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Communities for a Lifetime Update

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As 65 of Florida's communities have committed themselves to preparing for the aging of the baby boomer population, they have helped shape the *Communities for a Lifetime* initiative. During the fourth year of the initiative, we have accomplished the following:

1. We have developed a *Communities for a Lifetime* Web site that outlines guidelines for conducting a community-wide inventory of opportunities and services available to older adults that can help a person maintain independence throughout a lifetime.
2. We have provided tools such as a brochure and PowerPoint presentation to individuals who can effectively speak with interested communities. These partners include Area Agencies on Aging and progressing participating *Communities for a Lifetime*.
3. We are developing a "welcome kit" for newly participating communities and developing strategies to assist communities in communicating to their residents their commitment to older adults.

During the past few months, we have frequently provided information regarding the following questions:

Q: What self-assessment instrument is provided to communities?

A: Guidelines for conducting a community-wide inventory of opportunities and services available to older adults that can help a person maintain independence throughout a lifetime are available on the *Communities for a Lifetime* Web site (www.CommunitiesforaLifetime.org). These guidelines provide a description of senior friendly features in an ideal *Community for a Lifetime*. The guidelines focus on seven Areas of Discovery — physical spaces, transportation, land use, community development, health, education and cultural and social opportunities.

Q: How does a community begin the process of creating an inventory?

A: It is a good idea for the participating community's government staff to partner with the Area Agency on Aging and local aging services providers as well as other not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. Your community's team members will inventory the available opportunities, services and features that make it convenient and attractive to an older population. We believe that this inventory will best help residents and prospective residents learn about the programs and opportunities available in your community. Communities can benefit by involving many community partners and stakeholders, including both those who are familiar with aging and caregiving issues, and those who may be unfamiliar with these issues. As your community's team gathers information, these partners begin to become more aware of needs of an aging population, as well as their contributions.

Q: What does a community do with the information gathered during the inventory?

A: As you gather information about your community, you may want to develop a means to distribute the information to your community's residents. It might be included in your community's senior resources directory. Or you might want to encourage organizations that already produce printed materials to also include information of interest to seniors. For example, your community's guide to parks and recreation might add a special section of information for seniors. Or the information could also be available on the Web site of your local government, senior center or other organization.

Q: What if a community uses the previously developed self-assessment instrument?

A: Because the *Communities for a Lifetime* initiative is locally driven, it is up to the local *Communities for a Lifetime* team to determine the best course of action for the initiative. We recommend, however, that the team share the information gathered in a way that can benefit residents—caregivers as well as older adults and potential new residents.

Q: How long will it take for our community to be designated as one of Florida's *Communities for a Lifetime*?

A: Because becoming a *Community for a Lifetime* is a process of continuous self-assessment and improvement and commitment to evaluating the community's opportunities, the Department of Elder Affairs has shifted away from the concept of "designating" *Communities for a Lifetime*. Instead, the Department of Elder Affairs is committed to helping provide information to the residents of participating *Communities for a Lifetime* about the importance of older adults to the community and the community's commitment to this very important population. We are also interested in identifying best practices that might be of interest to other communities participating in the *Communities for a Lifetime* initiative. We are especially interested in any collaborative efforts in your community that can serve as an example of what other communities can do to help residents live independently as they age.

Q: What will the Department of Elder Affairs do to help us with the *Communities for a Lifetime* process?

A: The Department of Elder Affairs serves as a clearinghouse of information about each of the seven Areas of Discovery and other aging issues. For technical assistance with an issue specific to your community, please e-mail the communities@elderaffairs.org. Community leaders and team members can learn more about other communities' successful strategies and methods on the *Communities for a Lifetime* Web site.