



SENIOR CONNECTIONS

A program of The Singer Institute

943 Warder Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63130
314.727.9202

Suzanne Singer, PhD, Founder

THE CONNECTOR

Marketing Leads to Surge in Number of Volunteers Trained

by Roberta Kilstrom, Volunteer

Senior Connections is growing in numbers and types of programming! In the past twelve months, we have trained seventy-eight people. Compare this to the forty-one trained in 2008. What has made the difference? Publicity, both formal and informal. Area churches have always been a good source for us, as active volunteers and trainers have shared the program with friends. Our very first twelve volunteers trained in 1999 were from Kingshighway Baptist Church. And, three years ago, Ellen Brasunas, our Volunteer Coordinator and an active member of the Ethical Society, requested that the Society use our program as a community service project. Forty-two volunteers have come from the Ethical Society since then. See our "National Model" story for the 2010 expansion within the national Ethical Society system.

We have also been in print. Both *The Java Journal*, which provides monthly news and information about the metropolitan area, and the new *C3 Magazine*, which celebrates the philanthropic spirit in St. Louis and beyond, published articles about us. The *C3* feature focused on volunteer Jennifer Blome, her dog, and Jackie, the resident Jennifer visits at Richmond Terrace LSS (see the related newsletter story in this issue).

Jennifer has done more important work for us by doing three interviews of Senior Connections personnel on her Channel 5 news program. After each of these, KSDK received a surprising number of telephone calls from potential volunteers. Many of them appeared for this year's training sessions.

We have grown in other ways too, through some **very creative projects begun by volunteers and highlighted in this month's newsletter**. Jennifer Blome organized two dog training sessions which were conducted for nine volunteers and their dogs in November so that these volunteers and their dogs can now visit residents together.

Last summer poet Marilyn Probe organized a series of workshops in which nursing home residents at The Cedars wrote about both their life and their workshop experiences. For further information, see the article "Poetry at the Cedars" in this newsletter.

Thanks to everyone who has helped Senior Connections grow this year, both in membership and in creative service!

Next Volunteer Training Session

Training will be held Saturday,
February 13 and 20, 2010 from 9 AM
to 1PM. Location to be announced.

Volunteer Support Group Meeting

The next Senior Connections Support
Group will be held on Saturday, Janu-
ary 23, 2010 at 2pm. at The Ethical
Society of St. Louis 9001 Clayton
Road Richmond Heights, St. Louis,
MO 63117



New Dog at The Warder House

Oreo is the six year old female canine
who has become the new friend of
Suzanne, coming to live at the Warder
House on November 1, 2009.

Holiday Greetings to Volunteers and Supporters of Senior Connections

—Suzanne Singer, Founder

Richmond Terrace goes to the Dogs!

by Jennifer Blome, Volunteer and Board Member

In its effort to bring hope and connection to the lives of isolated long term care facility residents, the Senior Connections program continually explores unique variations to its core programming—weekly visits between volunteers and residents without other companionship. Volunteers bringing their dogs along for visits is one of these recent expansions of our model.

The residents at Richmond Terrace and Singer Institute volunteers want to thank Kim Gracner for two weekends of dog training in Richmond Heights. Kim owns Positive Paws Pet Training and has trained over 1500 dogs in her career. We are so thankful she donated her expertise, and a great time was had by all!

When I first started visiting Richmond Terrace early this year with my pup, Clyde, Kim came with us. We had already had in-home training, but I was nervous that Clyde might not be ready. With Kim's help, we have done just fine, and Clyde and I visit weekly, and have made so many friends. Richmond Terrace is a terrific facility. Some residents have their own pets living with them.

The volunteers who took the class included Cindy Wolk and Cookie, Tracy Anders and Callie, Meg Zelenovich and Cider, Pat Digirolamo and Simon, Sarah Bartelt and Lucy, and Kell Jennings and Garcia. Lu Thurman had signed up with her dog Millie. Lu had heart surgery, but still sent Millie to class with her daughter Kim Mayer, and grandson, Dan Brym. That's dedication! Millie is a little dog with a great big personality, and she will make a fine Singer Institute Volunteer! We hope Lu is feeling better soon.

In Kim's classes, volunteers learned some of the basics: "Sit," "stay,"



"down," "leave it," "take it," "drop it," and "sit quietly" while being petted. The residents enjoyed watching and helping with the petting! As dog owners, we learned so much from Kim. At one point, Kim opened her toy chest of dog toys. My dog Clyde and Meg's dog Cider were sitting on either side of the toy chest. Little did we know they were having a quiet communication, until my perfect little Clyde lurched, barked, growled, snarled and wanted to get at Cider. Gentle Cider responded with the same behavior! Without missing a beat, Kim instructed us to avert their gazes, and explained that "sharing" hooves and rawhides is not a natural behavior for dogs. Point taken! Despite the altercation, all dogs graduated with certificates!

If any of you are interested in private training with Kim, you can reach her at Positive Paws Pet Training at 636-352-3104. You can visit her website at positivepawstraining.com. We thank Kim for donating her weekends! The residents are in for a real treat from their canine visitors!

Doorways Collaboration to Reach Isolated HIV+ Elderly

by Christine Boatright, Volunteer and Board Member

Senior Connections is pleased to announce that a collaboration with Doorways is moving forward. Doorways is a non-profit organization providing housing facilities for lower income persons living with AIDS. There are 99 residential units within their organization. Living alone and being extremely isolated, many of Doorways' older adult residents are in dire need of companionship, caring companionship that Senior Connections' volunteers can provide. In addition to the Senior Connections' good neighbor training, relational volunteers wanting to participate in the Doorways collaboration must attend HIV 101 training with partner agency St. Louis Effort for AIDS and an on-site orientation with Doorways. Currently, there are 4 volunteers who are completing the training. If you are interested in being trained, please call the Singer Institute at 314-727-9202.

First Steps Toward A National Model

by Sandra Roeder Singer, Singer Institute Staff member

One of Dr. Suzsanne H. Singer's original goals has been national replication of the Senior Connections program. The Institute will take its first steps in this direction when it provides Senior Connections implementation support and training to our Ethical Society collaborative partner in Silicon Valley, CA in early 2010.

Having nurtured a relationship with the two local Ethical Societies since 2006, national participants of this June's local American Ethical Union's 94th Annual Assembly developed interest in program replication by participating in hands-on activities in our care facilities and engaging in information-sharing with Institute members.

If you wish to donate funds to assist with training, travel and materials, please contact the Institute.

Poetry at The Cedars

by Roberta Kilstrom, Volunteer

“The more we get together, the happier we’ll be!” sang six enthusiastic seniors, in a small room filled with wheelchairs and the aroma of fresh sage. “I used to cook chicken feet with sage,” offered a resident who once lived in rural Alabama. “I can just see my mother standing at the stove cooking,” shared another. “It’s like Thanksgiving. I made pumpkin pie and lemon pie with whipped cream. Everyone liked my pies,” commented another good cook.



It was poetry day at The Cedars on South Outer 40. The project was initiated, created, and led by Marilyn Probe, a local poet, and assisted by myself, Roberta Kilstrom, a former teacher. We spent an hour each week for three sessions with the residents, many who wrote poetry for the first time. Several aides and The Cedars Director of Volunteers, Judy Pontello, added encouragement and steady writing hands.

Each week there was a theme—hands, the sea, and food, a very powerful motivator! We took time to be silent, to breathe deeply, to visualize. We shared about ourselves, even our “inside names.” (Emma’s was “Monarch Butterfly!”) We touched, observed, and smelled things set in the middle of the table—beautiful seashells, a familiar painting of waves, fresh garden herbs. We

brainstormed and wrote group poems.

Then students set to work individually. When they read their poems aloud, everyone clapped; spontaneous validation. The seniors told us they treasured the stimulation and learning, the being together and sharing, and the computer-generated “book” of their writing and photos. And what could be better another time? “Snacks!” Even without them, it was a very special experience for us all.

In Memorium—Gilbert Fisher Gilbert Fisher was a member of the Board of Directors of The Singer Institute for three years. He was a dear friend who contributed greatly. He and Visions in Performance participated in our first Fall Wine & Cheese Event in 2007 and in the Day of Service at the American Ethical Union Assembly this year. Gil was writing and editing Suzanne Singer’s Cookbook which we still plan to finish and publish. He is greatly missed.

Dearest Readers,

Many of us will share the upcoming Holidays with family and friends. We will reminisce about past holidays, look forward to favorite foods, share news and enjoy the warmth of connection with loved ones. But more than 7,000 elderly residents of long term care facilities in the St. Louis area have no one visiting them during the holidays or throughout the year. Even caring facility staff does not have the time to offer consistent individual attention. Many residents find themselves trapped in a state of isolation so great they suffer from a depression and hopelessness that increases their physical and emotional pain, leaving them nothing to look forward to.

In 2009, Senior Connections broke this cycle for 221 isolated seniors. This newsletter is full of stories about Senior Connections’ growth and exciting new endeavors this year. The need to address the social isolation of our elders has never been greater and, with your help, The Singer Institute will remain on the cutting edge of programming to decrease this damaging isolation.

Senior Connections visits make a difference in the lives of the resident and the volunteer by training volunteers to provide crucial friendship and social stimulation through regular visits—they encourage a smile, take a walk, listen to memories and offer support:

“With each visit, my resident has become happier and more at ease with her surroundings. She smiles a lot now. I am also rewarded with a friendship I cherish...” —relational volunteer

“It brightens my day when she is here. We have so much in common... Margot is a very bright and sweet person. She has made my life so much more useful and happy. My life is so much better because of her.” —resident without visitors

The Singer Institute Senior Connections Program is offering more than friendship. We’re offering our community an opportunity to brighten the lives of those who have so little hope, and the opportunity for those who have the desire and time to give of themselves in this worthy endeavor.

These residents deserve to **thrive**, not just **survive**. We’re providing them with tools for making the most out of being **alive**. But we depend on financial support from people like you to train, place, and manage our growing army of volunteers. Can we count on you for a financial gift today?

Suzanne H. Singer, PhD

The Singer Institute Founder and Executive Director



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SENIOR CONNECTIONS

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Executive Director, The Singer Institute

New Directors added to The Singer Institute

Since June, 2009 we have had the honor of adding the following 6 individuals to The Board of Directors:

Jennifer Blome

Newschannel 5 Anchor/Reporter and Senior Connections relational volunteer

Christine L. Boatright

Senior Connections relational volunteer

Timothy J. Butler

Executive Director of The Mary Ryder Home

Loretta M. Davis

AARP representative, Travel the World Agency staff members,
and Senior Connections relational volunteer

Barth Holohan

Founder and President, Continuum and Co-Founder of Family Partners Adult Day Services

Paul A. Kieselhorst

Assembly Mechanic, Boeing Corporation

Toni Moran

Stranded No More

Annual Wine and Cheese Social Celebrates Volunteers, Founder, Program Goals

by Christine Boatright, Volunteer and Board Member

What a wonderful day! On Saturday, September 26th, The Singer Institute held its annual Wine and Cheese Social that served as a celebration to honor Suzsanne's 85th birthday, show appreciation for Senior Connections' relational volunteers and to continue The Suzsanne Singer Speaker Series, *Focus on Senior Issues*. Dedicated relational volunteer, the always lovely and pleasant Jennifer Blome, KSDK News Channel 5 anchor, served as mistress of ceremonies.

The sounds of Fred "Saxy Jazz" Walker's soprano sax greeted guests. Later special guest William A. Symes delighted the enthusiastic crowd with stellar vocals and Joyce Byers-Hines offered stirring renditions of jazz classics. Delicious wines and sudsy brews were provided by **A. Bommarito Wines**, wine maker, **Alvin Vliestra** and **Schlaflly Brewery**. An abundance of tasty morsels was donated by **Roma Grocery** and **Trader Joe's** and graciously served up "Step Up!" St. Louis volunteers.

Barth Holohan, president of *Continuum*, one of the largest home health care providers in the St. Louis area, was special guest speaker for the Suzsanne Singer Speaker Series. Holohan, who gave a touching and insightful speech entitled "Why We Do What We Do," has been a committed senior advocate since his high school years and later earned a MSW and MBA. His dedication continues as he joins the Institute Board.

Rounding out the celebration was a fun and successful raffle presented by vivacious Larry A. Brown and Mike Mulholland. Lucky guests won a variety of plentiful prizes, including a one night stay at the historic Beall Mansion, Rams football tickets and various gift certificates. Raffle prizes were provided by **Amalgamated Brewing**, **Frontier Integrated Health Care Inc.**, **ITEX**, **Jake Medve**, **James Mitchell Salon**, **St. Louis Cinemas**, **Hans Wiemann**, **Ken Yavitz**, and **Dr. Aamir and Susan Salaria**.

It was a fabulous occasion to celebrate The Singer Institute's continuing commitment finding solutions for the needs of the aging population in the St Louis community.