UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

AGING Initiative

Protecting the Health of Older Americans

Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging Awards 2009

About the Awards

The Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging award is sponsored by the U.S. EPA in partnership with the President's Council for Fitness and Sports, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Council on Aging, the National Blueprint and Active for Life. The awards are supported by federal, state and local agencies as well as non-governmental organizations. The awards recognize excellence and raise awareness about healthy synergies that can be achieved when communities combine and implement the principles of smart growth with the concepts of active aging. This year, a new award category was created to recognize excellence at the neighborhood level. Award recipients demonstrate the best and most comprehensive overall implementation of smart growth and active aging at the neighborhood, municipal, tribal, county and regional levels. Applicants are evaluated based on their program's effectiveness, community involvement, outreach efforts, innovation, and environmental and health benefits and outcomes.

Individuals and the environment benefit when people of all ages engage in an active lifestyle.

There are two types of awards—the Achievement award and the Commitment award. Achievement award winners have demonstrated excellence in building healthy communities by integrating the principles of smart growth with the concepts of active aging. These recipients have implemented programs and policies that improve the health and well-being of the community and its citizens. The Commitment award recognizes communities that are planning for and beginning to integrate smart growth and active aging.

Cover photo courtesy of Project for Public Spaces, www.pps.org.

Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging

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Achievement Award—Public Entity Winner

Town of Cary

North Carolina

"The most important aspect of line dancing, besides the physical and mental benefits, is the chance to socialize and have fun. I have seen participants grow in both confidence and coordination!"

–Helen Merentino, age 74, instructor

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The Town of Cary demonstrates excellence in smart growth and promoting active aging through creative and extensive programs that include active preservation of open space, extensive walking and biking paths, and hundreds of fitness and wellness programs designed by and for older adults. Community and participant involvement in Cary's Planning Department efforts and Cary's Senior Center activities has led to successful implementation of these programs.

Over the past five years, the Cary Senior Center quadrupled its courses and activities. It now serves more than 22,000 elders. Cary has successfully promoted physical activity by placing importance on it and intentionally providing peer recognition and social support.

Cary has made active aging by design: it has preserved 2,300 acres of open space, 22 parks, and 174 miles of biking and walking trails. Cary has invested millions to acquire open space and greenways. It has also developed "activity centers," the building blocks of Cary's long range planning. These activity centers are physically and aesthetically unified, concentrating mixed-use development in a compact and pedestrian friendly fashion. The centers are popular locations for retirement communities due to their proximity to shopping, exercising and socializing.

Photo credit: Sam Trogdon

Biking and walking trails provide opportunities for safe, outdoor activities.

Neighborhood Winner—Achievement Award

The Martinsville-Henry County (MHC) Coalition for Health and Wellness advocates active living for persons of all ages and abilities. The Coalition made significant strides to promote active aging services through its Activate initiative by adopting active aging programs and implementing smart growth policies.

Activate strives to increase participation in physical activities, improve the recreational image of the community, and advocate for additional active living resources. One feature is the community assessment, in which Activate staff bring citizens on community walkabouts to assess specific needs in the area, such as walking and biking facilities. Thanks to older resident input, the City of Martinsville has its first bike lane and pedestrian safety lights.

Photo credit: Nelda Purcell

Bike Basics 101 makes riding a bike easy, teaches the rules of the road, and promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Activate inventoried physical activity programs and identified a need for more senior services, including walking and biking programs. Activate partnered with the Martinsville YMCA to establish a low impact beginners' walking program, which now has 100 participants, 61% of whom are elders.

Activate publishes an annual physical activity guide and tool kit with useful information on recreation programs, and fitness and health centers so elders can stay active.

Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness

Virginia

"I have just celebrated my 68th birthday, and I'm so excited about the increase in my energy level from walking only three days a week."

– Jean Royall, age 68, Activate participant

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Commitment Award—Public Entity Winner

City of Gaithersburg Upcounty Senior Center

Maryland

"Last time I went for my bone density test, to my surprise I was told that I no longer need bone density tablets. My bones showed remarkable improvement. I have arthritis in both knees. I have been able to walk much better and even took part this summer in a 5k walk."

–Nisha Jagannath, age 70

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Gaithersburg is recognized as one of the first cities in Maryland to adopt smart growth as a foundation for city planning. Gaithersburg has updated its master plan with incentives for developers to adopt smart growth practices. For example, it adopted ordinances for affordable housing and requires new developments to comply with LEED building standards.

Photo credit: Bridget Ryder

GOT FIT, a low-impact program, helps older adults take the first step to make walking a healthy habit.

Gaithersburg has overseen the development of several mixed use communities with senior living facilities, including the Kentlands, an award-winning new urbanist community with shops, businesses, recreation, and housing, all within a 10-minute walk of downtown Gaithersburg. Kentlands' success prompted plans for a similar community, Casey East.

Gaithersburg plans to relocate the Upcounty Senior Center to a larger facility within walking distance of mass transit. The Center has nearly 1,000 members and offers about 25 fitness classes a week. One 12 week program, GOT FIT (Feet in Training) program, is led by a personal trainer that demonstrates "it's never too late to improve one's fitness."

Public Entity Winner—Commitment Award

The County of San Mateo, California has a growing aging population but limited affordable housing and supportive services. To address this gap, a collaborative group of local non-profits teamed with the county to develop the Half Moon Bay Senior Campus Plan—an integrated continuum of care for the county's older adults.

The plan's success is largely attributable to a strong sense of collaboration and community involvement. The plan successfully integrates more than 250 units of affordable housing with a network of pedestrian walkways and open space intended for structured and unstructured activities. By limiting parking based on evidence of reduced rates of car ownership among low-income elders, planners can reduce development costs and motor vehicle use.

The network of pedestrian paths and open space encourages an active lifestyle with minimal interference from traffic. A special feature is raised pavement where paths cross streets, signaling motorists to yield to pedestrians.

Photo credit: Payatok and Associates

Elders provided invaluable contributions to the Half Moon Bay Senior Campus Plan.

Half Moon Bay Senior Campus Plan

California

"As I age, it's comforting to know that the senior center and adult day health care center will be just steps away. Flat paths that connect the buildings with an interesting landscaping will allow for gentle walks with my friends on good weather days."

–Harriett Plimmer, age 88

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Updates of Past Winners

Town of Scarborough,

2007 Commitment Award Winner

Maine

"I was apprehensive about attending this program because of the terrain and the walking distance. However, I had an absolutely wonderful time. We found all the caches and walked the entire 1 ¼ mile. This was so much fun!"

–Easy Adventures participant, age 73

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Scarborough, Maine's Community Services Department continues to support aging residents through new programs and activities. Scarborough strives to improve its services and facilities through programs like Seniors Without Walls (WOW).

WOW's goal is to enrich the quality of life for older adults by having them participate in programs like Easy Adventures. Elders come together to engage in sociable, fun, outdoor activities that are focused on improving health in a low-intensity format. Each year, nearly 500 elders participate in WOW programs such as horseback riding, rafting and snowshoeing.

Choices is a newly designed comprehensive program that helps elders make good decisions that support a healthy mind, body and spirit. Participants are currently focusing on weight loss and identifying ways to stay involved in the community.

Scarborough's older residents have a unique opportunity to express their needs through the City Council's Senior Liaison Representative. The representative ensures resident's interests are brought to the forefront when the Scarborough City Council discusses planning and development for older residents.

Photo credit: Debbie Jones

Easy Adventures is a recreational program that offers sociable and fun outdoor activities for older adults.

Updates of Past Winners

The City of Portland provides hiking, biking and walking programs to integrate older adults into the community and encourage healthy lifestyles. In 2009, more elders participated in older adult recreational activities which led the City to expand its facilities and programs. In addition, an increasing number of older adults volunteered to lead recreational activities.

Photo credit: Donna Green

Strolling programs are popular recreational options for older adults.

Portland's extensive Senior Recreational Program features 225 courses per quarter and depends on more than 1,000 senior volunteer hours to ensure the program's success. A hiking course for elders is offered 5 days per week and is led by older volunteers and a part-time senior employee. The Senior Bike program added more sessions, orientation rides and intermediate rides. Since last winter, more than 200 elders participated in the 47 Senior Bike programs.

Portland is spearheading several new initiatives to increase awareness of their programs for both disabled and older adults. In partnership with the Department of Motor Vehicles and Ride Connection, a nonprofit transportation organization for older and disabled residents, Portland is developing informational materials on transportation options for persons who no longer drive.

Portland Parks & Recreation and Bureau of Transportation

2008 Achievement Award Winner

Oregon

"I enjoyed myself! Thanks so much. The free admission was a great blessing to my low income budget."

–City Strolls participant

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Updates of Past Winners

City of Casper

2008 Commitment Award Winner

Wyoming

"I regularly do a lot of walking on the trails along the North Platte River and dance at the senior center every chance I get!"

–Mike Kilmer, age 92

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Several years ago Casper, Wyoming, identified a need to expand the city's senior center to accommodate a growing older population. Casper's leaders also recognized that many additional services would be needed. In response, Casper convened a Senior Study Committee to conduct an inventory of existing needs and services for their aging residents. This inventory, which included surveys, focus groups and data analysis, was completed in 2008 and resulted in a comprehensive plan to improve services for older adults in Casper.

Casper has since embarked on several studies and initiatives to implement the committee's recommendations. For example, Casper is developing a Trails Master Plan to determine how to best extend the trail system to more communities. Additionally, the Recreation Division is completing a strategic plan on how to expand its programming to offer more elder exercise courses as well as more active living courses, such as health and wellness for the entire community.

Casper's comprehensive "Boomer Study" has generated much dialogue in the community and created awareness about the need to improve services for older adults. Casper is organizing a follow-up meeting to discuss successes and lessons learned from the previous year's activities.

Photo credit: City of Casper

Senior center activities offer social interaction and health benefits.

What is Smart Growth?

The built environment—places where we live, work, and play—impacts people of all ages. Housing and transportation opportunities shape our environment and have longstanding consequences on our daily lives and the quality of our environment. When communities implement smart growth strategies, they preserve the best of their past and create a healthy environment for future generations. By applying smart growth practices, communities create attractive, walkable neighborhoods that give people of varying age, income and abilities a range of safe, affordable, and convenient choices where to live and how to get around.

Photo credit: Project for Public Spaces, www.pps.org

In neighborhoods that incorporate smart growth practices, housing is within walking distance to shops, businesses and farmers markets.

Growing smart helps reduce our ecological footprint and preserve our natural resources. Smart growth reduces greenhouse-gas emissions and improves our health, a winning combination.

www.epa.gov/smartgrowth

Smart Growth Principles

1. Mix land uses.
2. Take advantage of compact building design.
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
4. Create walkable neighborhoods.
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

What is Active Aging?

By 2030, the 65 and older population in the United States is expected to reach nearly 20 percent, or more than 70 million. As our population ages, a growing number of us will be living with chronic conditions, placing increased pressure on our health care system. Many older adults live with at least one chronic condition.

Physical activity benefits persons of all ages. It is vital for reducing the risk of numerous chronic conditions, relieving symptoms of depression, helping to maintain independent living and enhancing the overall quality of life. It also improves mobility and functioning in the frail and the very old.

Photo credit: Leda Isenhour

Recreational classes are within reach for many elders. These classes provide a dual benefit of improved health and social interaction.

Active aging takes place when elders regularly participate in structured and unstructured physical activities. Communities can promote Active aging by implementing a diverse array of accessible physical activity programs or self-directed activities such as walking and biking to local parks and greenways. Communities can promote active aging by creating complete streets with safe, bikeable and walkable neighborhoods.

Learning Network for Active Aging: **www.LNactiveaging.org**

National Council on Aging: **www.healthyagingprograms.org**

National Blueprint Initiative: **www.agingblueprint.org**

Connecting Smart Growth and Active Aging

By adopting smart growth principles, communities can design places that increase mobility and improve our quality of life. Neighborhoods that integrate homes with shops, services, and parks and recreational facilities allow residents—especially older adults—to pursue an interesting and active life without depending on a car.

Properly designed sidewalks and bikeways allow older residents of all abilities to walk and bike to doctors' offices, businesses, and local shops. Transit provides access to places that are further away. These everyday activities promote physical fitness. Across the nation, the average transit rider walks or bikes 20 minutes a day as part of using transit, meeting two thirds of his or her daily needs for physical activity.

The benefits of building healthy communities for active aging are being realized in communities across the country. By living near key amenities such as grocery stores, pharmacies and cafes, we have more choices to be active, we can choose to walk rather than drive.

Smart land use planning that incorporates smart growth principles by modifying the built environment can lead to a reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions and create a supportive environment for active aging.

Communities that provide sidewalks, bike lanes and walking trails promote healthy options for persons of all ages and the option to be more active.

Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging:

http://www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/about.htm

Call for Applications 2010

We are pleased to announce the 4th annual Building Healthy Communities for Active Aging awards program. The awards recognize outstanding community planning and strategies that support active aging. Winners will be announced in early 2011. **Applications are due July 17, 2010**. Applications, award guidelines, and entry rules can be found at **www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/awards**.

Growing Smarter, Living Healthier: A Guide to Smart Growth and Active Aging

Growing Smarter, Living Healthier is a guidebook for older adults. It not only addresses the basic principles of neighborhood and town design, but also explains why community design matters. It explains how a community can create the foundation for an active lifestyle and how residents can get involved in a community's planning process. The guidebook includes resources on redesigning neighborhoods so it is easier to get around in communities of all sizes: city, suburb, or small town. It shares ideas for getting involved and staying engaged in one's community. Copies are available at **www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/ guide/index.html**.

For more information, please visit...
EPA Aging Initiative: www.epa.gov/aging

Please submit questions by
E-mail to: aging.info@epa.gov

Aging Initiative
Protecting the Health of Older Americans

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www.epa.gov/aging/bhc/supporters.htm

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