community.”*

The topic of housing is broad and offers opportunity for exploration in many areas. Central themes are: appropriate design to maximize one’s independence and mobility and the sense of community that the living arrangement fosters. This includes land-use planning that allows for mixed-use developments and greater flexibility in community design that makes services, recreation, and social opportunities more accessible. Projects that incorporate affordability, mixed-age, mixed-use, communal living qualities, and universal design (design that accommodates all ranges of age and mobility) are among some of the possibilities for Sarasota County. Topics should include new developments as well as modification of existing homes. Several other communities have been creative in their approaches (the following are excerpts from websites).

- **Nathalie Salmon Home, Chicago, Illinois** – This housing model lends itself to intergenerational living on each of its five floors. This 54-unit building is a fully handicap accessible facility that accommodates 48 seniors and seven students. The first floor includes a kitchen, a common dining room, a community room, a recreation area, a garden room, a library, a family apartment and offices of volunteer coordinator and property manager. The second, third and fourth floors offer one and two bedroom apartments for independent elderly, studio apartments for resident assistants and three-bedroom apartments for families with children. The fifth floor is an assisted living community for 14 frail elderly who need some assistance with their daily activities.

Developing a demonstration home that showcases the latest technology to help people remain in their homes as they age could be a possibility. A learning institute modeled on the Florida House Institute could work with economic development programs to bring new services and manufacturers to the community. An example follows:

- **Universal Design Demonstration Home, Atlantic City, NJ** – The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) of Atlantic City, New Jersey in partnership with AARP and the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University funded the design and construction of the Universal Design Demonstration Home near Atlantic City. The home showcases affordable and practical Universal Design features, which may be incorporated into new home construction or renovations. The demonstration home is part of a larger project which has three initiatives: Universal Demonstration Home, Universal Homes for Atlantic City, and Home Modifications. The overall goals of the

project are to provide universally designed homes and neighborhoods in Atlantic City and to allow individuals with disabilities to remain in their homes.

- **The Easy Living Home Coalition in Atlanta, Georgia.** In this initiative, the Home Builders Association of Georgia, AARP Georgia, Concrete Change – a non-profit organization committed to making homes “visitable” by people with diverse abilities – and several other groups, are collaborating on a voluntary program to certify open-market homes that meet a specified, basic standard of universal design.
- **AARP’s Design for the Lifespan: Aging in Place,** is a collaborative effort between the AARP, National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to reach the mainstream market for homes designed for the nation’s aging population. AARP has shown in its *Fixing to Stay* project that people want to “age in place” (in their own homes), which raises the urgent need to train remodelers and contractors who are responsible for much of the home modification work. A key outcome has been a program called Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists (CAPS). Sarasota County has CAPS who could be partners on future projects.

### **Economic and Workforce Opportunities**

Our demographics make us a compelling market and test site for products and services for older adults. Sarasota County is in a unique position to attract manufacturers of creative products, prototypes and services. Baby boomers continue to dominate the marketplace and devices to help daily living, manage health concerns or create a safer environment range from the simple to the complex. Examples include stove burners that turn off after a designated time period; monitors

to remind one to take medication and send simple health information (i.e. blood pressure, weight, heart rate) electronically to a medical professional; and vibrating soles to stimulate nerve endings and help improve balance. Our community is poised to explore creative and intentional dialogue around this topic. Statistics show that by 2012, nearly 20% of the workforce will be over the age of 55. A growing labor shortage will oblige our community to understand better how to attract and retain an older workforce. This includes creating meaningful opportunities for both a paid and a volunteer workforce. The Suncoast Workforce Board is working with employers and businesses to communicate tips for hiring and retaining older workers.

### **Neighbors and Neighborhood Associations**

*“It was reassuring to know that there were other people in the community interested in bridging the generations. Building a community is a huge endeavor which can be enhanced by considering everyone’s contribution and talents...Sarasota is in a new period of growth and we want to embrace the changes taking place.”*

Neighborhoods are a central piece to creating a community that supports all of its residents, regardless of age. Building relationships with neighbors can allow people to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible as they get older. Other issues, such as caregiving and caregiver respite, transportation, mental and physical exercises, and landscaping can also be addressed through collaborative work among neighbors. We are exploring ways to maximize these relationships and are working intentionally with individuals and neighborhood associations.

Some examples of neighbors working together to address issues in the community follow:

- Chicago, Illinois – A seniors group worked with the Greater Grand Crossing Organizing Committee to open an intergenerational center at a local park.
- Abbot Park, Chicago, Illinois - Seniors run a program for driver training which was originally intended for seniors but it now open to the entire community.

SCOPE staff is currently working in the following neighborhoods and areas throughout Sarasota County using the Asset-Based Community Development principles (see page 6): The Winds, Amaryllis Park, North Port and Venice Gardens.

The purpose of doing this work is to increase relationships and connections between people and to create opportunities for people to share their gifts, talents, and assets in order to build a strong community. The research shows that communities whose residents have high levels of trust and relationships with each other and where there are abundant opportunities for people to contribute their gifts are healthier – there is less crime, less cardiovascular disease, even fewer colds.

Initial conversations have focused on the existing skills, talents, and gifts of individuals within those neighborhoods and ways to nurture and grow the relationships and exchange of skills between people. Planned activities include developing an expanded caregiver support network in North Port and conducting asset assessments to determine ways that neighbors can care for neighbors in Venice Gardens.

### **Mobility and Transportation**

Independence and transportation are inextricably linked to each other and transportation usually means driving a car in Sarasota County. Inability to “get around” the community is a fear

that many have later in life. Community discussion will focus more intently on volunteer drivers and innovative driver pool systems. We will work with neighbors and associations to learn their desire and interest in participating in volunteer driving systems in their neighborhoods. We will explore current volunteer systems (i.e. FISH) and some promising ideas from other communities.

One example to explore is ITN America, the Independent Transportation Network, a community-based alternative transportation service for seniors and the visually impaired. This service has been described as “the dignified transportation for seniors,” and began in Portland Maine, now with several other affiliates including Orlando, Florida. It combines a system of paid transportation services and a community support network. A person ready to give up driving can donate their car to ITN and receive a credit (based on the resale value of their car) to draw on for future rides at approximately \$3/ride. Once the credit is drawn down, the rider can add more funds to his account by credit card. No money changes hands for the ride, and the rider receives a discount for shared rides and pre-planned rides. The rider receives an account statement each month. ITN America provides the software for scheduling rides and running the program, and the business model. Each community must establish a diversified funding base in order to raise the funds needed to complement the fare.

### **Healthcare and Supportive Services**

The volunteer interest focused on helping caregivers increase their awareness of training, respite and support groups; expanding awareness of community resources for seniors in general, and expanding volunteer transportation service. These topics are being addressed through the Community Awareness efforts and the Mobility and Transportation discussions. We will invite the healthcare action team members to stay

engaged through the other discussions as volunteers will be needed to accomplish these goals. Possibilities include neighborhood-based services for transportation and communication (newsletters, phone trees, public presentations) of services and resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we move forward, the next challenge is to harness community energy around the big directions identified. These directions for the

future are opportunities to invite public and private community partners to work together to move these ideas along. SCOPE's role is one of convener and catalyst. It is the community commitment of energy, time and talents that will create change and implement strategies. SCOPE will work to create the opportunities for partnerships, to convene community members around these important issues, and facilitate processes that will move Sarasota County forward.

**Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence (SCOPE)** is a 501 (c) (3) whose mission is to engage our community in planning for excellence through a process of open dialogue and impartial research, to establish priorities, propose solutions and monitor change to enhance the quality of life in Sarasota County.

Additional copies of this report are available on the SCOPE website:  
[www.scopexcel.org](http://www.scopexcel.org)



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