



Pat Quinn, Governor
Charles D. Johnson, Director

421 East Capitol Avenue, #100, Springfield, Illinois 62701-1789
217-785-3356, Fax: 217-785-4477 • www.state.il.us/aging

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CONTACT:
Kimberly Parker 312-814-1577

Illinois Department on Aging Focuses on Oral History to Document Stories and Learn Lessons

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) director Charles Johnson announced today that oral history is this month's theme for the year-long campaign *2010: Year of the Engaged Older Adult*. Director Johnson is leading a statewide initiative to improve the health and lives of older adults and increase their involvement in volunteering, education and working. Out of the initiative came a year-long campaign for the year 2010 to engage citizens, especially those ages 50 and older, and tap their talents to benefit their communities and the entire state. Each month of the year will offer a theme with the purpose of creating stronger connections among the generations. Log on to www.law.siu.edu/GenServeGen for information or ideas.

"Documenting history can be as simple as talking to family members about the things they remember. Or it can be more elaborate by documenting stories by date, place and time. Either way it's important to have the input of older adults to document our history," said Director Johnson.

One such elaborate oral history project is presented by the Center for Creative Aging at Harold Washington College, in Chicago. The exhibit is on display through February 5 and features eight Chicagoans with vivid memories of the Great Depression who tell their stories on videotape in a project called "Hard Times, Yesterday and Today: Living Chicagoans' Experience of the Great Depression and the Current Recession."

Jacquelyn A. Mattfeld, Ph.D., is the director for the Center for Creative Aging. She says it's important to document our stories and to use them as a learning tool.

"Through this oral history project we wanted to tell the stories of how people survived through this country's worst economic crisis and we wanted to focus on lessons can they teach us today about survival, resilience and hard work," Mattfeld said.

The oral history exhibit is one example of activities that will be planned this month across the state.

The team of dedicated professionals in Illinois who have been working to map out the best strategies to get older adults involved in community and to encourage more interaction between the generations include representatives from the Illinois Department on Aging, Intergenerational Initiative-SIU School of Law, AARP, Serve Illinois Commission, Retirement Research Foundation, Corporation for National and Community Service, Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, Senate Higher Education Committee, Illinois Community College Council of Presidents, Chinese American Service League, Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and McCormick Foundation.

For more information about program services to assist older adults in Illinois and their caregivers, call the IDoA Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 or for TTY (hearing impaired use only) call 1-888-206-1327.

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