

# HEALTHY RETIREMENT

## Instructor steers seniors through class

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

VICTOR — If you're driving down the road and see the years going by, it may be time for a refresher course even if you think you're driving well, according to Mary Lou Palumbo, who teaches a 55 Alive Driver Safety Program for seniors at Victor Town Hall.

A Eucharistic minister and lector at St. Patrick's Parish in Victor, Palumbo, 66, said anyone 50 years or older is eligible to take the course, which costs \$10 and is taught in two four-hour sessions on separate days. Classes are slated for April 16 and 18, as well as for dates in May, June, July, August and September, and are sponsored by the Victor Senior Citizens. You can learn more about them by calling Palumbo between 5 and 9 p.m. at 585/924-7973.

Similar classes are taught by volunteer instructors all over the Diocese of Rochester on behalf of the American Association of Retired Persons, which created the curriculum. To find out where you can take such a course, you can call 1-888-AARP-NOW and follow the prompts to find a class; or you can visit the organization's Web site at [www.aarp.org/55alive](http://www.aarp.org/55alive).

Married to Carl Palumbo, Mary Lou Palumbo is a retired psychology and English instructor from Finger Lakes Community College in Hopewell. She and her husband took the AARP course in 1994. Palumbo retired that year and decided teaching the course would fulfill her need to be with students.

"Once a teacher, always a teacher," she said.

Once a good driver, not necessarily always a good driver, though, she said, referring to people who have driven for decades. Loss of hearing, vision and nerve can make older drivers a danger not only to themselves, but to others on the road, she said. Older drivers are safer than others in some ways, she said, because they tend always to wear safety belts and maintain their cars well. Although young drivers often speed and take risks, she said, some older drivers drive too slowly, especially if they've ever been in an accident. This can cause accidents for others drivers who may be forced to brake quickly or swerve to avoid slower senior drivers.

"I think the people driving slow are very nervous," she said. "I tell them, 'If you're nervous and concerned, get someone else to drive.'"

Yet she acknowledged that many senior citizens equate driving with independence and are loathe to give up the privilege.

"To have them give up their license is like cutting off their right arm," she said.

If you plan to keep driving into your old age, Palumbo offered numerous tips to make you a safer driver. For example, she said, if you're on any kind of prescription medication, ask your pharmacist if the drug will have any effect on your driving skills. Many drugs, especially when mixed with alcohol, can adversely affect a driver's ability to stay awake or aware, Palumbo said.

Since many senior citizens did not take drivers' education before getting their licenses, they may not have learned all the proper rules of the road, the driving instructor noted. Some may not realize, for example, that they have to stop for a school bus unloading passengers — even if the bus is going the other way on a street divided by a median, she said.

She urges seniors to be careful in parking lots, where traffic is usually not well regulated and drivers are more likely to take dangerous chances. She said some seniors have difficulty backing out of parking spaces because they are unable to see what's happening behind them. Sometimes that's simply because they have difficulty turning their necks, she said. Palumbo said she advises seniors to find parking spots they can exit by driving forward, not backward, to make it easier for them to leave.

The course she teaches includes a workbook that serves as a refresher for senior drivers, she said. The book begins with



some quizzes on driving rules and traffic signs, and takes readers through such topics as reaction time, car phones, blind spots, road rage, and entrance and exit ramps.

The workbook also deals with the delicate subject of "driver retirement," or when it's time to turn in your keys for good and let others drive you. The workbook offers these reasons, as well as others, for drivers to consider retirement:

- Being uncomfortable, unsure and frightened behind the wheel.
- Expenses associated with maintaining a vehicle.
- Relatives or friends expressing concern about your driving.
- Other drivers frequently honking at you.
- Getting lost, or feeling physically exhausted by driving.

Many communities offer transportation for seniors, Palumbo said, and local authorities can usually tell you where you can find such transportation.

Most of her students take the course because they can get their auto insurance premiums reduced by 10 to 15 percent for three years, Palumbo said. She added that she loves teaching the course because seniors make such great pupils. "I love teaching older people because they're so much more attentive."

### Jewish center offers courses in computers

ROCHESTER — Seniors who want to learn how to use a computer can take a class at the SeniorNet Computer Learning Center, which is located at the Jewish Community Center, 1200 Edgewood Ave.

Those new to computers can sign up for the Computer Fundamentals course. This two-session basic course for non-computer users 50 and older will answer questions such as "Do I really need a computer?" and "Is a computer very hard to use?" The course costs \$5, and no SeniorNet membership is required. This course will help seniors decide if the Introduction to Computers course is right for them.

Those who are proficient in computer basics or who have taken Introduction to Computers can sign up for advanced classes, including Online With SeniorNet; Using Windows; Taking Control of Your Computer; and Introduction to Word Processing. The prerequisite to the advanced classes will be waived for the computer proficient.

Students do not need to be members of the JCC to enroll in SeniorNet courses. For class schedules, registration and course fee information, contact the SeniorNet Learning Center at 585/461-2000, ext. 463, or visit [www.RVYsenior.net](http://www.RVYsenior.net).

### Medicare discounts eye prescriptions

ATLANTA, Ga. — Medicare recipients who suffer from eye ailments can receive discounted prescription drugs through a Novartis Ophthalmics program called Novartis Care Card.

An estimated 10 million Medicare recipients who lack drug coverage are expected to qualify for this free program. The Novartis Care Card will provide 25 percent discounts off the wholesale price of prescription medications. This translates to a 25 percent to 40 percent savings off retail prices.

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