

# Executive Summary



*"Elder Grace" by Chester Higgins and the Art of Aging Campaign Exhibit*

## CONCEPT

On November 3-4, 2006, the National Center for Creative Aging (NCAA) and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) presented a National Conference on Arts and Aging: *Creativity Matters*, which was the first stand-alone, national conference focused on this topic. More significantly, it was the first opportunity to explore in-depth the intersections among research, policy and practice in the field of creative aging. The ability to plan such a landmark—and successful—conference, is a benchmark for the maturity of the organizations involved and the arts and aging field, in general.

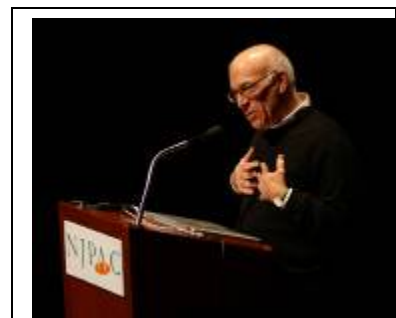
Two hundred and thirty-five leaders, staff and volunteers convened at NJPAC in Newark, NJ to address issues of older adults' access to quality arts programs. Presenters and attendees included professional community-based artists, and representatives of healthcare, aging, education and cultural organizations, foundation, corporations and government agencies from across the country. Specifically, the conference was designed to increase the capacity for and expertise in arts and aging programming of attending organizations and artists by

--highlighting research findings pointing to the physical, social and psychological benefits of cultural programming on older people;

--providing an overview of best practices;

--providing professional artists and organizations with the opportunity to exchange expertise;

--exploring the obstacles that prevent older adults from having full access to the arts and the steps needed to overcome them; and



*Lawrence P. Goldman,  
President & CEO, NJPAC,  
explains the genesis of the  
conference*

--disseminating the findings of the conference to professional artists and arts organizations through the publication of a conference report and subsequently an arts and aging toolkit including best practices and a resource guide, which is a joint effort between NCCA, NJPAC and the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts.

The dream of *Creativity Matters* became a reality thanks to the generous support of the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, MetLife, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, NAMM: The International Music Products Association, Roche, the Wallerstein Foundation for Geriatric Life Improvement and the Dana Foundation.

## OVERVIEW

The conference started on the afternoon of Friday, November 3, with two concurrent, regional meetings: National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA) Annual Board and Networks Meeting and NJPAC Regional Creative Aging Working Meeting. The former served as the annual meeting of governance board members, and NCCA representatives, individuals and organizations. The latter convened representatives of New Jersey arts and aging communities to discuss the current needs and services of the aging population related to the arts. Following these two meetings, an hour was designated for roundtables. The roundtables provided attendees with an informal opportunity to learn about programs, projects or publications pick up literature and speak to program representatives. They were grouped within four areas—Frail Elders, Media Arts, Intergenerational Arts and Well Elders. The opening dinner featured an address on the advantages of creative aging by actress Tovah Feldshuh. After dinner, attendees enjoyed performances in the Victoria Theater by PARADIGM Dance Company and Pearls of Wisdom.



*Amatullah Saleem, Pearls of Wisdom, shares her experience with attendees*

On Saturday, November 4, attendees were treated to a continental breakfast and again had an opportunity to visit the roundtables in the morning before moving to the Victoria Theater for plenary presentations. Featuring Dr. Gene Cohen (author of *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain* and *The Creative Age*) among other speakers, this session set the stage for attendees' discussions throughout the day on research, policy and practice. The first set of four concurrent sessions took place following the plenary. In two sessions, speakers discussed strategies to accommodate people with varying disabilities in performing and visual/literary arts programs; in the other two, they shared criteria for successful performing and visual/literary arts programs for older people and suggested ways to tackle possible obstacles. The second set of four concurrent sessions, after a lunch with remarks from Tony and Grammy Award winning actress/singer Leslie Uggams, included three interactive workshops in which attendees engaged in hands-on learning about best practices in visual/literary arts, music and dance/theater. The fourth session explored how to ensure access for seniors to the arts in community settings. To further demonstrate how culture builds community,



*Actress and conference speaker Leslie Uggams, Desiree Urquhart VP of Arts Education at NJPAC and Dr. Robert Hyfler, Executive Director of the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey smile for the camera*

conference attendees viewed short performances in the Victoria Theater by Stagebridge Theater

Company and Kairos Dance Theatre. At the conclusion of *Creativity Matters*, attendees shared their reflections on what they had learned and experienced, and offered assistance and resources to one another on how to strengthen, develop or implement arts and aging programs.

Serving as another reminder of the power of the arts, NJPAC and NCCA presented throughout the conference a visual art exhibit, "Elder Grace: the Nobility of Aging," by renowned photographer Chester Higgins. This exhibit was presented with panels located in the Victoria Theater Lobby from the award winning "Art of Aging – Creativity Matters" exhibit.

## OPENING PLENARY SESSION

The series of plenary presentations on Saturday, November 4, provided attendees with a common history of the arts and aging field, and background in research, policy and practice. This session was the knowledge base upon which attendees could build using the tools and information demonstrated and described in the concurrent sessions, performances, presentations and informal conversations during the conference.

Speakers made the following key points:



### Research

- Dr. Gene Cohen's national study, "The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults," was the first experimentally designed, rigorously controlled study in this field. It showed significant differences between arts groups and control groups in all major areas studied, with powerful positive results for the arts groups.
- The study built on research showing the positive effects of (1) having a sense of control and mastery and (2) being socially engaged, plus other research showing that these experiences boost immune system function and that, because of age-related changes in the brain, negative emotions have less impact.
- Arts programs that provided a sense of mastery and social engagement resulted in an improvement in health, less use of medication, fewer doctor visits, increased independence, better mood and morale, and increased activities among participating older adults.

### Policy

- There has been a shift from a "deficit" to an "asset" model of aging, from looking at older adults as medical objects to seeing all their vitality and wisdom. This change acknowledges how much older people have to offer, and, with this recognition, NCCA was created in 2001, receiving initial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. One role of the organization, according to Executive Director Susan Perlstein, is to influence federal policy through the White House Conference on Aging and local policy through members.
- Michael Patterson, who works with NRTA (National Retired Teachers' Association), the educators' community within AARP, noted that there are both positive and negative forms of brain plasticity, and that our goal is to find multimodal activities that promote positive plasticity and thus avoid a downward spiral of less activity.



- Paula Terry, director of the Office for AccessAbility at the National Endowment for the Arts, reported that the May 2005 miniconference on creativity and aging developed recommendations for policymakers, including three that were among those chosen for consideration as White House Conference on Aging resolutions. They were: expand opportunities for developing innovative housing for older adults; encourage community designs to promote livable communities to enable aging in place; and increase awareness of the positive physical and psychological impact that arts participation can have on older Americans. Only the latter recommendation was presented to the delegates, but it was not included among the final 50 that were forwarded to

the White House.

## Practice

- Executive Director of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) David Miller reported that state arts agencies are realizing that they should take a leadership role in engendering arts participation among older people. At the recent NJSCA Summit on Arts & Aging, attendees agreed that current challenges include developing an inventory of providers and resources; making connections between the arts and other state and national agencies; and recognizing the existence of a whole range of distinct subgroups, and not assuming that all members of a group have the same characteristics. He urged conference attendees to look to their state arts agencies as resources for their work.
- Trustee Emilie Roy Corey of the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts (NGCSA) discussed a soon-to-be published toolkit produced by NGCSA, NCCA and NJPAC. The toolkit is on arts and aging programs in summer 2007. Designed for leaders and program staff of arts and humanities service organizations and institutions, and elder service organizations, corporations and institutions, the publication's goal is to increase the expertise of those who direct existing arts and aging programs, and to provide others with the tools to take the first step...and keep going. It will be available in print and through the Guild's Web site. NCCA is also enhancing its Web site, which will include a database of current arts and aging programs across the country.



## SYMPOSIA/BEST PRACTICE PANELS AND WORKSHOPS

Most of the participatory learning at *Creativity Matters* took place in the concurrent sessions that were divided between symposia/best practice panels and interactive workshops. They focused on either access and audience development, or excellence and quality engagement in visual/literary arts or performing arts, and—within the latter category—dance/theater and music. In addition, one workshop examined older adults' access to quality arts exploration and engagement. In most cases, the hour-and-a-half sessions were well attended and rich with dialogue. Even though the presenters had been well coached, there was typically not enough time for as much discussion as the attendees would have liked—a fairly common complaint at all conferences.

Questions that shaped the sessions focused on access and audience development were:

- What makes an arts program for older people successful?
- What are practical and specific strategies for success?
- What are ways to tackle possible obstacles?

Questions that shaped those on excellence and quality engagement were:

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- What are practical and specific strategies for success?
- What are ways to tackle possible obstacles?

Attendees used presenters' responses to these questions as a springboard for asking questions or making comments on a variety of topics; indeed, access, audience development, excellence and quality engagement are interrelated. And, in a few concurrent sessions, the discussions veered off in interesting and useful—but tangential—directions. The following are key points, organized by:

- I. Performing Arts
  - A. Excellence and Quality Engagement
    1. Theory
    2. Strategy
- II. Visual/Literary Arts
  - A. Excellence and Quality Engagement
    1. Theory
    2. Strategy
- III. Access and Audience Development



## **Performing Arts**

### **Excellence and Quality Engagement**

What makes an arts program for older people successful? What are practical and specific strategies for success? What are ways to tackle possible obstacles?

#### **THEORY**

- Quality performing arts programs for older adults emphasize art making. The art is primary, even though the practice of creating art has other benefits and effects. Facilitators achieve this mentality by demanding the best that participants have to offer, by respecting them as artists in their own right, by creating engaging performances, and by treating these performances as professional ones—with printed programs and reviews.
- Asking audience members to participate—or giving them the opportunity to do so—deepens their connection with the artists and increases the impact of the experience. Keeping the audience small also contributes to a more meaningful interaction with the artists.
- Music is an innate impulse that can be learned and practiced intuitively. It provides a shared and basic language that can afford older adults incremental mastery that lifts spirits and builds

self-esteem. Older adults have a repository of decades of music and song; it brings personal satisfaction, prompts memories and bonds them intragenerationally.

- The fundamental “instruments” of voice to sing with and limbs to keep time and rhythm with provide an un-intimidating and efficient source of engagement for older adults. Musical cues condition memory, even in participants for whom it is compromised. Participants learn a bit of music and are intrigued to build on their accomplishment. The sensory range and coordination of music (sound, movement, linguistic understanding) help engage the brain in several pathways, creating methods to substitute for or reinforce cognitive function.



*Roy Ernst, founder of the New Horizons International Music Association, confers with a session participant*

- Participation in performing arts programs impacts participants, but it also affects families of participants and professional care staff. Family members who attend performances or witness programs may more fully recognize the capabilities of their relatives and may be inspired by them to pursue more opportunities in the arts for themselves. Creative arts programs also create bonds between older adults and caregivers in medical facilities or homes. They allow staff to see participants as unique artistic contributors.

## STRATEGY

- Developing trust within a group of participants is crucial to the success of a program. Group leaders use structured steps to facilitate activities, building from simple to complex outcomes. Beginning with a warm up can loosen up participants, and activities should be designed to allow participants to be challenged artistically without making them feel uncomfortable. By asking participants to keep stories shared within the group confidential, group leaders can build trust. They can also ask participants to share as much as they are willing, and ask participants to suggest themes for exploration.
- Creating quality performing arts programming includes marketing and promoting the work effectively. This can be done by listening and responding to the needs and objectives of care facilities and older adult organizations; by ensuring that exhibits, rehearsals and performances are seen by interested parties; by using research and best practice program models as promotional tools; by clarifying goals and communicating clearly to potential partners; by documenting programs for promotional and evaluation purposes; and by working with organizations to advocate for arts funding and space during their early stages of fiscal and spatial planning.
- Quality work also needs facilitators and administrators who are passionately committed to their work. In order to sustain the necessary level of enthusiasm, creative aging workers should maintain communities of like-minded individuals to gain learning and support; get paid a living wage for their labor; ask for in-kind support from organizations that cannot pay the program's full worth so that they are not giving services away; and find and develop advocates in nursing homes and service organizations. They should also look to their older adult participants as resources, continue to facilitate programs as an administrator and remember the purpose behind their work.



*Marsha Gildin of Elders Share the Arts explains a concept to a colleague*

- For residencies and performances in healthcare settings, it is vital to the transformational experience for audience members to provide professional, high quality artists and arts groups. And these artists need to be trained, supported and paid. Many have not had the opportunity to interact with audience members nor have they performed in a healthcare setting; therefore, they should be “eased into” this environment through, for example, an initial performance in the hospital lobby.

## Visual/Literary Arts

### Excellence and Quality Engagement

What makes an arts program for older people successful? What are practical and specific strategies for success? What are ways to tackle possible obstacles?

### THEORY

- Older adults are traditionally the members of society relied on to transmit history and culture. Preserving this perspective (or restoring its prestige) enriches the artistic experience and understanding of people of all ages, and fortifies the self-respect, vitality and quality of life of older adults.
- Older adults in arts programs, like anyone who has never practiced arts professionally or at least has not in some time, have self-doubts to overcome. It is paramount to create an environment in which, though their limits can be challenged and their potential reached, there is an atmosphere of open exploration and participants’ efforts are not judged or held to arbitrary or unrealistic standards. Participants in arts programs should feel free to express themselves, and facilitators should follow where the older adults’ interests and ability levels lead.
- A professional attitude and self-image is important for the teaching artist as well as the older adult participant. Living wages and measures to avoid burnout are necessary for teaching artists to sustain ongoing good and creative services to older adults.

### STRATEGY

- Respectful presentation—professionally hung exhibitions, properly staged dramatic works, etc.—is important for the older adults’ self-worth, and for current and potential community supporters’ enthusiasm; however, in the classroom and studio the process by which each older adult can accomplish a work she/he is happy with should take priority over the product that results.
- Programs work best when they build from simple exercises and basic shared experience: starting writing workshops from sense memory or childhood reminiscences; getting participants involved in each other’s success by assembling group poems from a single line

per workshop member on a shared theme; etc. Sensory impression helps retrieve memory, and a progression of complexity establishes confidence.

- Using sense memories of one's life to trigger powerful imagery is a good way to wake up any kind of group but specifically can lead to writing memoir. Depth and detail can be developed by asking questions such as, "How old were you? Who else was there? What did this moment mean to you?"
- A writing workshop about participants' lives may also incorporate visual images, which builds community among people who may live in the same place, but not know each other. Longer workshops are actually more effective than shorter, since people get to know each other better.
- Teachers need to do experiential exercises themselves, so they understand what this work is like for their students. They also must be careful when critiquing writing, in order not to shut down people who have fragile self-esteem. There is always something positive to say.

"We dig behind closed memories to emotions locked away—sometimes unhappy, but sometimes funny; sometimes in wonder, with new insight. Then we have to translate those into words that we can bear to utter, that others can bear to listen to. Our group listens, always with a constructive ear. It is this awakening, this struggle, and the listening that makes the magic."

--Participant in an arts and aging program

## Access and Audience Development

What are the successes and challenges in implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act? What are strategies for effectively accommodating older people with varying disabilities?

### THEORY

- Creativity can circumvent and sometimes alleviate memory loss and physical deterioration; for example, older adults benefit from the invigoration, affective and bodily movement of dance; can gain a sense of accomplishment and improve brain function by drawing with a non-dominant hand; and can express themselves with visual imagery or poetically compressed text when conventional speech is beyond them.
- It is not unusual or unnatural for older adults, especially those with some degree of dementia, to be reluctant, frightened of or hostile to participation in arts and other group programs. Patience and personalized means of drawing them in and identifying their interests are the obligation of the teaching artist.
- The lack of attention by libraries to the needs of older adults is a microcosm of the lack of attention within communities; older adults should be integrated into the community, and communities should be designed to accommodate older adults.

### STRATEGY

#### Physical and Communications Accessibility

- One big challenge is letting people know that facilities are much more accessible than in the past. Thus a major need is to publicize this fact, especially in mainstream media, and encourage people to use accessible facilities, since they often are reluctant to admit that they need assistance.

- Many physical barriers exist to accessibility in museums for people with impaired mobility, hearing and sight. These need to be addressed with wheelchairs, accessible entrances, lifts, and programs that make exhibits and displays accessible. Universal design addresses these issues. Signage is very useful to help people locate assistive devices or accessible entrances.
- Information and communications accessibility is another challenge that can be addressed with large-print labels, assistive listening devices, real-time captioning and a variety of other accessible information formats. Special programs such as touch tours and descriptive tours enable people with hearing or visual impairments to experience art.



*Michael Smith of the Meadowlands explains the physical and programmatic accessibility at his facility*

### Accessibility Training

- Staff should be well trained so they understand how to treat people with disabilities and older adults.
- Social and cultural exclusion is another potential barrier that can be addressed by efforts to enable a museum to meet the needs of all groups. Some see “access” as a form of “dumbing down” of information, so it is essential to pitch the information in a way people can use without watering down the content.
- Patience is a must for facilitators, and overlapping talents (i.e., conducting and piano-playing) can help to keep costs down. Older adults should be positioned in an ensemble so as to account for their special visual or hearing needs. Scheduling and duration of rehearsals and concerts should accommodate older adults’ sleep cycles and energy levels.

### Building Community-Social Engagement

- Programs for older adults that are a logical progression from existing programs are often more successful because they have developed organically, reflecting the mission of the institution and the needs of the community.
- The social aspect of arts events and related activities is very important to older adults who are often isolated, and organizations should plan accordingly; for example, organizing breakfast following a discussion or lecture, or facilitating the group going out to lunch after an acting class.

### Building Community-Physical Structures

- Healthcare centers could be considered community centers; ethnic and socio-economic barriers are broken down, and they are completely accessible to people with disabilities and older adults. As healthcare moves toward a more holistic approach, it is easier to make the case for the arts in healthcare; moreover, the arts give these facilities a competitive edge.
- The more than 16,500 public libraries are the community’s inclusive information and meeting place with more than 20 million visits a week. Ninety-five percent of libraries present cultural arts programs, and approximately 30 percent of these are designed for older adults. Libraries

provide a social and civic space; host book clubs and public affairs programs; share information; conduct health and wellness programs; provide computer and computer training; and give community members an opportunity for service.



*Gloria Coles of the Lifelong Access Initiative makes a point during her presentation*

- Successful lifelong access libraries will integrate new communications and information technologies to promote productive aging, and create programs and services that are accessible, culturally sensitive and connected to the larger community. The ability of the Lifelong Access Initiative to effect these changes is hampered by the lack of money, time, and training, and the challenges of building the necessary collaborations.

It is important to pay attention to transportation issues, exploring options such as asking the municipal senior transportation service to add a stop at the theater or cultivating a network of volunteer drivers.

## **SEEDS TO GROW AND SPEED NETWORKING**

At the end of the day, attendees shared reactions to the conference and divided into small groups for facilitated networking. The feelings expressed by attendees can be distilled into three words: inspired, supported and energized. With respect to the needs that emerged during the networking session, attendees are hungry for information:

- How do we find money and get money from public sources, foundations or corporations for general operating support, special projects, infrastructure and capital projects? How do we sustain funding?
- What are models for physical infrastructure, intergenerational programs and activities, disability awareness programs, film content, programs for people with Alzheimer's and/or memory loss, programs for aides in long term care facilities, sexuality programs, nonprofit organizations and building community?
- How do we provide training for artists, staff, volunteers, students and trainers, and how do we find opportunities for them to work—and make a living—in the arts and aging field?
- How do we measure our success both qualitatively and quantitatively, and how do we use the results to grow?
- How do we engage partners of all shape and sizes, and older adults?
- How do we learn about and/or build networks to facilitate sharing information and making connections with other organizations?
- What can we do to increase public awareness of the value and impact of arts and aging programs?
- How do we address fears of aging and denial of aging that stand between us and the people whom we serve?

## INSPIRATION

The opening event of *Creativity Matters* was a dinner on Friday, November 3. NJPAC President and CEO Lawrence P. Goldman, NJPAC Vice President for Arts Education Desiree Urquhart and NCCA Executive Director Susan Perlstein all welcomed attendees. Goldman described the genesis of the conference, adding, "It's incredible what people over 55 can give back to us!" He recognized the support of the conference funders, particularly the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey and CEO Lester Lieberman, whom he thanked for providing the "delivery system for the dream." Following dinner, actor Tovah Feldshuh discussed her career on stage and screen, which exemplifies her father's advice, "Reach for the stars and you might end up on the roof; aim for the roof, and you won't get off the ground."



Actress Tovah Feldshuh shares her philosophy

Similarly, singer, dancer and actress Leslie Uggams, who spoke at lunch on Saturday, November 4, said, "You have to keep your chops going." She described her experiences on stage, specifically taking over the lead in *On Golden Pond* with only ten days of rehearsal. Expressing her opinion that her career has kept her healthy, she added, "If this is aging honey...bring it on!"

In addition to the inspiring—and entertaining—presentations by Tovah Feldshuh and Leslie Uggams, the spirit of *Creativity Matters* was embodied in artistic performances and exhibits:

- **PARADIGM Dance Company:** PARADIGM was founded by the trio of distinguished dancers Carmen deLavallade, Gus Solomons Jr. and Dudley Williams. Together with Hope Clarke and Keith Sabado, they form an exciting performance ensemble that vividly illustrates the eloquence that years of experience bring to dance expression. PARADIGM's performances promote and celebrate the talents of mature artists on stage.
- **Pearls of Wisdom:** The elder touring ensemble of Elders Share the Arts transforms personal memory and experience into narrative art. Its featured storyteller, Amatullah Saleem has had an extensive career as a professional dancer and performer in the US and Europe as a member of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. Later in life, upon graduating from Empire State College, she transformed her repertoire of written short stories into narrative art to become a Pearl of Wisdom with Elders Share the Arts. She is a member of the African Folk Heritage Circle, Inc. and the National Association of Black Storytellers.
- **Stagebridge Senior Theatre Company:** Based in Oakland, California, Stagebridge is the nation's oldest senior theatre company. It is an arts organization that uses theatre and storytelling to bridge the generation gap and to stimulate positive attitudes toward aging. Stagebridge's intergenerational programs feature senior theater productions, storytelling in the schools, acting classes for seniors and writing contests for children. Through these programs, the company demonstrates its vision of cooperation, creativity and joy among people of all ages and backgrounds.



Kairos Dance Theatre performs

- **Kairos Dance Theatre:** An intergenerational dance company whose performers span four generations, ranging in age from six to ninety years old, Kairos has achieved local and national recognition for their pioneering work in both intergenerational dance and the emerging field of creative aging. At the heart of their work is the desire to expand audiences' and participants' ideas of what dance can be, and to offer a new vision of dance that is welcoming of all ages, all abilities and all life experiences. Their programming includes performances, classes, workshops and the groundbreaking "Dancing Heart" program, through which they offer older adults, families and caregivers an interactive, creative experience that combines opportunities for artistic expression and learning with the health-enhancing benefits of dance and music.
- **"Elder Grace" by Chester Higgins and the Art of Aging Campaign Exhibit:** The visual art exhibit featured the work of renowned photographer Chester Higgins who is the photographer and author of *Elder Grace: The Nobility of Aging*. Also included were panels from the award winning Art of Aging - Creativity Matters exhibit.

### **NJPAC REGIONAL CREATIVE AGING WORKING MEETING AND NATIONAL CENTER FOR CREATIVE AGING ANNUAL BOARD AND NETWORKS MEETING**

More than 75 representatives of New Jersey nonprofit, for profit and governmental arts and aging services organizations, facilities and agencies, New Jersey artists, and others from around the country attended the NJPAC meeting. Special guests included board chair of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA), Carol Herbert; Arthur Factor, a NJSCA council member; and the executive director, David Miller. Participating in the NCCA meeting were more than 40 governance board members, and NCCA representatives, individuals and organizations.



*Carol Herbert, Arthur Factor, Paula Terry & David Miller focus on a comment from a participant at the NJ Regional meeting*

### **Common Themes**

Discussions during both meetings focused initially on current strategies and initiatives, and progressed to future planning. The needs expressed by attendees were echoed repeatedly throughout *Creativity Matters*:

- **Networking, networking, networking:** they want to learn from each other how to develop their skills, balance leading and doing, obtain sustainable funding, train artists, increase research, build infrastructure, build coalitions, develop partnerships, develop services and programs, and promote their work. Further, collaborations are essential for building political support, accessing funds and conducting research.



*Creativity Matters attendees network during the closing session*

- **Identifying and coordinating resources:** they want to identify the existing arts and aging activities within a community and/or a state (best practices), and coordinate resources within and among states and communities so that they can match problems with solutions and artists with jobs.
- **Educating:** they want aging services organizations to understand the value of teaching artists and the actual costs of quality arts programming; and they want arts funding organizations and older adults to value arts and aging programs.
- **Researching:** they want research into the impact of arts and aging programs so that hard evidence exists to demonstrate that these programs, for example, reduce the cost of long-term care. One comment in the New Jersey network meeting was that arts and aging programming needs artistic trials, much like scientific clinical trials, in order to encourage evidence-based practices in the field.

### **NCCA – Additional Points**

In the NCCA board meeting, other needs included changing the concept of a senior center; ensuring that staff, educators and board members are as diverse (ethnicity and ability) as the community served; and defining quality in the context of arts and aging programs. Attendees also touched on a challenge to working with older adults: the fear of aging among all segments of society.

Responding to the suggestions made by attendees at the NCCA meeting, Executive Director Susan Perlstein expressed her vision for the next three years:

- Sustained federal funding for best practices in arts and aging across abilities and ages.
- Funding for and coordination among NCCA member organizations.

Susan stated that she would work toward these goals, starting with updating the organization's web site, and identifying a date and location for the next meeting.

### **NJPAC – Additional Points**

New Jersey regional meeting attendees, who were anxious to learn from each other and among arts and aging practitioners throughout the United States, expressed a strong desire to form a New Jersey network affiliated with the National Center for Creative Aging. They also agreed that arts constituents include everyone who is aging; the lifelong learning continuum extends from "pre-K until just before the grave." And the wealth of experience and social capital that generations of older adults have to offer can save our nation.

### **VIDEO CONFERENCE/DISTANCE LEARNING AND WEB STREAMING**

Thanks to a grant from the Wallerstein Foundation for Geriatric Life Improvement, NJPAC and NCCA were able to expand public participation in the conference through video conferencing/distance learning and Web streaming.

## Video Conference/Distance Learning



*Gus Solomons Jr. leads the workshop*

On the afternoon of Saturday, November 4, 20 seniors were invited to participate in a free workshop with Gus Solomon, Jr., the artistic director of PARADIGM Dance Company. The workshop focused on the joy of movement for all ages and the company's long-term goals to promote and celebrate the talents of mature artists on stage, illustrating the eloquence that years of experience bring to the stage, as well as create a dance repertory specifically for seasoned mature, professional dancers. In order to reach older adults, a live feed connected NJPAC's

Lucent Center Black Box Theater with Brookdale Community College, Wall Township Campus (the audience consisted of seniors from Seabrook Senior Center from Neptune) and Montclair State University (the audience consisted of seniors from the Montclair Adult School). NJ Edge.Net provided the technical equipment to present the real-time interactive workshop.

## Web Streaming

One of the most informative sessions during the conference was the plenary session that featured Dr. Gene Cohen, Paula Terry, director of the Office for AccessAbility at the Arts Endowment, and Michael Patterson of AARP. Cohen described his research on the benefits to older adults of participating in professionally-led arts programs. Terry and Patterson reviewed the policy discussions on arts and aging at both the May 2005 White House mini-conference on this topic and the December 2005 White House Conference on Aging.



*Michael Patterson reviews the history of the White House Conference on Aging*

In order to expand the audience, this session was web-streamed live, and then available for 48-hours through a link on the NJPAC web site. NJN, New Jersey's Public Television Station, and Limelight Networks provided a camera crew to document the event and the streaming technology, respectively. NJPAC informed all conference attendees in advance of this opportunity so that they could alert colleagues across the country to "tune-in" and watch. In addition, NJPAC contacted the Erickson Retirement Communities, parent company of the Seabrook Senior Center, and they promoted the opportunity to their retirement communities across the country.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Research, policy and best practice are coming together as a result of hard work and the impending "silver tsunami"—the aging baby boomers. Throughout the *Creativity Matters* conference, attendees and presenters exuded energy and optimism that the time is finally right for advancing the field of arts and aging. But to move forward, there is a need to increase the capacity for and expertise in arts and aging programming of organizations and artists.

## NCCA

### Networking

- Create a listserv, perhaps using Yahoo groups, and broadcast its availability as widely as possible using the list of attendees at *Creativity Matters* and asking other national organizations to notify their members.
- Update its Web site, particularly the database of arts and aging programs.
- Deepen and broaden its relationship with AARP.
- Court the state arts agencies and the regional arts organizations with the goal of “piggy-backing” on their state and/or regional meetings. In-person, regional or state-level networking is more cost-effective than one national conference.

### Promoting

- Publish two-page profiles of best practices featuring programs in the on-line database. This would provide “cross-marketing” and drive more people to the web site. The profiles should be published in an attractive, but not expensive, format, and the writing could be done by the featured organization (though this sometimes is more trouble than it is worth). Many organizations produce this type of piece; one model is “State Spotlight” by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies ([www.nasaa-arts.org/spotlight/0906\\_spotlight.pdf](http://www.nasaa-arts.org/spotlight/0906_spotlight.pdf)).
- Celebrate outstanding work by presenting an annual award to an organization. Start small with one award, and just pick a recipient for the first couple of years to build interest and momentum, then, implement a nominations process. If the awardee is an arts organization, try to present the award at the annual meeting of a national aging services organization such as the American Society on Aging, National Conference on Aging or AARP; if the awardee is an aging services organization, try to present the award at the annual meeting of a national arts organization such as Americans for the Arts.



### Training

- Identify and package an existing, effective training module on nonprofit management with both a basic and advanced track. The curriculum should include fundraising from all sources; board, staff, volunteer and program development and management; marketing and public relations; strategic and long range planning; financial management; and evaluation. An excellent resource is *Fundamentals of Arts Management* published by the Arts Extension Service of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and the corresponding on-line classes, workshops and conferences.
- Develop a separate training module on evaluation that includes theories and tools, and focuses more on measuring impact than assessing programs. While there have been some

studies on the impact of music on people with dementia and, of course, Dr. Gene Cohen's study, evaluation in the arts and aging field is limited almost exclusively to very basic program evaluation. When published in late 2007, Dr. Gene Cohen's book on evaluation could serve as the content for this module.

- Create workshops on skills specific to the arts and aging field: a committee could develop the learning objectives and content, and then one or two trainers could conduct sessions around the country on a fee-for-service basis.

"We have great opportunities to provide multigenerational experiences to families, and to encourage and help older adults take part in the arts, since the arts benefit from their experience and wisdom. It's not just about providing something; it's reciprocal, a huge opportunity for everyone to grow."

--*Creativity Matters* attendee

## **NJPAC**

### Networking

- Take the lead in forming a New Jersey network affiliated with the National Center for Creative Aging.
- Create a New Jersey creative aging listserv, perhaps using Yahoo groups, and broadcast its availability as widely as possible among organizations and individuals in the state.

### Planning

- Plan with stakeholders (older adults, aging service organizations, arts organizations, board and staff members, funders, etc.) in the state how best to capitalize on *Creativity Matters*; serve the needs of older adults in New Jersey; and be a leader in this area among performing arts centers.
- Review current arts education programs to determine which could be easily adapted into the organization's current Arts Education program infrastructure to appeal to and benefit older adults.
- Promote arts and aging as an issue for discussion at the Performing Arts Exchange (Southern Arts Federation as lead with the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation and New England Foundation for the Arts) and the Association of Performing Arts Presenters.

### Training

- Provide professional development and training to arts education teaching artists on how to teach older adults and how to train them in the arts.

## **CONCLUSION**

*Creativity Matters* succeeded in its goal to explore the intersections among research, policy and practice in the field of creative aging. While discussing these three topics in the context of excellence and quality engagement, and access and audience development, presenters and attendees learned about effective practices. These are defined by characteristics that include:

- "Intentionality": The program has specific outcome goals for older adults.

- Meeting Needs: The program was designed to meet the needs identified by the population to be served.
- Sustainability: The program has been sustained over a period of time.
- Participatory, Sequential Learning Designed for Adults: The education component of the program emphasizes participation, and is designed so that the learning is sequential.
- Professional, Teaching Artists: The teaching artists are professional artists who work in community-based arts.
- Learning Community: The program participants feel that they are part of a learning community, and the teaching artists are supported and nurtured by their own learning community.
- Excellence: The process and product are of high quality in the context of community-based art.

Presenters and attendees also identified needs, which are reflected in this Executive Summary in the sections on Seeds to Grow and Speed Networking, and Recommendations. The unstated need is, of course, money. And public awareness of the value of the arts to older adults and our communities—whether the community is within a small group home or across the United States. “Any community, government, society that does not tap into the power and potential of older adults is not state-of-the-art,” said Dr. Gene Cohen: “Any that does, will soar.” Strategies such as those listed above can begin to lead us to these goals. *Creativity Matters* created momentum for action, and—together—we can overcome challenges and make our dream a reality.



*PARADIGM Dance Company*