

Discovery - Learning - Engagement

*Fall 2012 Newsletter*

*Fall 2012 Marks the Start of Appalachia Community Cancer Network Research Project*

This fall the Center will begin data collection for the Appalachia Community Cancer Network (ACCN) project. Led by Dr. Karen A. Roberto, the research team members are set to begin their work in late November with four churches in the southwest region of Virginia. Two churches reside in Galax County, and the other two churches reside in Giles County. Each church will receive one of two cancer intervention programs entitled “Walk by Faith” or “Ribbons of Faith.” According to project manager, Megan Stuart, “participants from both programs will participate in a health assessment, and receive wellness information, and health education.” The Walk by Faith intervention provides materials on healthy eating and exercise as a way of cancer prevention while the Ribbons of Faith intervention provides educational materials on cancer screening and prevention.



Each church will participate in its respective program for a year, and then take part in a “sustainability year” in which it reports to the ACCN about the challenges and successes of the program. Upon completion of the project, each church will receive a tool kit for implementing the successful components of both intervention programs. Currently, Giles County churches will take part in the Walk by Faith program and the Galax County churches will take part in the Ribbons of Faith program. The recruitment process for the churches began earlier in the year and Stuart explained that “we identified well-known individuals and groups in both Galax and Giles that have helped facilitate our work with the churches” such as the Faith Community Nurses (a program of Twin County Regional Healthcare) and the Giles Free Clinic.

The community-engaged research program will include at least 20 rural churches in the 5 states comprising the ACCN – Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Thus, the project design ensures that the faith-based strategies, surveillance, and program outreach is tailored to the individual church’s history and culture. The goal for each church is to recruit 50 members to participate in the program, giving this program the potential to reach at least 1000 residents in the rural Appalachian region.

As part of the ACCN, Virginia Tech is working with The Ohio State University, University of Kentucky, Pennsylvania State University, and West Virginia University to reduce cancer health disparities in the Appalachian region. The intervention program continues the network’s previous work on cervical, colorectal, and lung cancer prevention, by expanding its focus on physical inactivity and obesity, two primary risk factors for cancer. As project manager for the Virginia team, Megan Stuart expressed enthusiasm for the intervention program and sees it as a great opportunity to address cancer health disparities in Appalachia. She is “hopeful this project will successfully help both [Giles and Galax] communities address the overwhelming burden of cancer in this area.”

Also working with Dr. Roberto on the project are Susan Marmagas, Associate Professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences, and Kim Shrader, a graduate student in the Public Health Program at Virginia Tech. Members of the Center for Gerontology research staff, Nancy Brossoie and Marya McPherson, and graduate students, Raven Weaver and Emma Potter are also involved with the project as are a cadre of student volunteers from the Public Health Program, the Gerontology Graduate Certificate Program, and other entities across campus.

### The Prevalence of Cancer and Appalachian Risk Factors<sup>1</sup>

- In the US, 77% of all cancer diagnoses are diagnosed in persons aged 55 or older
- In the US, women have a 1 in 9 chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer
- In the US, men have a 1 in 7 chance of being diagnosed with prostate cancer
- In Appalachia, 27% of all cancer diagnoses for women are breast cancer diagnoses
- In Appalachia, 25% of all cancer diagnoses for men are prostate cancer diagnoses
- In Appalachia, adults are much less likely to engage in cancer screening tests than in other parts of the U.S.
- Nearly half of all new cancer cases diagnosed for Appalachian residents could be prevented through early detection cancer screening

1. Appalachia Community Cancer Network. (2010). *Addressing the cancer burden in Appalachian communities*. Retrieved from [www.accnweb.com](http://www.accnweb.com)

### *Featured Graduate Certificate Alumna*



Adrienne Byrne, M.S., a 2003 alumna of the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology, currently serves as the Director of Business Growth for Healthy Aging and Rural Outreach for the Hospital Corporation of America (HCA). Based in Nashville, HCA is responsible for the operation of hospitals and clinics across the nation, including Lewis Gale. Adrienne works in the Richmond market in the Geriatric Outreach and Business Growth sector. Before taking on the role of director in 2010, Adrienne worked as the Director of Community Relations for Sunrise Assisted Living in central Virginia from 2005 to 2010.

Native to Canada, Adrienne came to Virginia during her high school years and attended Virginia Tech as an undergraduate student, majoring in marketing. Her involvement with the Center for Gerontology happened serendipitously when her college roommate mentioned the Center in a conversation. Having always felt a special connection to older persons, Adrienne applied for a position and worked at the Center throughout her undergraduate and graduate programs.

While at the Center as an undergraduate, Adrienne worked closely with former Virginia Tech faculty member, Pamela B. Teaster on issues related to policy and elder abuse. As a graduate student in health promotion, Adrienne worked with Drs. Teaster and Roberto on a project studying guardianship for elder adults. In addition to assisting with the Center's research, Adrienne also worked as a volunteer at Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg to gain hands-on and real-life involvement with the senior population. She acknowledges that her research experiences and her time at Warm Hearth helped her land her first job in an assisted living facility, and credits Dr. Roberto for having "such an incredible work ethic that pushed me to always want to do the best work possible."

For Adrienne, the Graduate Certificate gave her an added advantage as she ventured out into the job market. The certificate opened a number of doors and has provided her with several opportunities to mix business, aging-related issues, and health promotion. Employers find her certificate as an atypical bonus and regard Adrienne as an expert on senior-related issues. Not only has Adrienne provided guidance to hospital administration and staff, but also to fellow employees and superiors as they encounter issues with their own family members. She has used her expertise in gerontology to push for business and policy initiatives aimed at assisting the elderly population. Her work includes educating physicians, collecting data from assisted living facilities on post-hospital-discharge patient care, and helping set up a geriatric fracture prevention program. In addition to her daily responsibilities, Adrienne has also collaborated with Richmond area hospitals, various home health agencies, and health aging facilities to address hospital readmissions related to heart failure, and she consulted with the Virginia Geriatrics Society in its preparation for its annual conferences.

With her help, two major hospitals in the Richmond area have enacted senior-specific hospital protocol. One such protocol is related specifically to patients with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. "Nursing staff don't quite understand that when you have memory loss, a visit to the emergency room can be a very terrifying experience," so "we partnered with local assisted living facilities to have their residents come into the emergency room and have nurses go through a training exercise to gain experience of dealing with Alzheimer's patients." Another senior-specific program at the hospital includes specialized treatment. "We also have a senior protocol at the hospitals now, so when a patient comes into our hospital who is over 65, there are a few extra steps that our nursing team takes" that focus on maintaining mobility, reducing the use of catheters and unwarranted side effects, and improving patient care quality for the elderly population.

Adrienne is grateful for the Certificate in Gerontology for providing her with the opportunity to combine senior-related issues, research, and advocacy in a business environment. The Graduate Certificate has played a key role in the career path for Adrienne and she feels fortunate to have found something she loves doing at such an early age.

### *AARP "You've Earned a Say" Meeting*

On September 24th over 60 Virginia Tech students and community members sat down for an intergenerational discussion about Social Security and the current proposals in Washington regarding the income program. AARP state representative, Bill Kallio, served as the moderator for the event and presented the audience with 5 different proposals regarding changes to the Social Security. For each proposal, Mr. Kallio described the proposal, discussed arguments both for and against the proposal, and then had audience members voice their opinions through electronic polling. Audience members, armed with an electronic clicker, could cast their vote on whether they believed the proposal would strengthen or weaken the program, if they had mixed feelings, or if they needed more information on the proposal before forming an opinion.

The program, "You've Earned a Say" is part of a series of programs AARP conducted across the nation. Mr. Kallio explained to the audience that "the goal of these meetings is to get policy related to Social Security and Medicare out from behind closed doors in Washington" and into the public's hands.



(L to R) Bill Kallio &  
Dr. Karen A. Roberto

AARP looks at these meetings as a way to bring together Americans of all ages for an intergenerational dialogue about the current and future structure of these government entitlement programs.

Current proposals on Social Security in Washington include raising the age of retirement, adjusting the COLA (Cost Of Living Adjustment), raising or eliminating the cap on taxable income, and adjusting the benefits for different segments of the population. After reviewing each proposal, Mr. Kallio presented viewpoints from the Heritage Foundation and the National Academy of Social Insurance before having the audience members weigh in with their own opinions. The “You’ve Earned a Say” meeting encouraged respectful and open dialogue from both ends of the political spectrum.

### *Center for Gerontology Fall Research Forum*



On October 26, 2012, visiting scholar at the Center for Gerontology, Dr. Eunkyung Kim presented research at the Center’s Fall Research Forum. During her presentation, entitled, *The Hidden Population: The Rural Female Elderly in Korea*, Dr. Kim discussed the economic and social history of South Korea, disparities between urban and rural Koreans, the feminization of poverty, and recent trends in Korean family practices.

Using data from both the Korean government and her own research, Dr. Kim showed that, like the U.S., Korea’s older adult population is growing rapidly. For example, the Korean government projects that by 2040, there will be 288 older adults (aged 65+) to every 100 youth (aged 15 or below) with the largest population growth occurring in females over the age of 80. In South Korea, 45% of adults over the age of 65 live in poverty (as compared with 22.5% in the United States), and single elderly widows are much more likely to live in extreme levels of poverty with limited access to healthcare, social support, and economic resources. Dr. Kim explained, “The aging population in Korea has emerged as one of the most serious social issues that Korea will have to deal with in the near future.”

Dr. Kim also focused on rural women in Korea and revealed that older women (age 65+) make up over one-fourth of the rural population where the population is less than 20,000. Moreover, she explained, the female, rural, and elderly population experiences a “triple jeopardy” of disadvantage due to the lack of economic, social, and education resources.

In her own study of over 200 rural elderly people, Dr. Kim found that women reported lower levels of life satisfaction and higher levels of feeling useless and feeling bored than their male counterparts. Dr. Kim also found significant differences in family practices and caregiving for men and women. “Among all of the variables, three variables related to social resources were different for men and women: number of people visiting, who gives care, and length of care,” Dr. Kim explained. Men had a significantly higher number of people in their social support. Caregiving practices also differed by men and women. Women reported that sons were the most common caregiver and spouses were the least common caregiver. Men, however, reported that the spouse was the most common caregiver and other relatives were uncommon caregivers. In addition to men having spousal care, they also reported having indefinite care. Over 84% of men reported they had a caretaker for as long as they would need, and only 40% of women reported they had a caretaker for as long as they would need. Dr. Kim contended that “females are providing care for their husbands until they die, and then are left without a caregiver for themselves.”

The patterns in caregiver status come in conjunction with changing social mores on elder-adult care in South Korea. In 2002, 70.7% of adult children believed the responsibility of caring for older adults rests solely with the family. In 2010, that statistic dropped by nearly half to 36%. Now, 47.4% of adult children believe the care of elder adults should be a family and government partnership, which suggests

a shift in perceived familial obligations. Dr. Kim warned that the government in South Korea was not fully prepared to handle this shift and must consider the needs of older adults and their care in the future.

Dr. Kim also discussed the rise in international marriages in South Korea. In a country with ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, the influx of international wives is a growing issue. She explained that economically disadvantaged South Korean men are taking wives from other economically disadvantaged countries. Their wives are usually much younger than the husbands; the average age differences between the husband and wife in these couples is over 12 years. When these men die, the wives will be left with few resources. Unfortunately, these wives tend to be less educated, have less access to income, and have less power. “Sooner or later,” Dr. Kim said, “these women will face a big problem.”

Dr. Kim came to the Center in January as part of an 18-month stay at Virginia Tech. Her professional interest includes relationships between adult children and elderly parents, well-being in old age, older women, and marital instability and marital satisfaction of foreign wives. Dr. Kim received her bachelor’s degree in Home Management from Ewha Woman’s University (Korea) and her master’s and doctoral degree in Human Development and Family Studies from Iowa State University, where she specialized in life span studies. After completing her Ph.D., she worked at the Stanford University Center for Research in Disease Prevention as a research associate. She joined the faculty of Changwon National University (CNU), in 1997. Dr. Kim teaches courses in gerontology, family studies, and research methodology at CNU.

### ***Dr. Rosemary Blieszner to serve as President of the Gerontological Society of America***

This November, the Center’s own Associate Director, Dr. Rosemary Blieszner, will begin a 3-year term as the President-elect, President, and Past-president for the Gerontological Society of America (GSA). Dr. Blieszner was elected by fellow members of the GSA and will be responsible for the governance, planning strategy, and representation of the GSA.

In preparation for her President-elect year, Dr. Blieszner has already been busy appointing committee members to serve alongside her and laying out future plans. “During my second year, when I am President, I will choose a theme for the annual meeting, identify plenary speakers and presidential sessions related to the theme, preside over the Council and Executive Committee, and ensure the GSA is making progress on its ongoing strategic plan.”



Dr. Blieszner is no stranger to the GSA, having been a member and conference attendee every year since she was a graduate student. She served Behavioral and Social Sciences Section Chair roles from 2000 to 2004 and was the Editor of *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* from 2008 to 2011. “I consider GSA the most important of the organizations to which I belong,” Blieszner said. “I am very excited about this opportunity to continue serving GSA and I look forward to an interesting and challenging time in the next three years.” Dr. Blieszner will begin her term at the close of the organization’s 65th annual meeting which will take place in San Diego, California from November 14th to the 18th.

The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) was founded in 1945 to advance the study of aging. With over 5,400 members world-wide, it is the largest and most prominent interdisciplinary gerontological organization in the world. Its mission is to advance the study of aging and disseminate gerontological knowledge among researchers, decision makers, and the general public.

## *Gerontological Society of America Recognizes Dr. Karen A. Roberto for Distinguished Mentorship*



The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) has chosen Dr. Karen Roberto as the 2012 recipient of the Distinguished Mentorship in Gerontology Award. The award highlights GSA members in the Behavioral and Social Science section who foster excellence in the field of aging and have made a major impact on their students and fellow researchers. As Director of the Center for Gerontology since 1996, Dr. Roberto mentors undergraduate and graduate students, but also uses her position as a research administrator to mentor new and experienced faculty members alike. Similarly, in her previous position at the University of Northern Colorado (1984-1996), Dr. Roberto served as coordinator of the gerontology program and worked closely with undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom now serve in leadership positions in community service organizations and academia.

Dr. Roberto expressed her gratitude to her colleagues and former students for nominating her and is “humbled and honored to receive this prestigious award.” She commented that for her, mentoring is a two-way street. “I do what I can to support my students and colleagues as they proceed along their career pathways. Most of the time, I just need to listen as they work through their ideas or issues, but I am pretty direct and known to ‘push’ a little too,” Roberto said laughingly. “It is very rewarding for me to see those I work with grow and succeed.”

Dr. Roberto joined the Gerontological Society of America as a graduate student in 1980 and by 1985 had begun to engage in the work of the organization by reviewing abstracts for the annual meeting. Most of her involvement has been with the Behavioral and Social Sciences section, where she has served in various leadership positions, including secretary-treasurer (1999-2002) and section chair (2008-2011). Dr. Roberto also is a GSA fellow, the highest class of membership in the organization. The Gerontology Society of America will honor Dr. Roberto with the Distinguished Mentorship Award during this year’s 65th Annual Scientific Meeting, which takes place from November 14th to the 18th in San Diego, California.

### *Hold the Date! Senior Mobility Awareness Symposium Comes to Virginia Tech*

On December 6th, 2012, Virginia Tech will host the Senior Mobility Awareness Symposium (SMAS). The event, sponsored by the National Surface Transportation Safety Center for Excellence, will bring together nationally-recognized experts on transportation and aging to raise awareness of and discuss issues facing aging drivers. To ensure the New River Valley can meet the needs of aging drivers, the conference will initiate a senior-focused transportation coalition made up of researchers, transportation administrators, and community professionals.

Dr. Nancy Brossoie, who represents the Center for Gerontology on the symposium planning committee, encourages any in-home care providers, health professionals, local law enforcement officers, social workers, community faith leaders, and senior center staff in the New River Valley to attend. Experts on transportation and aging issues will come from a variety of governmental, educational, and private institutions including:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) AgeLab
- AARP
- Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
- University of Michigan Center for Advancing Safe Transportation through the Lifespan (M-CASTL)
- Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI)
- Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology

The conference will take place at The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center in Blacksburg. For more information on the conference contact Jon Antin at [jantin@vtti.vt.edu](mailto:jantin@vtti.vt.edu) or 540-231-1579. For information lodging and directions contact The Inn at Virginia Tech at 1-877-200-3360. Registration is required and is \$90/person. The fee includes a continental breakfast, lunch, refreshments throughout the day, a concluding reception, symposium materials, and a CEU certificate. To register online visit <http://www.cpe.vt.edu/reg/smd/>. Deadline for online registration is November 26th, 2012.

### *The Center Welcomes a New Staff Member!*

The Center for Gerontology welcomes and is pleased to introduce Megan Stuart, M.P.H., as the newest staff member. Megan is the new Project Manager for the Appalachia Community Cancer Network - Virginia site.

Megan is a recent graduate from Virginia Tech, receiving her Masters in Public Health with a concentration in Infectious Diseases in May 2012. During her M.P.H. studies, her capstone research focused on oral health disparities in rural Appalachia. She is very community-oriented, and is active with To Our House, a homeless shelter in the area for single, homeless men. At the center, her work will include implementing a research project focused on community-based participatory research with the overall goal of reducing cancer health disparities in Appalachia.



### *The Center Welcomes New Graduate Research Assistants for 2012-2013!*

The center welcomes Michelle Butner, M.S., Jill Lorenzi, M.S., Emma Potter, B.A., and Raven Weaver, B.A. as the newest members of the Center's research team.



(L to R) Raven Weaver &  
Michelle Butner

Raven Weaver is a first year M.S. to Ph.D. student in the department of Human Development, with a focus in Adult Development and Aging and is enrolled in the Gerontology Graduate Certificate Program. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from Berea College (Berea, KY). At the Center, she works with Dr. Roberto primarily on the fall prevention project. Raven enjoys being outdoors, playing soccer, eating delicious food, and traveling abroad in her free time.

Michelle Butner is a first-year doctoral student in the Adult Development and Aging program, and is pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Gerontology. Michelle holds a Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy, a B.A. in Psychology and a B.B.A. in Marketing, all from New Mexico State University.

This semester, Michelle is working with Dr. Tina Savla to examine the effects of resistance training on diabetes progression in elderly adults. Her personal research interests focus on the impact of cognitive impairment on personal relationships and the self. In her free time, Michelle likes any outdoor activity with her dog, especially hiking, running, and horseback riding. She also enjoys cooking and craft projects.

Jill Lorenzi is a fourth-year doctoral student in the clinical psychology program. She received her B.A. in psychology and economics from the University of Virginia and her M.S. in clinical psychology from Virginia Tech. Prior to beginning graduate school, Jill worked as a research assistant on the Sensory Experiences Project in the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At the Center, Jill is working with Dr. Savla on research related to individuals with mild cognitive impairment and the statistical implications of diary studies. Jill's own research interests include the early identification and evidence-based treatment of autism spec-

trum disorders, particularly in young children. Outside the lab, you might find Jill biking around campus, playing volleyball, or testing out a new recipe.

Emma Potter is a second-year M.S. to Ph.D. student in the department of Human Development's family studies program. For the past year, Emma has worked with Drs. Katherine Allen and Karen Roberto on a pilot study of cancer survivorship and family support in later life. At the Center she continues to work with Dr. Roberto on the pilot project as well as projects related to cancer prevention and fall prevention among old people. Her research interests include disparities, healthcare (HealthIT), LGBT families, and gender. A native of Virginia, she holds a B.A. in American Studies and a minor in Media Studies from the University of Virginia. Emma enjoys using up all her free time with travel, yoga, family, and friends.



(L to R) Jill Lorenzi & Emma Potter

### *Thanks for Making a Difference!*

Your donation to the Center for Gerontology supports a variety of activities including student travel, special publications, scholarships, and professional development activities. This year, Kelly Munly, Ph.D. candidate in Human Development, expressed her gratitude in receiving the Future's Board Scholarship:

*"I am so appreciative of the Center for Gerontology's continued generosity and support of its students. Receiving the Future's Board Scholarship will assist me with my tuition payments, as well as provide me with a mentored opportunity for research in my area of interest [older adult foster care providers] and pursuit of publication."*

Donations can be mailed directly to the Center, or made on-line:

<http://www.givingto.vt.edu/>

### *Center for Gerontology Staff*

Karen A. Roberto, Ph.D., Professor & Director  
Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D., Alumni Distinguished Professor & Associate Director  
Tina Savla, Ph.D., Assistant Professor & Research Methodologist  
Nancy Brossoie, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate  
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The Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology is a Collaborating Centre and member of the Global Ageing Research Network in the International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics.