

# Begin the adventure

## of Active Aging Week



**This year's health promotion event encourages participants and professionals to explore life's many possibilities**

Every day active-aging professionals support older adults in improving quality of life, and challenge myths and perceptions of aging that inhibit many from engaging fully in life. Across a broad spectrum of organizations and settings, professionals create programming to help clients stay active, healthy and engaged, and they pour their energies into encouraging participation. Partners in these efforts often include already-active older adults. This September, Active Aging Week® brings all who share the goals of this positive approach—organizations, professionals and individuals—opportunities to increase their impact.

Led by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), Active Aging Week is an annual health promotion event held each

year during the last week of September. The weeklong observance celebrates adults ages 50 and older as fully participating members of society and promotes the benefits of leading an active, healthier lifestyle. It also highlights the ability of older adults to live well, regardless of age or health conditions.

In 2014, Active Aging Week takes place September 21–27. ICAA encourages those interested in hosting the event to register as an official host site (see “Mark your calendar” on page 27 for the campaign website).

Local host organizations throughout North America offer activities and events that are free to low cost, educational, and presented in a safe, fun and friendly atmosphere. Events are held in parks, malls, YMCAs and JCCs, health clubs, seniors centers, apartments, senior living commu-

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*A Westminster-Canterbury resident gives a 'thumbs up' to hang gliding during Active Aging Week 2013. Image courtesy of Westminster-Canterbury of Chesapeake Bay*



# Begin the adventure of Active Aging Week

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*Covenant Village day-trippers relax in the bright autumn sunshine during an Active Aging Week visit to the shores of Lake Michigan. The group braved strong winds to walk the pier at Grand Haven. Image courtesy of Covenant Village of the Great Lakes*

nities, and various other sites. Some mainstay activities include group walks, health fairs, dances, fitness classes, concerts and field trips, with myriad variations and fresh programming options added each year. Veteran hosts challenge themselves to attract first-time participants and inspire returning ones with their offerings.

Flexibility makes the annual observance unique. Active Aging Week hosts decide how they will participate by choosing how many events to offer and what type of activities to provide, from a single group walk, to a multifaceted schedule each day.

Each year ICAA names a theme to help hosts focus their programming and marketing. In 2014, Active Aging Week will promote an adventurous spirit with the theme “Let the adventure begin.”

## Connecting with the theme

What does the word *adventure* bring to mind? One meaning, according to the

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is “an exciting or remarkable experience.”<sup>1</sup> “Adventure” carries visions of exploring the world around and within us, and being open to the possibilities. Life becomes bigger—and we become bigger—as we learn and grow from our experiences.

While “Let the adventure begin” is the overall theme for this year’s Active Aging Week, it also invites participants to undertake a very personal journey—one in which they start or continue experiences that enhance their well-being. For some individuals, that journey might involve ballroom dancing, learning digital photography or planting a community garden. Professionals have a key role to play in discovering what activities will promote a meaningful personal experience for each client.

In that context, personal wellness is an adventure for professionals and clients. And the seven dimensions of wellness model is a great way to connect with this year’s theme.

For example, tying to the environmental dimension, a group walk could “Let the adventure begin outdoors!” In 2013, Wellness Director Michael Cain led members of the Shoc & Awe Hiking Club from Twin Lakes Community in Burlington, North Carolina, on a 2.5-mile hike through the trails of Cedarock Park. The 414-acre park offers six miles of hiking trails to explore, along with a restored historical farm and an old mill dam.

Outdoor programming such as a hike lends itself to the theme of adventure by bringing people into the natural environment. A treasure hunt (or today’s high-tech equivalent, geocaching) can heighten that element of adventure, with participants searching for hidden items or locations. Another option is a scavenger hunt. This activity increases the fun as individuals or teams explore their surroundings while collecting items and fulfilling tasks on a list.

Hosts who have ramped up the outdoor adventure in past years include Westminster-Canterbury on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia Beach, Virginia. According to Linda White, coordinator of fitness and aquatic programs, Westminster-Canterbury organized a successful hang-gliding expedition in 2013 for community residents. Eleven adventurous souls participated, each soaring in tandem with a professional hang glider over the Eastern Shore. When programming for outdoor settings, professionals rely on their creativity and client knowledge to provide appealing experiences that work for their specific populations.

Every wellness dimension offers opportunities to “Let the adventure begin.” Hosts may want to build programming that encourages exploring each different dimension of wellness (physical, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual, vocational and environmental). Another way to present the dimensions is to focus on different aspects of self. For instance, healthy-brain activities may offer an adventure of the mind; aerobics, an adventure of the body; and meditation, an adventure of the spirit.

## Planning for success

Active Aging Week reports over the years affirm that hosts use the annual theme to anchor programming content. “Having a theme does make it easier to plan because it gives the day or week a focal point,” noted Cindy Caprio, Castle Pointe at Baywinde’s resident program director, in 2012 in *ICAA Functional U*.<sup>2</sup>

When hosts discuss Active Aging Week with potential sponsors, the theme can help create vision for the event and crystallize ideas for tie-ins. At the Brightview East Norriton community in Pennsylvania, Vibrant Living Director Jodi K. Wendl emailed the 2013 theme to “every vendor we’ve ever worked with ... and asked what [they] could do for us. Many responded with some interesting presentations,” she revealed.

Hosts can use the theme to choose activities, inspire volunteers, get colleagues on board, and excite interest among clients and the media as the week draws nearer.<sup>2</sup>

Active Aging Week veterans consistently emphasize an early start to planning. They also advise bringing together a team to create the event and maximize the resources available to deliver it. Team members might include wellness staff, colleagues from across departments, board or committee members, older-adult volunteers, and trusted supporters such as vendors and contractors.

To help hosts plan and deliver a successful event, ICAA’s Active Aging Week website offers free campaign resources. Each year the association reviews these resources and updates promotional materials such as logos, posters and press releases. The resource library also features planning guides and worksheets; past articles about planning; annual overview articles with examples of activities; and a webinar that shares best practices from three veteran hosts.

After Active Aging Week 2013, Becky Talley-Maholick, a recreation supervisor at



*At the Legacy of Delano, Minnesota, participants enjoy the group walk held as part of Active Aging Week. Image courtesy of Tealwood Senior Living*

The Villages, Florida, wrote that the online resources provided “everything I needed and then some to aid me in planning a successful program ...” ICAA will roll out this year’s posters and planning tools over the next months.

## Motivating change

Every day active-aging professionals encourage people to stay healthy, active and engaged in life. Every September Active Aging Week offers the opportunity to celebrate these efforts and connect them to the momentum of a national campaign. From coast to coast, the annual observance unites North America’s active-aging advocates in championing the abilities of older adults and raising awareness of a more positive way to age.

## Mark your calendar

*Observance:* Active Aging Week®

*Theme:* Let the adventure begin

*Dates:* September 21–27, 2014

Visit [www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm) for information and resources.

Local hosts link communities with the energy that Active Aging Week generates. Through their activities, they support experiences that may inspire change—for example, in the individual who puts aside a negative belief or habit, challenges the status quo, or finds a new interest or purpose. Or the person who blossoms with a renewed sense of possibility. In 2014, Active Aging Week supports professionals and older adults in exploring those possibilities. Let the adventure begin.🌀

## References

1. “Adventure.” (2014). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved on March 28, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adventure?show=0&t=1396215319>.
2. ICAA editors. (2012). Anchor Active Aging Week with a theme. *ICAA Functional U*, 10(2), 18–19; March/April issue. Retrieved on March 28, 2014, from <http://www.icaa.cc/activeagingweek/aaw2012/anchoraawwithatheme.pdf>.

*The sponsors of Active Aging Week 2014 include EnerG by Aegis™, Healthways SilverSneakers® Fitness Program, Institute for Preventive Foot Health, Performance Health Systems, Thor•Lo®, Inc., and National Council on the Aging and Falls Free.*

