

California Aging Issues

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Diane Gilmer - editor

At about the age of 16, most people learn to drive, an event frequently considered a marker of adulthood. The automobile has been the primary mode of transportation in our country for many years – for both older and younger generations. In later years, there is a growing reliance on driving and more than 90% of trips to stores, services, and activities are by car.

Loss of a driver's license can have a major impact on the life of an older person – “you are taking away my manhood”, one older gentleman told me. Studies show loss of license lowers self-esteem, increases sense of loneliness and decreases activity level – all which can affect quality of life. Alternative forms of transportation, buses, trains, or areas for walking, are often not available, particularly in suburban and rural areas of our country.

In this issue, Betty Perry, Public Policy Director for the Older Women's League, writes about driving in later years from the perspective of advocacy groups for older people – and asks us to understand and consider what is fair.

* In response to the recommendations of the ANR Program Policy Advisory Committee, **California Aging Issues** will address “Critical Issues” in the area of aging : skill development for caregivers, shifting demographics of California, preparing service agencies for the growing elderly population, and promoting family support and relationships.

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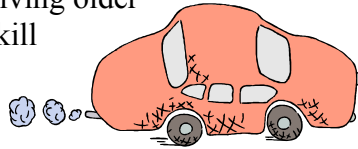
Aging and Driving: A Closer Look

-- by Betty Perry, Public Policy Director,
Older Women's League of California

At the Santa Monica farmers market recently, an eighty-five year old driver was involved in an accident that killed 10 people. This brought to the forefront, once again, the issue of older driver safety. Since driving is so important to older Californians, I thought you would like to know about the legislative hearing held at the State Capitol on August 26, 2003. Arranged by Senator John Vasconcellos and Assembly Member Lynn Daucher, chairs of the legislative committees dedicated to aging and long-term care, the hearing brought together authorities to discuss the question, “Should Age be a Factor in Licensure and Renewal?” The information from these authorities proved interesting and hopeful for the older driver.

First and foremost, we learned that older people are not the most dangerous drivers on the road. In fact, they have fewer accidents than younger ones (In fairness to the younger driver, they do not drive as many miles, either) and accidents involving older drivers rarely kill other people.

However, if an older driver is in a crash that has a fatality, the older person has the greatest risk of dying or being injured.



(Persons in their 60s are relatively safe drivers, representing 14% of the drivers and 8% of the accidents. Accident rates increase at about age 70.)

How does the state know when a person is an unsafe driver? Testing usually occurs only when there has been an accident or it is license renewal time. Speakers at the hearing told us that family members and doctors are the principal groups that report the unsafe older driver. (Interestingly, doctors are particularly reluctant to restrict someone's driving, not wanting to offend the person). The best solution is when the older person recognizes the problem (most are aware when they do not drive safely*) and makes early driving modifications or decides to quit driving.

Representatives from the department of Motor Vehicles stressed the need to have a fair test to evaluate the older driver. A new program, The Three Tier Driver Assessment System, is currently under review by the DMV. In this system, the DMV would judge a person's physical and mental abilities – and do further

testing if a problem is presented in any area. Testing would not be based on age.

The senior advocacy groups all agreed that we do not want dangerous drivers on the road, dangerous drivers of any age. However, we do not want regulations which eliminate drivers by age or make it especially hard for an older driver to be licensed. For example, we think that a behind-the-wheel test, if failed, might be repeated more than once. When you are old and frail, and it has been fifty or sixty years since you took such a test, an extra attempt is fair.

We also think that more attention must be given the rural driver. This person is placed in an especially vulnerable position if their driver's license is lost. You do not want to return to the horse and buggy, like the one my grandmother drove for six miles from her farm to Chico before she had a Model T Ford.



Senior advocacy groups will continue to work for safe ways for seniors to keep behind the wheel of their cars. Another time we will explore the alternative means of transportation for seniors – (a very important issue – editor's comment!).

For an excellent resource on safe driving in later years go to:

<http://www.aarp.org/confacts/programs/driving.html>

*** Note: Make copies of the handout found on the last page of this newsletter "Should You Consider Limiting Your Driving" for your constituents.**

Focus on Verna Newman: Senior Volunteer

-- Recommended by Gloria Barrett,
Cooperative Extension Co. Dir.

Verna Newman, a Sacramento resident since 1947, has been an extraordinary volunteer for over 50 years. She has been an active member in 4-H Food and Nutrition programs and a volunteer



Master Gardener. One of her jobs in 4-H was to judge clothing and food demonstrations – in fairs from the Oregon border to San Jose. Mrs. Newman became a Master Gardener in 1980, volunteering over 5,000 hours. In this capacity, she demonstrated tree planting for the Sacramento Tree Foundation. She was once in charge of planting 600 trees in the Wilton area.

Mrs. Newman has also served as a volunteer for Bruceville Convalescent home. One of her projects at the convalescent home was to teach residents about plants. She would bring them a sprig of the plant or flower to smell and see. The Master Gardeners, together with the Bruceville home, donated a bench with her name on it in recognition of her work.

After the death of her husband in 1954, Mrs. Newman raised her son by herself, working to support the two of them. She spent many years working for Germain's Seed and Plant Company. One of her jobs was to test the Jackson Perkin's Rose. People who know her



best say that “she knows plants (all kinds) and how they grow.”

The walls of Mrs. Newman's home are covered with certificates of appreciation from organizations that she has helped: Kiwanis, Sacramento Volunteer Center, RSVP, 4-H, Florin Historical Society, Bruceville Terrace, Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, Sacramento Tree Foundation, and the State of California.

On December 16, 2003, Mrs. Newman woman will be 95 years old. Happy Birthday to a truly remarkable person.



Myths and Truths



Myth: Depression is normal in later life.

Truth: Depression is not a normal result of aging - nor is it more common among older people than younger ones. Illnesses, such as heart disease or cancer, or stressful life events (loss of a spouse or divorce) can trigger depression. Some people are susceptible to depression during specific seasons, such as at Christmas time, and others may find the dark months of winter particularly difficult. While most older people are very satisfied with their lives, untreated depression may underlie the high suicide rates among older men.

Warning signs of depression include self-neglect, loss of appetite, sleep problems, and confusional states. Most importantly, depression can be diagnosed and treated.

NUTRITION NEWS

Tips for Eating Out

-- Marci Klenk, CFCS
Napa County Cooperative Extension

Most of today's seniors lead an active lifestyle. Many enjoy meeting friends for lunch or dinner in a local restaurant. Still others rely on fast foods and prepared foods from the local deli or grocery store. In fact, it is estimated that about 50 percent of every food dollar is spent on food others prepare.

When food-borne illness occurs, most people think of the last meal they ate. In fact, depending on the bacteria, it can take from 20 minutes to up to 6 weeks for food-borne illness symptoms to occur. Because food-borne illness can have flu-like symptoms (stomachache, headache, vomiting, diarrhea), many cases are not reported. It is always best to check with your doctor should you experience these symptoms after eating out.

Protect yourself when you eat out! Check the place, is it clean, are the restrooms clean? If not, maybe you should not eat there.

- Always wash your hands before you eat.
 - If hot food is not hot, send it back and order something else. The food may have been held at too low a temperature.
 - If ordering a hamburger, make sure it has been cooked thoroughly to 160°F.
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Special Food Advice

– Marci, continued.

The science of food safety is constantly changing. Recommendations are updated frequently as scientists learn more about bacteria that cause food-borne illness. The USDA has compiled a list of foods that seniors and others at risk of illness are advised not to eat, including:

- Raw fin fish and raw shellfish
 - Raw or unpasteurized milk or cheese
 - Raw or lightly cooked eggs
 - Raw meat or poultry
 - Raw sprouts
 - Unpasteurized or untreated fruit or vegetable juice.
-

Men and Cooking

Kelly Greene, *journalist for the Wall Street Journal*, published an article about the Broomfield, New York, cooking class for older men (*California Aging Issues, July, 2003*). The article, "Late in Life, Men Find Their Way in the Kitchen --- Cooking Classes Can Double as Therapy for Widowers; How to peel a Carrot", mentions similar work in this area by Lila Shelton, nutritionist for California's Area 4 Agency on Aging.



Nutrition Education

The University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service has developed an interactive program curriculum for educators on Elder Nutrition and Food Safety (ENAFS) curriculum. Materials

are available in English and Spanish (some modules are also in Haitian and Vietnamese). This curriculum can be ordered on the IFAS Bookstore website:

<http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu/merchant2/>

Go to the "Education" section, click on the CD-ROMs and Software portion and you will see the ENAFS materials.

Mark your calendars:



“Annual Alzheimer’s Workshop”

Saturday, November 1st, 2003
American River College,
Sacramento CA.

Guest Speaker: Dr. Andrew Duxbury
Topics include: psycho/social health, legal issues, caregiving, and issues of early diagnosis.

8 hours of CEU credit are available if you are an RN, LVN, CNA, RCFE admin., LCSW, or LMFT.

For more information, call 916-448-7001

“Aging in Place”

Saturday, December 6, 2003
Primrose Care Facility,
7707 Rush River Drive
Sacramento, CA

8 hours of CEU credits for LCSW, LMFT, and NHA

Sponsored by American River College Gerontology Department

For more information, call 916-448-7001

Resources on Aging

Where to get help?



■ For ongoing State Legislation information, contact Sarah Sutro-Steenhausen, Consultant, Senate Subcommittee on Aging and Long Term Care:
Sarah.Sutro@SEN.CA.GOV

■ A national all-around source of excellent information:
<http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/elderpage.html>

■ National Institute of Aging:
<http://www.nia.nih.gov>

■ California Department of Aging:
<http://www.aging.state.ca.us/>

■ DANR Aging Workgroup site:
<http://groups.ucanr.org/elderly/>

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“SHOULD YOU CONSIDER LIMITING YOUR DRIVING?”



**DO YOU TAKE MEDICATIONS THAT
MAKE YOU SLEEPY?**



**HAVE YOU HAD SOME ACCIDENTS RECENTLY,
EVEN FENDER BENDERS?**



**HAVE YOU SOMETIMES CONFUSED THE GAS
PEDAL WITH THE BRAKE PEDAL?**



**DO YOU THINK TRAFFIC SIGNS ARE MORE
CONFUSING NOWADAYS?**



**DO CARS OR PEDESTRIANS SEEM TO APPEAR
OUT OF NOWHERE?**



**IS IT GETTING HARDER TO NAVIGATE, THAT IS,
DO YOU GET LOST A LOT?**



**IS IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO LOOK OVER YOUR
LEFT SHOULDER WHEN TURNING LEFT OR
PULLING OUT INTO TRAFFIC?**



DO OTHER DRIVERS OFTEN HONK AT YOU?



DO PEOPLE WHIZ BY YOU ON THE FREEWAY?

**IF THESE ARE CONCERNS FOR YOU –
TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR.**

