

## COUNCIL ON AGING

The past year once again was very eventful as plans develop for a permanent senior center in the near future. (See the Senior Center Building Committee report for details on the progress of the new center project.) It was also good news that the Town was able to negotiate a favorable lease and rental arrangement so that a move into temporary quarters was averted. The current lease will expire in May of 2008, which hopefully will mean a direct relocation into the new center. The Friends of the COA have continued their fund-raising efforts to support the construction of the center. To that end they sponsored a highly successful crafts fair in November, which they plan to repeat next year. Other fund-raising projects are also underway but the major campaign will renew once the start date for construction is definitively determined. In a spirit of giving the Friends sponsored a Mardi Gras in April event, which was a fund-raiser for a senior center in the New Orleans area that was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The event was also a very successful social event for seniors and the community. This year the Friends' contribution to the COA was funding for a comprehensive social service directory to help seniors access resources. The directory is available on-line through the Town web-site or in hard copy at the senior center.

The COA board has been active in advocacy and program development. Their effort to bring an innovative and cutting edge health course, called "Chronic Disease Self-Management", came to fruition and begins in January of '07. Advocacy efforts included: 1) appeals to the Town to not relocate the agency to temporary quarters 2) request to add a custodial position to staffing 3) letters of support to various Town boards with regard to the senior center project and 4) active assistance in the FY'08 budget process with the formation of the budget sub-committee. Neil Hegarty completed his two year term as chair in Oct., after ably steering the board through the process of obtaining Town support for the new center. He also took the lead in managing the Belmont Elderly Citizens, Inc. in such a way that it once again became a vibrant support entity for the COA. Joel Semuels was elected the new chair this past October. He brings with him an unusually high level of expertise from having worked as general counsel for the state's Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Phyl Solomon, long time activist for seniors through the COA board, the Friends of the COA and Springwell, was elected vice chair. The board also welcomes Ann Verrilli, newly elected member of the Belmont Housing Authority and now liaison to the COA board. Ms. Verrilli's participation is timely given that the two agencies are involved in advocating for grant funding to build an elevator at the Waverley Oaks senior housing complex.

The budget remains very tight for the agency after years of level funding. Funds for professional development are nil. No subsidies remain for trips, and the only programs that offer Town funded support are the English as Second Language courses, the swim program and the annual holiday party. Fortunately, the state's formula grant was slightly increased, which enabled the annual volunteer recognition event to be fully funded. Other sources of revenue have been pursued for a range of programs. Grant funding has been applied for a caregivers' education program and for art classes. Through our Friends' organization continued grant funding was successfully awarded by Cambridge Savings Bank for our Lifeline/ personal response system that allows low-income seniors a necessary technology to remain independent in their homes.



Exercise classes are a popular program at Belmont's Senior Center`

The ever increasing volume of programs and activities at the center have grown to the point where there is no more space to accommodate new on-going programs. However, as some programs come to their natural ending others are begun. Class size, for our exercise programs in particular, continue to expand. Our new Boston College social work intern since September, Jacalyn Boucher, has embarked on helping us to provide a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan. A special educational session for seniors was held in October to help them plan for a variety of unplanned crises. Ms. Boucher has since been researching the best ways for us to identify and establish a check in system for our elders at risk. Another of the projects assigned to her was to provide more advocacy for COA funding from the state. A new wave of efforts was made to provide outreach to elders who are part of the linguistic minority communities. Community meetings with social service agencies serving Russian and Chinese elders were sponsored. The meeting with the Chinese elders led to a new service whereby Chinese speaking seniors from Belmont High School have begun to provide translation services. In some cases this has meant the difference between remaining at home independently or not since some elders have not been able to read important notices regarding health, finances and other essential communications due to the language barrier. Our BelderBus has been busier with extra destinations this year. The Belmont Food Pantry has funded the bus to bring eligible seniors to their bi-weekly Saturday program. The bus was also needed for the weekend flu clinic in November. During the first season of the Belmont Farmers' Market's operation the bus was available for trips there. The COA is also grateful to the Belmont Farmers' Market for both volunteering to escort seniors needing assistance with their groceries and for the generous weekly donations of fresh produce for those elders and their families in particular need.

As ever we are proud of our very dedicated staff. We were delighted at the marriage of our senior center coordinator, Suzanne Ochoa (now Cromwell). The seniors held a lovely celebration in honor of her wedding. We persevered while Lucia Stone, our social worker, was out on extended medical leave last spring as was Marie Poore, our volunteer coordinator, in the fall. The staff pitched in readily to provide the very valuable services those out on leave typically handles. Still on medical leave is our morning driver, Ernie Brennan. Fortunately, John Kennedy, one of our volunteers who is known for his courtesy to seniors, and Peter Goneau, one of our other experienced drivers, have stepped up to the plate and have filled in for Ernie so that we were able to avoid interruptions in service. We are particularly proud that even while our bus was unavailable for repairs in October and our other, very old car has been out often for repairs, our hard-working transportation coordinator, Brian Jennings and all our drivers pitched in with their own cars to insure continuity of service. Mr. Jennings was able to enlist the help of the Arlington COA and use of their bus for several weeks. Our BelderBus driver, Mr. Andre Guzeyer, scheduled his personal vacation for when the bus was out for repairs, again, as a means to avoid further disruption. Although we lost our custodial aide, Jose Salazar, we are exceedingly grateful that the federally funded Operation A.B.L.E. that brought him to us also found a replacement. Michael Keough has been on board tending to the needs of our facility since October. He is so dedicated that he offered to come in on the weekends to wax and buff our entire floor area, a task that had not been done since the building opened almost 8 years ago. In addition to our social work intern we are grateful to the Town for having provided us with an accounting intern for several months so that we could perform an internal audit of our new revolving account.

As always, we continue to be deeply grateful for the work of our 190 odd volunteers. Without their labor and professional services our agency would not be able to appropriately serve our seniors' needs. In addition we would like to take the opportunity to thank those who donate to our programs year round. The COA is grateful to the Arlington V.N.A. and CareGroup for donating their nurses for our weekly blood pressure clinic, to Dr. David Alper for funds towards our weekly movies and for flowers at holiday times, to Ms. Kitty Haas for the daily subscription to the Boston Globe, to Stoneham Savings Bank for their generous employee and corporate matching gifts, to Brown's Funeral Home for all the magazine subscriptions, to Starbucks for morning pastries, to Mr. John Cleary for weekly bagels, to the Lions' Club for a new blood pressure cuff and last but not least, to Belmont Manor Nursing Home, for the yearly Thanksgiving feast and for the use of their dining room where the senior daily lunch site is located. Program donations have also come from families who lost senior members of our community. We are grateful to the family and friends of Catherine Minahan (with a special thanks to Johanna Robinson for her gift in memory of Catherine), Eugenia Dromey and Marion Gardner for memorial gifts and the bequests from the estates of Joseph Hoffman and Catherine Minahan. To all those who donated in appreciation of all the hard work Mr. Fix-it does to keep their homes in good repair, we are also deeply grateful.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nava Niv-Vogel, Director