



State Society on Aging of New York

# SSA BULLETIN

SUMMER 2008

## A sneak peak at the 2008 conference:

*Cutting Edge Issues in Gerontology throughout New York State*

**LOCATION:** *Gideon Putnam Hotel and Conference Center*

**DATES:** *October 23-25, 2008*

This year, SSA conference abstracts have soared to over 65 submissions and promises to deliver diverse and enriching material to our 2008 meeting entitled, "The Road to the Future: Healthy Aging & Mental Health." The meeting is being held at the Gideon Putnam Hotel and Conference Center October 23-25, 2008. This conference affords a remarkable opportunity to assimilate new information, understand creative approaches, and reflect on a range of exciting material presented by other distinguished professionals.

Our conference will kick-off with a **TOWN HALL** meeting focusing on substance abuse, "*Getting Renewed Life: The Interface of Treatment and Legislation to Help Older New Yorkers with Substance Abuse and Addiction.*" The remainder of the day will be devoted to thought-provoking workshops, paper presentations, symposiums, poster and artist forums, with special sessions focusing on retirement, leisure, end-of-life planning, intergenerational care, and housing. Thursday's luncheon, sponsored by

SSA's past presidents, will feature a forum with the State Office for the Aging (SOFA) to explore issues surrounding workforce education and training. In the afternoon, the NYS Geriatric Education Consortium will sponsor the **KERMIT SCHOOLER SYMPOSIUM**. This symposium will provide insights from a panel of esteemed experts that will address effective tools for meeting the mental health needs of elders and the importance of policy and planning to the field. The panel includes **Michael Friedman** and **Kimberly Steinhagen** from The Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York, **Chris Langston**, Program Director at the John A. Hartford Foundation, and **Gary Kennedy**, MD, Director, Geriatric Psychiatry, Montefiore Medical Center. During Thursday evening's dinner the SSA will present **MICHAEL FRIEDMAN** with the esteemed Presidential Award.

Friday morning begins early, with an SSA Membership meeting followed by the **GEORGE N. WARNER**

**MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM**, coordinated by **Dr. John Krout**. This symposium will feature an overview and action update from the first ever comprehensive New York Statewide Summit on Rural Aging held last fall. At the Summit, individuals from 27 rural counties (including service providers and practitioners, rural elder advocates, elected officials and state agency staff) identified a policy agenda addressing six key quality of life areas. The symposium will include representatives from NYSOFA, the NYS Legislature and the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources who will provide updates on legislative and programmatic initiatives that address the needs of New York's rural elders.

Throughout the day on Friday there are workshops on HIV/AIDS, elder abuse, care giving, poverty, and health indicators. These presentations will offer stimulating discussion and insights in the field of aging. Friday's luncheon highlights the presentation of the Walter Beattie Award to **MICHAEL BURGESS**. Workshops, poster sessions and panels will continue throughout the day. The Friday evening program begins with our silent auction benefit, coordinated by **Patricia Maiden**. During the dinner hour, **ROBERT BLANCATO** will discuss policy issues in the field of aging, sure to be a stimulating and informative presentation!

Saturday morning will start with a breakfast roundtable discussion of innovative programs and issues in gerontology for physicians, social workers, nurses and other professionals. Awareness of emerging practices, coupled with insight and expertise, is our

motivating force. Through these and other group discussions, SSA hopes to stay at the forefront of offering a better way of life for New York's aging population.

We are pleased to have **Dr. Janna Heyman** serving as the 2008 SSA Conference Program Chairperson helping to organize these conference sessions for SSA. Dr. Heyman is an Associate Professor at Fordham University's University Graduate School of Social Service and is Associate Director of Fordham's Ravazzin Center on Aging.



**Gideon Putnam Hotel and Conference Center**

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### **A Message From SSA's President, Deborah Heiser**

For the past 36 years, SSA has been working toward improving the lives and image and standing of the elderly in New York. We've done so by "providing a forum for the exchange of information, exploration of issues and concerns, and the development of policy recommendations in the field of aging". This year, our focus is on Healthy Aging and Mental Health. We are bringing together an exciting conference at the

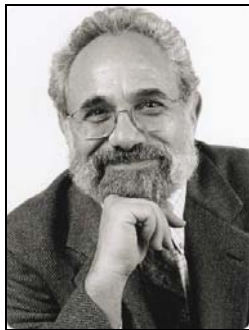
Gideon Putnam in Saratoga Springs, NY with some of New York's finest scholars and researchers, advocates, clinicians, government officials, and private citizens in the field of aging. It promises to be stimulating and enlightening. I look forward to seeing you at the conference!



**Deborah Heiser, PhD**  
**2008 President of SSA**

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## **THE 2008 AWARD** **RECIPIENTS**



**Michael Friedman**  
**2008 Presidential Award Recipient**

**Michael B. Friedman** is the founder and Chairperson of the Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York and Director of The Center for Policy and Advocacy of The Mental Health Associations of New York City and Westchester. In addition he teaches courses on health policy and on professional identity at Columbia University School of Social Work as well

as a course on mental health policy at Columbia's School of Public Health.

In a career which has spanned 40 years, Mr. Friedman has served as, Regional Director (Deputy Commissioner) of the New York State Office of Mental Health, Director of Network Development for The Department of Psychiatry of New York Presbyterian Hospital, Executive Director of The Mental Health Association of Westchester, Director of Operations of The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services; and Program Director, The Bridge, Inc. In the late 60's and early 70's, he taught philosophy at a number of colleges in the NYC area.

Mr. Friedman has been extremely active in the community over the years, working with numerous advisory and advocacy groups at the local, state, and federal levels. He is a Past President of the Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, was Chairman of the Hudson River Planning Advisory Committee of the Office of Mental Health, was Vice-Chairman of the New York City Public Child Fatality Review Committee, and served on The National Institute of Mental Health Services Research Planning Panel to mention just a few of his community service activities.

Currently, he is a member of The New York State Adult Home Reform Coalition, The Campaign for Mental Health Housing Reform, The Mental Health Committee of the New York State Child Action Network, The NYS OMH Commissioner's Committee for Families, and other advocacy and advisory groups. He served on the Health Care Policy

Advisory Committee for the Governor's Transition Team in 2006.

Mr. Friedman has spoken at many professional conferences and published numerous articles and opinion essays. His topics have included mental health policy and finance, child mental health, geriatric mental health, advocacy, family support, managed care, psychiatric rehabilitation, child welfare, family violence, stigma, and political philosophy. His recent opinion essays and other material on mental health policy can be found at [www.mhawestchester.org/advocates/metcenter.asp](http://www.mhawestchester.org/advocates/metcenter.asp) or [www.mhawestchester.org/advocates/geriatrichome.asp](http://www.mhawestchester.org/advocates/geriatrichome.asp).

Mr. Friedman received his Bachelor's degree from Columbia College, a Master's degree in philosophy from Columbia University, and a Master's in Social Work from the Hunter College School of Social Work.

Mr. Friedman is also a semi-professional jazz pianist and photographer.



**Michael Burgess**  
**2008 Recipient of Walter Beattie**  
**Award**

Michael Burgess was appointed by former Governor Eliot Spitzer, and

confirmed by the New York State Senate, to serve as the Director of the New York State Office for the Aging in February 2007. Governor David A. Patterson reappointed him on April 2008. As Director of the State Office for the Aging, Mr. Burgess oversees the administration of federal and state funded programs designed to assist the more than 3.2 million elderly residents in the state, as well as programs that assist family members and others involved with helping elderly residents that are in need of greater levels of assistance. The Office for the Aging assists older New Yorkers to be as independent as possible, for as long as possible, through advocacy, and the development and delivery of programs and services which support and empower the elderly and their families, in partnership with the network of public and private organizations which serve them.

Prior to joining the Office for Aging, Mr. Burgess was the Executive Director of the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans, and for several years prior to that, was the Executive Director of the New York StateWide Senior Action Council. In those positions, he played a major role in the passage of landmark state legislation, including the EPIC prescription drug program and subsequent expansion of the EPIC program. Earlier in his career, Mr. Burgess served as the Executive Director of the Non-Profit Resource Center, an organization which worked to strengthen the capacity of smaller non-profit agencies so that they could better serve their constituents. He also served as the Executive Director for the Statewide Emergency Network for Social and Economic Security.

He is the author of “To the Last Breath,” a book that chronicles the life and times of Rose Kryzak, a leader and role model who was involved in the Senior Action Movement for many years.

Mr. Burgess began his career in Watertown, NY, his childhood home, working for the local anti-poverty community assistance program as Director of the Energy and Weatherization Program.

Mr. Burgess was born in Massena, New York and is a graduate of St. Lawrence University. He resides in Albany, with his wife Katherine and they have two children.

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### **Speaking at this year’s Conference:**



**Robert Blancato**

**Robert Blancato** is President of Matz, Blancato & Associates, Inc. a firm specializing in government affairs, association and coalition management, and advocacy services since 1996. During that time his firm has provided Washington representational services for scores of clients. The firm provides lobbying and advocacy services strategic consulting, legislative development, association management. Clients

according to longevity include the Mature Market Institute of MetLife, National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Program, Long Term Care Partners, the Elder Justice Coalition, the California Elderly Nutrition Partnership and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems.

Blancato’s career also included some 20 years of public service. He served on the Policy Committee and Executive Committee of the 2005 White House Conference on aging, appointed by Representative Nancy Pelosi. He served as the Executive Director of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging, appointed by President Clinton and a Senior Executive Service position from 1994 to 1996. In addition Bob served in senior staff positions in the House of Representatives including 10 years as a Chief of Staff to former REP Mario Biaggi of New York and serving as Staff Director of the House Select Committee on Aging’s Subcommittee on Human Services from 1977 through 1988 and as Senior Advisor until 1993. In 2004 Bob was appointed by Rep. Nancy Pelosi to be on the Policy Committee for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

Bob currently serves as the Immediate Past President of the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Chairman of the National Silver Haired Congress Advisory Council, Special Advisor to the Board of Generations United and the Board of Directors for the American Society on Aging, (2000-2003 and 2005-2008) the Greater Washington Urban League and Senior Navigator. He was a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations World Assembly on Aging in 1982 in Vienna and a delegate

to the 1998 White House Conference on Social Security.

The American Society on Aging (ASA) awarded him the ASA Award in 1999 for outstanding contributions to the field of aging. In 2007 Bob received the Claude Pepper Award for excellence in Community Based Long Term Care from the National Institute of Community Based Long Term Care. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Georgetown University and a Master of Public Administration from American University. He has served as Associate Professorial Lecturer in the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University and is currently serving as an adjunct professor in the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

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## **Members in the News!**

### **Geriatric Depression Screening Initiative: a 2-time award winning private-public partnership**

**By**

**Jackie Berman**

Almost 20 percent of persons sixty years of age and older experience mental disorders that are not normal to aging. Yet seniors underutilize mental health services more than any other age group. Reasons for underutilization include seniors' lack of information about the disease and its symptoms, stigma associated with mental illness, the shortage of culturally competent and

bilingual staff trained to recognize and treat older minority persons with depression, and the relative underutilization of depression screening tools with elders. Healthy aging requires attention to this public health problem.

To proactively respond, the New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA), the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the Mental Health Association of New York (MHA) joined forces in 2005 on an initiative, now in its fourth year, to educate seniors about depression, screen their mental health status using the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire) as a depression screening tool, and refer for further evaluation and treatment seniors found to be at-risk for clinical depression. The target for this Initiative is seniors attending publicly funded senior centers in New York City's minority and high-poverty communities and homebound older clients of publicly funded case management agencies in these communities.

Through culturally and linguistic appropriate activities, the initiative addresses: misconceptions, stigma, lack of knowledge and attitude barriers among seniors, with a particular focus on minority elders; misconceptions and lack of knowledge impeding the ability of senior center and case management agency staff to appropriately identify and refer depressed seniors they work with; access barriers to diagnosis and treatment including underutilization of depression screening tools in community settings; lack of understanding of geriatric depression and related screening, evaluation and treatment issues on the part of many primary care providers. Throughout the project, partners used a stakeholder process to

ensure input from New York's Asian and Latino communities to project design, particularly workshop content and format.

Project activities involve (1) training senior center staff to recognize the signs of clinical depression and to encourage center participants who appear depressed to participate in project activities; (2) training of case management agency staff to recognize the signs of clinical depression and also to administer the PHQ-9 to their clients, make referrals to the medical community, and conduct post-screening follow up; (3) provision of interactive workshops on depression myths, symptoms and treatment for senior center members; (4) screening seniors on site at their centers using the PHQ-9, counseling them on results and providing referral where necessary; (5) physician detailing to assist primary care providers in the evaluation and treatment of seniors who present with symptoms of clinical depression; and (6) follow-up with referred seniors one month after referral to ascertain whether they have contacted a physician.

The project began as a small pilot in one New York City borough, and was successfully replicated in all boroughs in subsequent years, reaching 73 senior centers and 7 case management agencies. The project team has trained 419 staff from both senior centers and case management agencies, and educated well over 2,000 seniors in English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean. The majority of those seniors agreed to be screened for depression using the PHQ-9 (81.0%). Screening activities resulted in the identification of over 200 senior center participants at-risk for depression who were referred to their primary care provider (12.7%).

The project has also proved to be effective in reaching minority elders with depression education and screening. Over the first three years of project implementation, close to one-third of senior center participants in the project spoke Chinese (39.2%), with a smaller percentage speaking Korean (14.5%), Spanish (11.5%) or Russian (4.0%). The remaining seniors were English speaking (30.8%)

Results from pre and post questionnaires indicate that seniors enjoyed the workshops and learned about geriatric depression. A paired t-test indicates that seniors scored significantly higher on a knowledge based index on depression at the conclusion of the workshop ( $p < .000$ ).

This project is continuing this year with the creation of three additional workshops on memory loss, anxiety/stress, and polypharmacy. This project has received the Aging Innovations award by the National Association for Area Agencies on Aging (N4A), as well as the 2008 Healthcare and Aging Award for exceptional work to improve the health and healthcare. This award was given by the American Society on Aging (ASA) Healthcare & Aging Network and Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative.



## **The NYC Coalition on Aging and Vision hosts first symposium in New York City**

With people living longer, age-related eye diseases that cause vision loss are on the rise. The NYC Coalition on Aging and Vision was formed in 2007 to heighten awareness of the importance of early disease detection and the role of vision rehabilitation services in maximizing independence when a person experiences vision loss. Its first major activity, a Symposium for 250 professionals on reaching the underserved, was held on June 17 to launch a year-long educational outreach and referral initiative.

The Allene Reuss Memorial Trust, the Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation and The New York Community Trust provided support for the Symposium. These philanthropies are also supporting the Coalition's outreach and educational project, which kicked-off with a session on how to complete a referral form to a vision rehabilitation services agency. Throughout the year, referral forms will be processed and expedited through the Department for the Aging and sent on to an appropriate vision rehabilitation agency. DFTA will also process requests from symposium participants to the Coalition for staff training or vision education sessions for their agencies and/or seniors in the community. The plenary session of the Symposium featured a keynote address by Dr. Eleanor E. Faye on "life with low vision" followed by presentations on vision rehabilitation service issues and legislative and advocacy issues.

Afternoon workshops included sessions on best practices in reaching the underserved, adaptive techniques and tools for daily living with vision loss, mental health and vision loss, diabetes and vision loss, computer use by people with vision loss and providing effective caregiving at home.

Coalition members in addition to the New York City Department for the Aging are: Aging in New York Fund, American Diabetes Association, Catholic Guild for the Blind, Helen Keller Services for the Blind, Hunter College School of Social Work, Isabella Geriatric Center, Lighthouse International, NYS Home Care Association, NYS Occupational Therapy Association, NYS Office of Children and Family Services/NYS Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped; SUNY College of Optometry; The Jewish Guild for the Blind; VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Weill Cornell Medical College.

For more information about the Coalition, please contact **Alberta L. Orr**, Coalition Coordinator at 212-442-0980 or email [aorr@aging.nyc.gov](mailto:aorr@aging.nyc.gov).





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The State Society on Aging of New York (SSA) and the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) are pleased to make our joint final report, *Working with Older Adults: Charting the Future of Workforce Training and Education in New York*, available on the websites of both SSA (<http://www.ssany.org>) and NYSOFA (<http://www.aging.ny.gov>). This report provides information, strategies, and suggestions obtained from a series of eight Listening Sessions held across New York State between 2006 and 2007 to address workforce needs. The report additionally seeks to provide guidance for action to address the education and training needed to successfully prepare New York State's diverse workforce to interact and serve older adults and their families.

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## **STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS**



**Arien K. Muzacz, BA**

Arien Muzacz is a second-year student in the Masters program in Mental Health Counseling at the City College of the City University of New York. Her

research interests include human sexuality – including sexual identity, fantasy and behavior, especially among underrepresented or alternative populations – and multicultural counseling. Her developing clinical approach is strongly influenced by existential and psychodynamic theories.

Ms. Muzacz received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Political Science from Barnard College in 1998, and returned to Barnard in 2005 to work as a research assistant for Dr. Larry Heuer. She has been a hotline volunteer for the NYC Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project since early 2007, and has volunteered as a peer counselor for Identity House since 2006, working with individuals and couples who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Arien has presented her research at the annual and regional meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (SSSS), at Pace University's Psychology Conference and at the City College Graduate Student Research Symposium. She recently received the Diversity Award for 2008 from the American Psychological Association's Division 29, the division for psychotherapy, for her paper entitled, "Older Adults, Sexuality and Psychotherapy: Implications for Ethnic and Sexual Minorities."

She is a student member of the American Psychological Association (APA), APA's Division 17 (Counseling Psychology), Division 17's Section for Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Awareness, SSSS, and NYMHCA, the New York State Mental Health Counselors Association. She is also a member of the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom.

## **WANT TO BE IN THE NEXT SSA NEWSLETTER???**

Please send us any articles/updates/news releases about yourself or issues you would like to see featured in the next newsletter to the SSA Publications Committee:

**Jackie Berman:** Chair of Publications *JBerman@aging.nyc.gov*

**Meredith Morris:** Co-Editor  
*mmorris@isabella.org*

We look forward to hearing from you!!



Meredith Morris  
Publications Committee



