

# HEALTHY RETIREMENT

## 55Plus scores an A+ with members

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Whether it be seminars, handouts, newsletters or health screenings, there's much to gain from the 55Plus program that celebrates its 10th anniversary next month at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira.

And, monetarily speaking, there's nothing to lose: Membership is free.

More than 8,000 people are now affiliated with 55Plus, a community service of St. Joseph's. According to Kathy Gray, program coordinator, 55Plus was the first of its kind in the Southern Tier, sparking similar programs at other area hospitals.

"(St. Joseph's) really did their homework. They did a lot of research in the community to determine whether it was a needed program; they did studies through the Office for the Aging. They found out that like most areas in the U.S., we're an aging population," Gray said.

Here are some of the many benefits available through this free community service:

- Testing for high blood pressure, prostate cancer, pulmonary function and gastrointestinal problems.

- Seminars by a variety of health experts.

- Discounts on goods and services from area merchants, obtained by presenting a 55Plus membership card.

- Transportation to and from St. Joseph's Hospital, if needed.

- Eliminating some of the necessary paperwork for admission, by doing it in advance over the telephone.

- Private hospital rooms at discounted rates.

- A visit from a designated 55Plus representative during hospital stays.

- Discounts on guest meals at the hospital.

- Complimentary homemaker services for up to three hours following release from the hospital.

- Interest-free payment plans for the balance of hospital bills not covered by insurance.

- Help with insurance filing.

As one might assume from its title, 55Plus is open to people who are 55 years or older. "We've had the program established long enough that a lot of people are aware of it. They're stopping in the hospital on their 55th birthday for an application," Gray said.

Benefits involving any hospital stay apply to inpatient admissions only. Gray said that 55Plus was originally established for such patients, but the program has expanded to include many offerings for the general community. For example, a health fair held at St. Joseph's last October drew approximately 300 people for various screenings.

"More often than not, the staff that helps out will catch something in the



Karin von Voigtlander

Della Jordan-Gardner, occupational therapist at St. Joseph's Hospital, guides Elsie Van Alstine through household activities. Jordan-Gardner gave a talk "How to Stay in Your Home and Out of a Nursing Home" as part of the 55Plus series.

screenings. They'll talk with the individual and encourage them to schedule an appointment with their own physician," Gray said. "We'll have people call back and say 'Thank you so much, I had no idea my blood sugar was so high.'"

Jean Hurley, a long-time 55Plus member, said the health fair was "where I had my first sampling of bone density. My bones were perfect." Yet Hurley, a parishioner at Our Lady of Lourdes in Elmira, also remarked, "Now I'm more cognizant that I have to have enough calcium in my body."

Gray said that 55Plus participants come mostly from Chemung County, but also from several surrounding counties. And, she added, "Some people have moved from the area, but still maintain membership because they'd still like to receive our newsletter. It's very timely as far as content."

That newsletter, the *Advisor*, is published quarterly and edited by Eileen Kirkpatrick, a 55Plus departmental assistant. The publication addresses such topics as the importance of flu vaccines; changes in the digestive system created by aging; advice for seniors who are crime victims; and safety tips for seniors.

Kirkpatrick also coordinates the 55Plus seminars, while Hurley volunteers at the registration table for the talks, which are



held six to eight times per year.

"They've been interesting," said Hurley, who noted that she has attended seminars on diabetes, use of the hands, laser surgery and nutrition. "It's a wonderful program; the sections are very informative. And people look for handouts to read."

### Cooperative Extension presents healthy tips

ROCHESTER—During March, which is National Nutrition Month, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County will offer weekly nutrition and exercise exhibits to the community.

From 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Cooperative Extension's lobby, 249 Highland Ave., visitors can learn to improve their food choices and make positive lifestyle changes to enhance the quality of their lives.

During the week of March 11, the extension will offer a demonstration on the fat content in selected foods and tips on how to reduce fat intake. The week of March 18 will feature exercise tips, and the week of March 24 will highlight the importance of fruits and vegetables.

Each week, the exhibit will feature a trivia quiz. Quizzes can be handed in for a weekly drawing.

National Nutrition Month is sponsored annually by the American Dietetic Association. The campaign is designed to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating habits. The key messages of this year's campaign are:

- Americans of all ages benefit from making healthy eating choices, physical activity and lifestyle choices.

- Trying new foods and physical activity can jump-start your plans for health.

- Personalize the Food Guide Pyramid as a road map toward eating a variety of foods, using moderation when selecting portion sizes, and balancing your choices over time.

- Taking the first step toward making healthy choices can be easy if you enlist help from family and friends.

*Milestones/  
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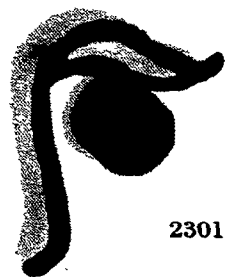


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