

# Minnesota State University, Mankato Newslink Vol 1 Issue 3–May 2007



## Listening to the Lessons of Aging

Approximately 180 people attended the Second Annual Chesley Lecture, “Listening to the Lessons of Aging”, sponsored by MSU’s Center on Aging on Monday, April 23 at the Country Inn and Suites. Attendees included administrators, faculty, staff and students from MSU, as well as aging network professionals and seniors from Mankato and across south central Minnesota.

This year’s two keynote speakers were Helen Kivnick, Professor of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, who spoke on “Vital Involvement, Aging and Caring: A Boomer’s-Eye View” and Jim Klobuchar, former Minneapolis Star Tribune columnist, who talked about “Adding Years, Finding New Gifts”. Kivnick presented an overview of her research on vital involvement of elders in their families and communities, illustrated by a story on a family coping with health changes in their elderly parents. Klobuchar spoke about people and events that have been life-changing experiences for him, reading excerpts from his most recent book, “Walking Briskly Towards the Sunset”.

Planning is already underway for next year, including possibly holding a Conference on Aging during the day, prior to the Chesley Lecture in the evening. The daytime conference could feature presentations and posters highlighting research on aging at Minnesota State University, as well as at other locations in south central Minnesota.



## Faculty Highlight: Jeffrey Buchanan

Dr. Jeffrey Buchanan has been an Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology at Minnesota State University in Mankato, Minnesota for approximately three years. Dr. Buchanan is also on the faculty of the Gerontology program at MSU. Prior to coming to MSU, Dr. Buchanan received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Nevada and completed a clinical internship and post-doctoral fellowship at the Veteran's Affairs Hospital in Minneapolis, MN.

Among the many courses Dr. Buchanan teaches is Psychology of Aging. Psychology of Aging is a developmental psychology course that focuses on normal as well as pathological aspects of aging. However, because Dr. Buchanan is a clinical psychologist, there is much discussion of clinical assessment and intervention issues related to common cognitive and emotional disorders associated with aging. There is extensive discussion of Alzheimer's disease and related conditions given that this is Dr. Buchanan's primary area of interest. Other topics discussed in this class include ageism, cognitive aspects of aging, caregiving issues, mental health and aging, changes in socialization patterns associated with aging, and death and bereavement. Older adults are often invited as guest speakers to share experiences and discuss issues related to course content such as caring for a family member with dementia, values important to older adults, and secrets to staying married 50+ years. Students are encouraged to increase contact with older adults as part of the class and assignments are designed to "step into the shoes" of older adults so as to have a better understanding of their experiences and relate course material to

Dr. Buchanan's primary clinical and research interests are in behavioral gerontology. Much of his research is conducted in long-term care facilities and is designed to improve quality of life of both direct care staff as well as residents with cognitive impairments. His current research is in the areas of managing challenging behaviors such as agitation and aggression in dementia patients, training long-term care staff to use non-pharmacological behavior

management strategies, developing methods to increase the frequency of positive emotional experiences in dementia patients living in long-term care, the assessment of ageism, the analysis of communication styles used by nursing assistants when caring for persons with dementia, and stress and coping among caregivers of persons with dementia.

## New Graduate Assistants for 2007-2008 Academic Year

For the 2007-08 academic year, two new graduate assistants, Katie Griep and Sanjay Sarkar, have been hired to work with the Gerontology Program and Center on Aging.

Katie, who will graduate from MSU with her Bachelor's this spring with a major in Sociology and minor in Gerontology, will begin the Master's program in Gerontology at MSU this fall. Sanjay, who currently lives in Calcutta, India, will also be starting MSU's Gerontology Master's program in the fall.

Graduate assistants in the Gerontology Program and Center on Aging are essential to the day-to-day functioning of the program and center. They perform such duties as taking calls and inquiries from students, faculty and the public; assisting with writing and editing Newslink, the Gerontology Program newsletter; planning and participating in gerontology-related research; helping increase the visibility of the program and center on campus and in the Mankato area community; participating in meetings of Gerontology Program and Center on Aging committee meetings; and planning and coordinating events, such as the Chesley Lecture on Aging.

Watch for more information and profiles of our two new graduate assistants in future issues of Newslink.

## Gerontology Student Conducts Research on Assisted Living Facility Amenities for Baby Boomers

MSU Gerontology graduate student Rick Ruzin's thesis research was concerned with trying to discover whether or not today's assisted living facilities contain features and amenities would meet the demands of the baby boom generation.

To accomplish this, he worked with Dr. Jeff Buchanan, Assistant Professor, Psychology to develop a qualitative and quantitative survey. He first wanted to discover what the highest values are for the baby boom generation. He did this by interviewing a group of baby boomers and asking them to rate different values on a 5-part Likert Scale. Next he asked these respondents to answer questions regarding their personal experiences with assisted living communities. He wanted these questions to be open-ended so the respondents could give them as much information as they wished. He wanted their opinions and beliefs about both the good and the bad experiences they had with assisted living facilities. The respondents selected for this task all matched the demographics of today's assisted living communities. They also all had personal knowledge of, and experience with, current assisted living facilities. When this was accomplished he tabulated results to discover, first, which values received the highest totals and, thus, were the highest rated for the baby boomer group. They were 1. Good health 2. Independence 3. Choice He used these as the guidelines to review current amenities and features available today. He was able to state conclusions and make recommendations about amenities and feature changes that likely should be changed to meet the values of the baby boomers, the next large cohort of customers for assisted living communities.

Submitted by Rick Ruzin, Gerontology Masters Student

## Rose M. Hull Scholarship Award Winners Named

The Rose M. Hull endowment offers two scholarships each year for undergraduate or graduate gerontology students preparing for a career serving older adults. Scholarship award winners for 2007-08 are Cassandra Werner, an undergraduate student and Sandra Zempel, a graduate student. Each student will receive \$750 to cover tuition and fees.

Cassandra, who lives in Warsaw, Minnesota, is a Nursing major and Gerontology minor at MSU. Since becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant in July 2004, she has worked at Three Links Care Center, Heritage House Elder Care and is currently employed as a CNA at Northfield Hospital Long Term Care Center. Future career plans include working as a Registered Nurse in a nursing home or pursuing a Ph.D. in Gerontological Nursing. In choosing gerontological nursing as a career, Cassandra notes that, "I have taken away more knowledge and insight from a single day in a nursing home than I did from four years in high school."

Sandra lives in St. Anthony, Minnesota and graduated in 1991 from Concordia University. She will be pursuing an M.S. in Gerontology from MSU. She has worked for the last ten years in direct care and program management with developmentally disabled adults and the elderly, conducting training with managers and support staff at two agencies on Alzheimer's Disease and Down's Syndrome. During her graduate studies at MSU, she hopes to continue her experiences and research with the elderly developmentally disabled population and to provide training and assistance to direct care staff. In choosing this career, Cassandra states, "I have found it to be my calling in life to advocate on behalf of this very special population, and I hope to be able to do this on a higher level while completing MSU's graduate program in Gerontology."

## Graduate Assistant's Corner— The Ecuman Age Wave Study

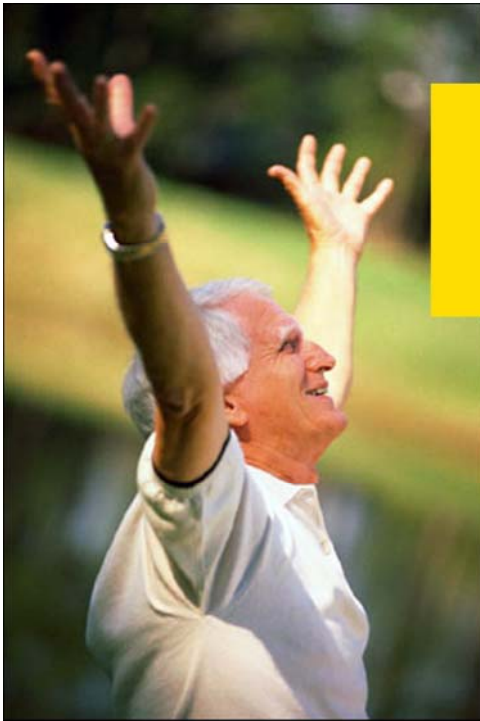
In January 2007—Ecuman released a state wide report which dives into what is on the minds of Minnesota's aging population. They surveyed 564 baby boomers, ages ranging 42-60.

The Ecuman website points out a few facts about baby boomers. A baby boomer enters their sixties ever 7 seconds in America. In 1950, we had 69,000 seniors in Minnesota. In 2030, we will have 1.3 million.

Our life expectancy at birth in 1900 was 47 years; today it's nearly 80 years. Amazing and true facts about the changes of the aging population in America and in Minnesota. So, what did the survey find out about Minnesota baby boomers. According to those who took the survey the number one issue facing the state today is "having access to affordable health care". 40 % of the participants reported that this is the number one issue facing the state, followed by controlling taxes (23% ).

Some of the concerns of the baby boomers reported include: maintaining good health (70%) , financial well-being (54%), maintaining your independence (38%) and loneliness and isolation (37%)

57% of baby boomers plan on volunteering when they retire. Baby boomers also think they can have some impact on improving their communities quality of life. The report covers many areas from how baby boomers define images of aging and at what age a person becomes "old". For more information on this study log into: <http://www.ecumen.org/boomerreport.html>



**We are on the web**

[www.mnsu.edu/gerontology](http://www.mnsu.edu/gerontology)