

FEATURE

Seminar considers ways to address seniors issues

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

ROCHESTER — Maralee Lindley remembers her mother dressing her up in her good clothes to go visit a 100-year-old resident of their hometown, Springfield, Ill. Her mother said they would never again have the opportunity to meet someone that old. That was in 1931.

"For years and years I thought, 'Isn't that unbelievable,' that I had actually been with and shaken the hand of a 100-year-old person," Lindley said.

But today, the United States is home to 70,000 centenarians, although the nation's average life expectancy is 76. One in 26 baby boomers will live to be 100, Lindley said.

Now a specialist on aging, Lindley presented a seminar called "Who Wants To Live To Be 100?" at the Monroe Community Hospital June 14. It was sponsored by the Monroe County Office for the Aging primarily for professionals who work with older people. Attending were dietitians, therapists, nursing home workers, nurses, insurance representatives, senior center directors and others.

The reality is that people live long lives today, Lindley said. "My goal was to make them aware of the fact longevity is here, it's going to continue ... and it's very promising. It's not all doom and gloom."

Lindley has worked with numerous organizations. She is a representative of the International Federation on Aging at the United Nations; was vice-chair of the U.S. Committee for the Celebration of the U.N. International Year of Older Persons in 1999; and was director of the Illinois Department on Aging from 1992-99.

In the 1960s, she noted, researchers set out to learn about aging, particularly by studying men living in nursing homes. They predicted that people would live longer and longer, but that the longer they lived, the sicker they would be, and with very grievous disabilities.

Yet current data show that less than 5 percent of the country's citizens 65 and

older is seriously disabled, she said.

"Another thing — our centenarians are basically healthy," she added. "They may not see as well, may not hear as well. (But) we all have disabilities."

The participants in the interactive workshop took part in such activities as prioritizing senior issues. While covering a wide range, top-ranking concerns were financial status, caregiving and losing independence and loved ones.

Participants also brainstormed ways of planning intergenerational activities, with Lindley noting the importance of keeping the generations together.

Joyce Daley, a Catholic Family Center case manager, said her small group came up with a scavenger hunt for a senior center and scout troop. The hunt could involve searching for certain items from both the older and younger generations, and getting together to talk about them.

Daley had been among the third of participants who raised their hands when Lindley asked how many wanted to live to be 100.

"You want to live a good long life, to enjoy seeing your family and their children grow," Daley explained. "But it's all based on the quality of life."

High among Lindley's goals was convincing workshop participants to lobby for needs of the aging population.

"You all are in a marvelous position to see what's happening in aging," she said. She urged them to network and help gain attention within the public-policy arena for senior issues.

For example, grandparents parenting grandchildren has become a "huge social issue," she said, "but it's nowhere near the public-policy arena."

Grandparents have been embarrassed to push for recognition and aid, thinking they must have done something wrong in raising their own children, she said.

Meanwhile federal funding is being designated for caregivers through the Older Americans Act, reauthorized by Congress last year.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Grace Doyle greets friends and family at a June 24 brunch following 9:30 a.m. Mass at Holy Apostles Church in honor of her upcoming 100th birthday.

Parish honors almost-centenarian

GREECE — Grace Doyle has some words of wisdom to offer. And why shouldn't she? She's been gathering experiences for nearly 100 years.

Doyle, who was born in Livonia on Nov. 5, 1901, said the greatest lesson the years have taught her is "to be honest with everyone."

She is mother of seven children, six who are still living. She became a widow after 60 years of marriage to Nick Doyle, who worked as a custodian at the former St. Bernard's Seminary for \$17 a week during the Depression. She said the family got along through "good management I guess. I fed them all."

Doyle became a parishioner of Rochester's Holy Apostles Parish at the age of 14. She worked at the parish's bingo games for 30 years, which she enjoyed because "you meet a lot of nice people and talk to

them."

Holy Apostles honored the 86-year-parishioner in anticipation of her 100th birthday with a 9:30 a.m. Mass and birthday brunch June 24. Jumping the gun by nearly five months enabled friends and more than 100 family members to attend.

Doyle attributes her longevity to "my genes, what else?!" and said she's "seemed to be quite happy all my life."

"You just go one day at a time, and you get there," she said. "I'm still living and feeling good."

The hardest part about being her age is that she gets lonely sometimes. Yet she said she is never totally alone. "I just talk to my Savior and his mother," she said, pointing to a statue of Mary and the infant Jesus hanging on her wall. "They're my best friends."

— Jeanne Kidera

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