



Jordan Oaks residents took advantage of the walkways circling the community during Active Aging Week

Incentives reward participation during Active Aging Week

Giveaways, prizes and T-shirts add to the fun of each event and create lasting memories during this national weeklong campaign promoted by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA)

The goal of Active Aging Week, ICAA's annual health promotion event, is to encourage people to take action. Its tenets are simple and appealing. Whether a single activity or a daily parade of programming, Active Aging Week events are:

- educational
- fun
- free

These events are planned and hosted by professionals and older adults in retirement communities, community services

such as seniors centers and area agencies on aging, wellness centers and health clubs. The activities include walks, demonstrations, many varieties of exercise classes, lectures, health fairs, music performances, spelling bees, and friendly competitions.

People who are curious can take action by attending an event and learning about the many options they have for an active lifestyle. Those who already have a bit of activity in their lives also benefit from introduction to new options, and reinforcement for their healthy choices. And older adults who live the active-aging lifestyle take charge of the action by advising and volunteering, as well as participating.

Active Aging Week hosts have often added to the festivities by offering

healthy foods and a variety of incentives, such as free gifts and raffle prizes, to participants. Not least among the incentives—and an effective promotional tool—are Active Aging Week T-shirts.

While incentives are not likely to be the sole reason why a person participates in Active Aging Week, they are a fun way to reward those who attend. To take a cue from social marketing, the benefits of attending an Active Aging Week event need to be greater than the cost of attendance.¹ Free attendance and free stuff help achieve that aim.

Goody bags

The “goody” or gift bag is an incentive given by some hosts to people who attend Active Aging Week. The bag itself and the goodies or information pamphlets inside are contributed by organizations, such as an arthritis association, government agency and sponsor. These goodies are tangible items for attendees to take home as reminders of healthy messages.

For going to the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging’s fitness walk in Tuscaloosa, more than 100 participants received a free custom T-shirt, paid for by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. Individuals also received a goody bag filled with health information and a wristband keychain. During the event, which featured a mall walk and health fair (the bags conveniently carrying additional literature from the booths), there was a drawing for door prizes donated by local businesses and free lunch coupons.

The West Alabama agency has been providing services for over 30 years, noted Melanie Allen, wellness coordinator of its Alabama Senior Rx program, and local older adults are familiar with the agency’s regular events. “Seniors in our area know that when they attend an event hosted by our Area Agency on Aging ... they are going to get some free stuff! I do think

that the giveaways had something to do with people attending the [fitness walk],” said Allen. But “most came to exercise.”

The goody bag was filled to the brim for Active Aging Week participants at S.I.M. (Seniors in Motion) Gym, which is part of St. Joseph’s Villa and Foundation in Dundas, Ontario, Canada. The staff wrote a booklet about the benefits of exercise and a group-exercise instructor gathered recipes from staff, books and her own kitchen for a cookbook, explained Tamara Johnson, manager of health and wellness programs. Both booklets went into the goody bag, along with a water bottle, lanyard and pedometer (provided at no charge by the non-profit Run for Life). In addition, after each exercise class, there was a drawing for a free gym T-shirt and a fitness assessment. The costs for the T-shirts and booklets were covered by the S.I.M. Gym marketing budget.

Johnson, who counted about 150 participants, felt that “free” helped bring new people from the community to the week’s activities. “A gym just for seniors is different; it’s comfortable ... and things were free,” she said. “Free classes, free information, free lectures.”

Over 400 goody bags were given out to attendees at the Harvest Hop hosted by the Active Aging Collaborative of El Paso, Texas. The single big event of Active Aging Week in El Paso, the annual dance is supported by the 12 member agencies of the collaborative (which includes public and private organizations) and sponsors. The goody bag was loaded with information on each member agency’s older-adult fitness activities along with its general information; booklets in English and Spanish for the state’s Texercise program; ICAA Functional U® articles; an event T-shirt; fruit; bottled water; and additional giveaways.

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At The Village at Germantown, bocce ball players showed off their T-shirts

Active Aging Week September 21–27, 2009

The International Council on Active Aging’s annual health promotion event is held in the last full week of September. Active Aging Week events are:

- representative of all the dimensions of wellness, with a focus on physical activity
- delivered in a fun, no-pressure atmosphere
- educational
- free to participants, so cost is not a barrier

The organizers at each host site decide what they wish to do. At some locations, it may be a single activity, such as a health fair or a walk. Other hosts plan an activity every day, or on several days during the week. The number and type of activities is up to each host.

Professional resources for you to develop your event are found on the ICAA website, www.icaa.cc. You can click on “Active Aging Week” on the left menu of the ICAA home page, or go directly to Active Aging Week resources at www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm.



Active Aging Week 2009 is sponsored by Aegis Therapies, Thor•Lo, and the Institute for Preventive Foot Health (IPFH).

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Residents and staff members at Westminster Towers donned their T-shirts for the Wii games

helping to plan Active Aging Week at the club. The store manager offered to set up a table in Peak Health's lobby and staff it for a few hours during the week to answer questions about footwear, with a drawing for a free pair of shoes.

During Active Aging Week, the center held a significant number of activities every day, so there was a lot of traffic and excitement. "Of course, giveaways always draw people to a display," commented Cyndy Grinde, Peak Health's staffing and program coordinator, "but I did hear a lot of valid questions being asked as well." An Active Aging Week participant received a free pair of shoes—and the sporting goods store positioned itself as a footwear expert.

Points for participation

Residents at Sierra Hills Retirement Community in Porterville, California, followed a walking trail and played an activity at stations set up along the way to receive a stamp on a card, according to Lori Yarbrough, the community's enrichment coordinator. These activities included such things as ring toss, soccer kick through a hula hoop, and beanbag baseball. After completing the trail, individuals walked up stairs to drop off their cards. The names of participants were then entered into a drawing "for heart healthy prizes, which included Heart Healthy oatmeal, Ensure shakes and two-pound dumbbells," said Yarbrough. "The grand prize was a gift certificate to [sporting goods provider] Big 5 for a new pair of tennis shoes!"

A custom T-shirt that combined the logos for Active Aging Week and The Village at Germantown was given to each person who participated in an event during the week, according to Susan Berretta, director of resident services at the community in Germantown, Tennessee. The cost of printing the T-shirts was donated by Methodist Hospital.

As collaborative member Sylvia Sillas, center director at the El Paso Youth Tennis Center, said last year, "This event could not have been put together so successfully if it were not for the contributions of each Collaborative member agency. Overall, the event was a huge success and the Collaborative is already planning to make [2009's] event just as successful."

Drawings and coupons

It's common for organizations that set up booths during a health or lifestyle fair to give away coupons for discounts or free trials, along with literature and samples of their products and services. Sometimes coupons are given to everyone who visits a booth. Another method is to collect names and have a drawing, with free samples or special discounts awarded to the person whose name is drawn.

Peak Health and Wellness Center in Great Falls, Montana, reported a drawing that combined a giveaway with education. The manager of a local sporting goods store, Big Bear Sports Center, was a client of a personal trainer who was

Resources

About.com

Print Iron On Transfers for T-shirts
<http://desktoppub.about.com/od/transfers/a/IronOnTransfers.htm>

International Council on Active Aging: Functional U

Sample issue of ICAA's online publication featuring exercise and activity for healthy aging
www.icaa.cc/member_functional_u/2008/march_april.pdf

Run for Life

Walking routes and pedometers
www.runforlife.ca

Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services: Texercise

Free exercise program and materials
www.texercise.com

“Residents showed their card at the front desk to receive their shirt and then proudly wore them all week,” observed Berretta. “Staff also wore them every day (there were a lot of busy washing machines!), and it was gratifying to see more and more residents showing up in their T-shirts as the week went on and the momentum of fun grew day after day.”

At the end of each Village event, residents added punches to their cards. And since there were multiple activities on every day during the week, they had the opportunity to get a lot of punches. The person with the most punches at week’s end received a prize. Participants “took getting their punches very seriously,” added Berretta, “and no one as seriously as our hands-down winner, Mr. Dick Reed!”

T-shirts tell the story

To kick off Active Aging Week, Heather Lowry, enrichment coordinator at Jordan Oaks in Cary, North Carolina, gave residents a special T-shirt each and encour-

aged them to wear it to the kickoff Wellness Walk. “I think that the T-shirts were an added touch that really made the event successful,” said Lowry. “Each resident received one a few days before the start of Active Aging Week, and it made all of them feel involved just a little bit, regardless of their abilities.”

Both staff and residents at Westminster Towers in Orlando, Florida, supplied their own blank T-shirts, and wellness staff members ironed on the logo created for the week using iron-on transfer paper. The slogan “Got Energy?”, brainstormed by Fitness Coordinator Sarah Burke, topped the Active Aging Week logo.

Wearing the T-shirts helped promote the events, commented Melissa Bossert, Westminster Towers’ resident lifestyle facilitator. In fact, this year Bossert plans to encourage staff to wear T-shirts earlier in September to launch the in-house promotion of Active Aging Week. “Shirts are big at our community,” she stressed, “and do so much advertising.”

Every Westminster resident who attended an activity last year received a participation coin. Individuals turned in their coins to place in one of three groups: Bronze (1–10 coins), Silver (11–20 coins) or Gold (21–30 coins). One name was then drawn for each group, and the prizes awarded to the winners included gift certificates to the community’s Country Store; a Wal-Mart gift; and free day trips. Bossert observed that “people were so excited to get participation coins, they were showing up early to events and wearing their Active Aging T-shirts every day.”

Giveaways are takeaways

For older adults to take action during and after Active Aging Week, they need to leave with something besides the memory of a good time. Marianne Pinkham, center coordinator of Spectrum Generations Community



Participants at Jordan Oaks gathered in their T-shirts, sporting the message: “Jordan Oaks, keeping active, staying fit!”

Center in Damariscotta, Maine, suggests that hosts plan events that “offer variety and flexibility with a unique twist so people of all ages and levels of ability can feel comfortable, able to participate, and able to learn something from the activity or event that they can incorporate into their own life (the takeaway).”

The educational pamphlets and giveaways, such as pedometers or exercise bands, go home with attendees and give them the chance to turn information into action. Although T-shirts are fun, they also are constant reminders of the philosophies and opportunities of active aging.

Participants in Active Aging Week events may receive incentives with no strings attached or as a motivational tool to reward an action. What matters most is that these incentives are free. As marketing lore declares, the word *free* is a powerful way to attract people to your events. ☺

Reference

1. Rabinowitz, P. The Community Tool Box: Promoting Behavior Changes by Making It Easier and More Rewarding: Benefits and Costs. Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas. Retrieved May 18, 2009, from http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1870.htm.

Recommended reading

Andreasen, A. R. (1995). *Marketing Social Change*. San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Dacey, M. (2009). Link motivation and the stages of change to encourage exercise. *ICAA Functional U*, 7(1), 1–6, January-February.

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