



**Commission**

**on  
Aging**

# Senior Update

*...The Eyes & Ears of Alameda County Seniors*

**Senior Information & Assistance: 1-800-510-2020**

**Access current and past issues of Senior Update: [www.acgov.org/adult.htm](http://www.acgov.org/adult.htm)**

***Senior Update***

***October/November/December 2006***

## **English Autumn – American Fall**

**by Christine Steiner**

Wind whipped leaves, like snowflakes, fluttering to the ground. Autumn, my favorite season, rich in memories.

Shuffling through piles of crisp leaves and tramping across desolate moors colored by flaming bracken. Meat pies, cheese and beer by the fire of a lonely inn. Returning to school, new uniforms, uncomfortable shoes, new teachers, old friends.

Collecting wood for Bonfire Night, the fifth of November, the day in 1605 when Guy Fawkes attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Dressing an effigy of Guy, collecting pennies for him as we rode him in a cart door to door. Lighting the bonfire, fireworks. The smell of roast potatoes and chestnuts, mushy peas, sticky cake and treacle toffee. Laughter and cheers as Guy is hurled into the inferno, the glorious end.

Arriving in America, sailing past the Statue of Liberty - smaller than imagined. A new word - Fall. Snow flurries atop the Empire State Building, ice-skaters at Rockefeller Center, armed police. Hungry, inquisitive squirrels in Central Park. Ladies, draped in mink stoles, stepping into Rolls Royce cars. Flying across snow covered plains and mountains. Arriving in Seattle to find Mt. Rainier, a strawberry snow cone in the waning sun.

New traditions, Halloween, trick or treating, candied apples, carved pumpkins. Thanksgiving - new foods, squash, yams, cranberries and pumpkin pie. And, as the years passed, watching my own children start school in new clothes and stiff shoes.

California Fall. The fresh smell of earth and vegetation washed clean by heavy rains pounding the parched earth. Watching the golden hills turn green - almost overnight. The smell of wood fires and popping chestnuts.

It's time to curl up with a glass of wine by the fire and remember.

## **Bus Rapid Transit Plans Rolling Along**

**by Joel Ramos**

This fall, AC Transit will reveal their draft plans for a new Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT), which could give seniors improved access to the major destinations along a route from Bayfair Mall, up E. 14<sup>th</sup> st / International Blvd. to Downtown Oakland, and then up Telegraph Ave. to Downtown Berkeley.

Running in car-free, dedicated bus lanes along the route, BRT would be 30% faster than current service, and would run every 3 -5 minutes during peak commute hours.

With these benefits of the project come design issues that have concerned some in the affected neighborhoods, including reduced speeds for cars along the route, a reduction of the availability of street parking, and a potential reduction of transit stops. Community input, especially from seniors, will help ensure that challenges like these are addressed to best accommodate the needs of pedestrians, bus riders, car drivers, and all who travel along the route.

Once the draft plans for the BRT project are released, AC Transit will be legally obligated to address every issue raised by the public during a formal "45-day Public Comment Period" before finalizing the project design. The comment period could begin as early as fall 2006, and the public is encouraged to comment directly to AC Transit or through one of the Town Hall Meetings to be scheduled for the project.

For more information, call Joel Ramos of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition at 510-740-3109 ([joel@transcoalition.org](mailto:joel@transcoalition.org)).



INTERNATIONAL BOULEVARD AT 98th AVENUE - PROPOSED

## The Advisory Commission on Aging

The Alameda County Advisory Commission on Aging is a 21-member body created to advise the AAA how best to serve older citizens. Members are appointed by the Board of Supervisors and the Alameda County Mayors' Conference. We invite all who might be interested to join our public Commission meeting or become a Commissioner! We currently have 6 positions open. Please call for more information: 510-577-1975.



### Welcoming our new 2006 AAA Commissioners

Left: Mary E. Brown, Sylvia Stadmire, Delane Sims, Ronald Washington. Missing: Mamie Jackson, Rosiland C. Wright.

## AAA Welcomes New Assistant Director



The Area Agency on Aging has a new Assistant Director. On August 28, Tracy Murray joined the department. Tracy's professional background includes senior management positions in the private and nonprofit sectors. For the last five years, Tracy served as the Executive Director of the Volunteer Center of the East Bay, a nonprofit organization providing services in Alameda & Contra Costa Counties. Tracy lives in Walnut Creek, where she serves as the Chair of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Commission. When not at work, Tracy can usually be found riding on the Mt. Diablo trails with her horse Braveheart.

## REMEMBER TO VOTE!

*Your Vote Protects Seniors  
through Legislation.*

**General Election – November 7, 2006**  
**Voter Registration Deadline October 23<sup>rd</sup>**

For more information contact  
Alameda County Registrar of Voters,  
[www.acgov.org/rov/](http://www.acgov.org/rov/), 510-272-6933

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**California Senior Legislature (CSL),  
26<sup>th</sup> Annual Session,**

Sacramento – October 16-18, 2006  
(CSL information, 916-552-8056)

**Seniors' Night Out – October 25, 2006**  
(see p. 8 for Seniors' Night Out information)

**General Election – November 7, 2006**

**Senior Update Editorial Board:** F. Rose (Chair);  
C. Steiner (Co-Chair); G. Tucker, A. Santos, F. Howell, S.  
Stadmire, Q. Campbell, N. Hartschen, L. Ho, A.  
Holloway, and S. Braxton.

## Good News! A Shingles Vaccine!

By Mary Kaufmann

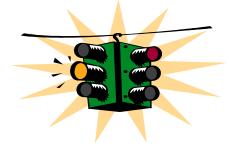
In May of 2006 the FDA approved the **first vaccine** for adult shingles – **Zostavax** – from Merck & Co. A study tracked 38,000 people over age 60 for 4 years and found the vaccine cut the odds of getting shingles by 50%.

Early shingles symptoms can include a) headache, b) light sensitivity, and c) flu-like symptoms without fever. Next would be itching, tingling or extreme pain as the rash and blisters develop in a band or belt around the body. Most people recover after 2-4 weeks. If you are *unlucky* (40% of those over 60 and 50% of those over 70), the virus may damage the nerves of the skin and may become so severe to disrupt one's life.

Although Medicare is slated to cover Zostavax on Medicare Part D, at the moment it is unclear what Medicare or any of the insurance companies will do. Experts indicate the vaccine will cost about \$100-\$150. If you have reasons to be concerned, talk to your doctor. For more information, go to [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com).

### ARE YOU AT RISK AS AN OLDER DRIVER?

By: S. Stadmire, F. Howell, G. Tucker, C. Campbell



Accidents involving older drivers often direct attention to the issue of older adult driving safety. Statistics actually indicate that most older adults are safe drivers. Older Drivers have a high safety belt use and few citations for speeding, reckless driving or alcohol-related charges. However medical conditions, medication usage and reduced physical function can increase the risk of accidents and injury among older adult drivers.

There is no single, simple test to determine if someone is a safe driver. There are tests for reflexes, vision, flexibility and cognition, all critical skills for driving. A doctor may refer a driver to a qualified specialist for an assessment of driving skills. However, a formal assessment may seem threatening to an older adult driver, especially if it is either pass or fail.

**There are alternatives to the formal assessments.** Seniors can take driving refresher courses given by the **AARP Safe Driving Program** or by a number of adult schools within the County. These courses will give an older adult the criteria to judge their driving abilities. Some older adults prefer self-assessments that give them tips on being a better driver. Most senior centers have **Roadwise Review** available on computer. Roadwise Review is a self-assessment tool developed by the American Automobile Association to help individuals identify potential driving safety issues. It is self-administered and the individual taking the assessment is the only one who sees the results.

In Alameda County the Public Health Department’s Senior Injury Prevention Program (SIPP) has partnered with the American Society on Aging to offer the **DriveWell Educational Program** to older adult drivers. SIPP provides DriveWell experts to lead Driving Safety Discussion Groups in the community. These discussion groups offer information on the types of physical changes we can expect that may affect driving and suggestions on maintaining or improving driving skills as well as resources for alternative methods of transportation. There are currently Driving Safety Discussion Groups scheduled at:

San Lorenzo Library	25-Oct	1:30 PM		Castro Valley Library	16-Nov	1:30 PM
Albany Library	2-Nov	1:30 PM		Newark Library	21-Nov	1:30 PM
Union City Library	8-Nov	1:30 PM		Fremont Main Library	13-Dec	1:30 PM



If you have a group of 12 or more older adults and would like to host a free Driving Safety Discussion Group, please contact Colleen Campbell at 510-577-3535. SIPP also hosts training sessions for older adult service providers on assisting families with having driving safety discussions. Contact Colleen for more information.

Listed below are some indicators of driving safety problems. They are ranked from minor to serious. Many of the less serious issues may be overcome with changes in driving behavior or improved physical fitness, while the more serious indicators may require your immediate action. Since driving ability seldom changes drastically in a short time, you should be able to track changes over time to get a clear picture of overall driving abilities.

**To use this list:** Observe driving over a period of time, keeping notes to help you understand changes in driving ability. (This is designed for use by the driver or a family member.) Look for a pattern of warning signs or for an increase in the frequency of occurrences.

- ♣ Decrease in confidence while driving.
- ♣ Difficulty turning to see when backing up.
- ♣ Riding the brake.
- ♣ Easily distracted while driving.
- ♣ Other drivers often honk horns.
- ♣ Hitting curbs.
- ♣ Parking inappropriately.
- ♣ Scrapes or dents on the car, mailbox or garage.
- ♣ Increased agitation or irritation when driving.
- ♣ Failure to notice important activity on the side of the road.
- ♣ Failure to notice traffic signs.
- ♣ Driving at inappropriate speed.
- ♣ Delayed response to unexpected situations.
- ♣ Moving into wrong lane.
- ♣ Difficulty maintaining lane position.
- ♣ Confusion at exits.
- ♣ Ticket moving violation or warnings.
- ♣ Getting lost in familiar places.
- ♣ Car accidents
- ♣ Failure to stop at stop sign or red light.
- ♣ Confusing the gas and brake pedals.
- ♣ Stopping in traffic for no apparent reason.



Limiting or giving up driving is a difficult decision for you or your older adult family member. Families can help individuals make these difficult decisions by periodic frank discussions about driving safety.

Web Resources: ♦ National Safety Council ([www.TheDefensiveDrivingSchool.com](http://www.TheDefensiveDrivingSchool.com)) ♦ Hartford/MIT At the Crossroads: A Guide to Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & driving ([www.thehartford.com/alzheimers](http://www.thehartford.com/alzheimers)). ♦ Hartford Family Conversations with Older Drivers ([www.theHartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers](http://www.theHartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers))  
 ♦ Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialists ([www.-ed.org](http://www.-ed.org)) ♦ MIT AgeLab ([web.mit.edu/agelab](http://web.mit.edu/agelab))  
 ♦ AARP Driver Safety Program ([www.aarp.org/drive](http://www.aarp.org/drive)) ♦ Eldercare Locator ([www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov))  
 ♦ American Medical Association Guidelines for Older Drivers ([www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub.category/8925.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub.category/8925.html))

Number to report a dangerous driver.

DMV (Driver Safety Office)  
 303 Hegenberger Road , 4th Floor  
 Oakland, CA 94621 Telephone: 510-563-8900



## Enjoying the Holidays in Healthy Style!

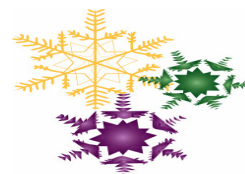
Mary Louise Zernicke MS MPH RD

The holidays can be a hectic time. Holiday shopping, holiday parties, and holiday dinners can combine to keep us busy and exhausted!

Many people complain that they gain weight and eat poorly during the holiday season. Why? Being busy typically means that your usual habits don't apply—eating more often, eating different and Calorie-rich foods, and not sleeping enough can lead to weight gain.

Want to avoid the usual December gain? First, remember that research has shown that too little sleep appears to make it harder to know whether or not you are hungry, and makes it harder to maintain or lose weight. Suggestions for getting enough sleep include:

- Drink fluids early in the day. Don't drink fluids close to bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine at night.
- Don't smoke.
- Have a regular sleep schedule.
- Limit naps during the day.
- Exercise regularly—exercise is even MORE important during the holidays.



Second, manage your Calorie intake to keep you feeling better and maintaining your weight and health during this busy time. Following are some suggestions:

- Drink lots of water at home and at parties.
- Bring healthy food choices to social gatherings –and eat them!
- Don't forget that alcohol has Calories, including wine and hard liquor.
- Take small portions of Calorie-rich foods, but you don't need to avoid them altogether. Balance is the key.
- Eat slowly. It takes about 20 minutes for our brains to realize our stomach is full. Visit while you eat, and you will have found an easy way to control intake!
- The holidays are about sharing, giving, socializing, and community. Focus on what is really important about the holidays and eating all that delicious and unhealthy food takes a lower priority. Sometimes, just skip it.
- Share restaurant entrees with a friend, or take food home for later (just refrigerate quickly and eat leftovers within two days).



It is also important to balance activity with food intake at all times, and especially during the holidays. Suggestions include:

- Go out dancing!
- Walk to the post office to buy your greeting card stamps.
- Visit the local dressed-for-the-season department store windows.
- Go holiday caroling.

So, have fun and focus on the true meaning of the season—your spirits and your waistline will be better off!!!



*For information about holiday meals and/or Christmas baskets, contact Eden Information & Referral, 510-537-2552. For information about ongoing meal programs, call Senior Information & Assistance at 1-800-510-2020 or consult the Food & Nutrition Guide at [www.acgov.org/adult.htm](http://www.acgov.org/adult.htm).*

## TipBits

### Nutrition Notes: Vitamin D by Frank Rose

**FACT:** Did you know that your body uses vitamin D to absorb calcium, which makes your bones stronger and helps prevent fractures? Vitamin D is manufactured in the skin following direct exposure to sunlight. The amount of vitamin D produced in the skin varies depending on the time of day, season, latitude, and skin pigmentation. While many people get enough vitamin D naturally, studies show that vitamin D production decreases in older people and in those who are homebound. These people may need to take vitamin D supplements to ensure a daily intake of between 400 and 800 IU (international units).

**TIPS:** Major food sources of vitamin D are vitamin D-fortified dairy products, eggs, saltwater fish, dark green vegetables, and liver. Some calcium supplements and most multivitamins contain vitamin D, so it is important to read the labels to find out how much each contains.

**CAUTION:** *MASSIVE DOSES OF VITAMIN D MAY BE HARMFUL AND ARE NOT RECOMMENDED.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** This information can be found on page 65, in: "**Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging.**" To order a copy of this **FREE** publication, call 1-800-222-2225, fax 1-301-589-3014, or e-mail [niaic@jbs1.com](mailto:niaic@jbs1.com).

### Cell phone Notes by Nery Hartschen

A simple way of making lost/stolen mobiles useless to thieves is to know your mobile phone's serial number. Should your mobile phone get lost/stolen, you can phone your service provider and give them the code. They will then be able to block your handset, so even if the thief changes the sim card, your phone will be totally useless to the thief.

### National Do Not Call Registry

The federal government created the national registry to make it easier and more efficient for you to stop getting telemarketing calls you don't want. You can register online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) or call toll-free 1-888-382-1222 (TTY 1-866-290-4236) from the number you wish to register. This toll-free number will work from your cell phones as well.

## California Property Tax Postponement Program

By Betty T. Yee

California's Property Tax Postponement Program allows senior, blind, and disabled homeowners with limited incomes the opportunity to delay paying part or all of the property taxes on their homes. This program can help by *deferring*, but *not eliminating*, your property tax obligations.

Generally, California homeowners are eligible if they are 62 years or older, blind, or disabled; have household incomes of \$24,000 or less; and have at least 20% equity in their home. You can also qualify for property tax postponement even if you receive Homeowner Assistance from the Franchise Tax Board. The two programs are administered separately.

For more detailed information: call the California State Controller's Office (SCO) at 1-800-952-5661 or e-mail to [postponement@sco.ca.gov](mailto:postponement@sco.ca.gov).

## Reverse Mortgages SB 1609

by Nery Hartschen

Reverse mortgages have become very popular in California and across the nation. Seniors facing costly home maintenance and/or experiencing health problems are often placed in financial situations that can be daunting. Limited income - but a large amount of home equity - makes these seniors perfect candidates for a reverse mortgage. Unfortunately, these seniors can become a target and are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous home mortgage scam artists.

The Reverse Mortgages bill SB 1609 was signed on September 5<sup>th</sup> by Governor Schwarzenegger. Senator Simitian's Bill 1609 requires that all reverse borrowers receive HUD certified counseling. Additionally, all loan documents will need to be translated into the same language as the borrower. Finally, the sale of an annuity will not be a part of the reverse transaction. A three day waiting period will be enacted. Seniors will now have protections that will enable them to make informed decisions on this very complex transaction.

For more information on reverse mortgages, contact ECHO, a HUD-approved reverse mortgage counseling agency, at 510-581-9380, ext. 19.

**Senior Update**

Alameda County Area Agency on Aging  
 Advisory Commission on Aging  
 6955 Foothill Blvd., Suite 300  
 Oakland, CA 94605

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**SENIOR INFORMATION****What is Rx Help for Californians?**

Rx Help for Californians is a free service for people who are uninsured, underinsured or have a limited income. The program offers access to free and reduced-priced medications through patient assistance programs sponsored by pharmaceutical companies.

The eligibility criteria for patient assistance programs vary from program to program and may even vary by medicines within a program, depending upon several factors related to income, prescription medicines, resident state, age, and current prescription drug coverage. For more information contact Rx Help for Californians at 1-877-777-7815 or [www.RxHelpforCA.org](http://www.RxHelpforCA.org).

**Seasonal Reminders**

**Flu season** is upon us. For information about flu shots consult your doctor, or contact the following agencies: Alameda County Public Health Immunization Project, 510-267-3230, [www.acphd.org](http://www.acphd.org); or Sutter VNA, 1-800-500-2400, [www.suttervna.org](http://www.suttervna.org).

**Energy bill assistance** to low-income households is provided through the HEAP program – 510-881-0300 (Alameda County), 510-644-8544 (Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville).

**13<sup>th</sup> Annual Seniors' Night Out**

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, The Tri-City Elder Coalition will host Seniors' Night Out at the Newark Hilton Hotel. This popular event is aimed at those seniors who rarely have an opportunity for "an evening on the town." The night's festivities include dinner and entertainment and the annual event supports the Tri-City Elder Coalition's "PUN" (Personal Urgent Need) Fund which assists Tri-City area older adults in obtaining goods or services to improve their health, safety, or quality of life. For more information, contact coordinators Yolanda Esparza, 510-543-5928, or Mary Jane Casper, 510-413-5960.

**Helpful Voice**

The Department of Adult and Aging Services has implemented a Voice Response System. Callers can now receive information they need from the automated Voice system. The options for callers include IHSS information for clients and providers, and Medi-Cal and Food Stamp information for clients. Information is also available in Spanish and Cantonese. The phone numbers have not changed: IHSS Clients 510-577-1800; IHSS Providers 510-577-1877; main phone number 510-577-1900. The Alameda County Agency web site, [www.alamedasocialservices.org](http://www.alamedasocialservices.org) will provide similar information.