

Retirement Conference to promote active 'golden years'

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

In olden times, miners set off to the wilds to search for gold and make their fortunes.

But a different kind of "gold" can be found in daily life — and organizers of an upcoming conference hope to help seniors find ways to tap that gold and enrich their lives.

Nazareth College and the Rochester Friendly Senior Services are cosponsoring a free "Golden Opportunities" conference May 23, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the college, 4245 East Ave.

"It's really a golden opportunity to take advantage of the golden years," remarked Dorinda Goggin, who is Friendly Senior Services' community services coordinator and is helping to organize the conference.

"We want to help people to make the most of life's opportunities," remarked Margaret Andrews, who also helped put the conference together and is chair of Nazareth's nursing department.

The conference will include a panel discussion about ways for seniors to make the most of their time and talents — presented by seniors who have done so; a pre-

sentation on opportunities for seniors during a time of change in society; safety tips from police to help "keep their gold"; and an address by Carter Catlett Williams of Rochester, a social work consultant on aging who has received the Older Women's League National Leadership Award and was a co-recipient of the President's Award of the American Society on Aging in 1993.

Goggin said that the conference is not intended to be just an information session about Medicare and Medicaid or for care-givers of seniors — though they are more than welcome. Rather, it is intended for seniors themselves to help chart their own courses.

"People are going to pretty much rather than discuss things, talk about their own experiences," she said. "I think what we're trying to do is empower seniors and encourage them to look at their lives and enrich the



time when they are not working. "My whole philosophy in working with people," Goggin added, "is unless you are isolated due to circumstances you cannot control — you live in the country and you don't have a car — it's a time to look at your life experiences and interests and things you wanted to do and maybe never had time to do."

Thus, for example, a senior who enjoyed Girls Scouts could

volunteer with the organization, or one who enjoyed reading to children could assist with story times at libraries, or an individual who enjoys doing puzzles could perhaps visit shut-ins, Goggin suggested.

Many seniors are already active in these and other ways, Goggin said.

Indeed, she observed, "Most of the volunteer work that used to be done by mothers that stay at home is being picked up by seniors. What we're trying to do get people to re-think what they have to offer."

The first "Golden Opportunities" conference was held in February 1995, in conjunction with the White House Conference on Aging, Andrews said. "We had such a fantastic response — 350 people came — so we said 'Let's do it again,'" Andrews reported. Organizers adopted a three-year approach for the senior conferences. "Last year we talked about growing older with independence," Andrews explained. "This year we're talking about

growing older with opportunity. Next year we will talk about growing older with dignity."

Andrews noted that a nursing department survey of the Greater Rochester area in 1995 showed there is an audience for a program of this sort:

"I think it's related to the population demographics," she explained. "We see the graying of our region and the graying of America."

Nazareth College has been responding to those demographics, Andrews said, offering a concentration in gerontology in its nursing program, providing courses through its Center for Lifelong Learning, and hosting Elderhostel programs each summer.

Goggin added that the program is a response to the changing climate that encourages seniors to be active, and not dwell on illness and fear.

"What we want to do is challenge them to look at the time they have and find ways to use it," Goggin said. "I think positive aging is something whose time has come."

EDITORS' NOTE: For information about the "Golden Opportunities" conference, call Nazareth College's nursing department at 716/586-2525, ext. 595. Pre-registration is due by May 17.

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