



# Transitions

## \$3.5M Grant Extends Michigan Resource Center

25 Years of Research, Mentoring and Community Engagement  
to Promote African American Aging & Health

Twenty-one years ago, the National Institute on Aging (NIA), threw down a gauntlet to challenge an emerging crisis. A widening gap had emerged in health and longevity between Caucasians and minorities in the US. Older African Americans, for example, were at higher risk than Caucasians of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke and certain cancers. The diseases struck earlier and caused more disability. Latinos, Native Americans, African Americans and other minorities were dying before their time.

Why?

In 1997, the NIA funded six Resource Centers for Minority Aging across the country to address those health disparities.

The Institute of Gerontology, in partnership with the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, became one of them. Named the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR),

it carried an inviolable mission: Reduce minority health disparities, especially among Detroit's African Americans. James Jackson, PhD, a research professor at U-M's Institute for Social Research is MCUAAAR's

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CAB members James Bridgforth (lt) and Freddie Hawkins discuss a new project.

### Community Advisors Bring Critical Insights to Research

The Community Advisory Board (CAB), a group of about 15 older African American men and women, dedicate their time and experience to improving minority health through MCUAAAR's Healthier Black Elders Center. They meet quarterly to review research projects for relevance and safety, and they attend HBEC Lunch & Learns to encourage underrepresented minorities to vol-

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**A Meaningful Life  
with Alzheimer's Disease**  
FOR CAREGIVERS & PROFESSIONALS  
(6 CEs available)

THURS., NOV. 29, 2018  
7:45 AM - 4:30 PM

*Bringing Art to Life: A Man, a Gift, a Mission*



Neurologist **Daniel Potts, MD**, is coauthor of *A Pocket Guide for the Alzheimer's Caregiver* and president of Cognitive Dynamics Foundation. He will highlight his

father's transformation from sawmill worker to internationally known watercolor artist while in the throes of Alzheimer's disease. The conference also features expert presentations on non-drug interventions, individualized care, and caring for a beloved spouse.

Schoolcraft VisTaTech Center  
18600 Haggerty Road, Livonia, MI

To Register visit: [alz.org./gmc/mdfc](http://alz.org./gmc/mdfc) or call  
Donna MacDonald at 313-664-2605



See all Lester Pott's beautiful watercolors at:  
<https://www.lesterslegacy.com>

principal investigator.

“MCUAAAR is a catalyst for widespread change. It has two major aims,” said Dr. Peter Lichtenberg, co-director of MCUAAAR’s administrative core. “Increase the number of diverse junior faculty working in aging and health research, and partner with older African Americans in new and meaningful ways to improve health and well-being.” MCUAAAR’s task was to expand research into health disparities by increasing minority researchers working in that area, and older African Americans willing to volunteer for research studies.

Two decades of continuous funding later, MCUAAAR is one of now 18 Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR) and boasts a portfolio of major achievements. The mission continues. This fall MCUAAAR won its fifth round of funding, a \$3.5 million five-year grant to strengthen and expand the Center. The new MCUAAAR includes a new partner – Michigan State University – making the Center part of Michigan’s University Research Corridor. MCUAAAR has sparked research by supporting cohorts of minority scholars, increasing community education, engagement and collaborations to improve health, and inspiring a new openness by many Detroit elders to support research into minority issues.

### **Mentoring Scholars**

Research into minority aging needs more minority researchers. To correct that, junior faculty members interested in researching minority aging are encouraged to apply to become MCUAAAR Pilot Scholars. Three scholars are chosen each year and matched with an experienced mentor as they conduct pilot studies, present research findings and publish journal articles. MCUAAAR Scholars join other junior faculty from across the country as MCUAAAR faculty host a summer workshop series focused on research and professional development.

More than 60 scholars have completed the program, 70% of them African American. Two-thirds of these scholars are now



The June CAB meeting was a busy one. Members reviewed upcoming Lunch & Learns, discussed a new research study, and planned the HBEC newsletter.

## COMMUNITY

unteer for research. CAB meetings also include a 20-minute Research Toolkit to teach members about research, concepts, terms, and the scientific process. Topics include ethical issues in research, what is a hypothesis, inductive versus deductive methods, and using DNA in research.

CAB members take their duties seriously. Most have been members for at least four years, some for more than a decade. JoAnn Smith-Taylor joined the CAB in 1992. She retired from the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, where she taught older adults about Medicare and Medicaid benefits. The CAB meetings stimulate her intellectually and socially.

“I like having an impact on Detroit’s lives,” she said, from the research they participate in to how they take care of themselves. She especially enjoys the Lunch & Learns, sharing information on healthy diets, exercise, talking to your doctor, and preventing disease. “It’s satisfying to be part of this process. I am older, too, so I can relate.” JoAnn also conducts telephone surveys with the Participant Resource Pool to insure information is up-to-date. “People thank us for educating them and reaching out.”

James Bridgforth is another long-time

CAB member, currently working to encourage all Detroiters to vote. He joined the CAB because he believes minorities deserve to have activities that support their needs. “We educate elders about their health. We inform. We get involved” he said. “HBEC is involved in all aspects of minority life. Finance, politics, health, lifestyle, community. Being a CAB member gives me the opportunity to influence good decisions in all these areas.”

One of the CAB’s newest members is Wilma Stringer. She joined to “help Detroiters understand the value of volunteering for research aimed at improving minority health.” Wilma, a member and former employee of the Detroit Institute of Arts, takes a global view of HBEC’s role. “Demographics are changing,” she said, “particularly in industrialized countries. Populations are skewing toward older people so understanding the social, political, and economic implications of that shift is crucial to our future.” Wilma first learned about the CAB by participating in Dr. Lichtenberg’s research on financial decision-making in older adults. “I’ll do what I can to make sure we have the resources, infrastructure and facilities older people need. Being old is a new adventure for me,” she said. “I want to do it well.”



tenured university professors. The past 15 scholars published more than 200 research papers. Scholars from this cohort include principal investigators or co-investigators on 92 grants totaling \$60 million in funding. “These high quality scholars are committed to minority research and will positively impact African American aging for decades to come,” said Dr. Lichtenberg.

### Partnering with the Community

Convincing older African Americans to participate in research projects requires trust-building and intensive community interaction. Across many decades, medical research involving African Americans injured some participants without revealing the risks. The resulting outrage helps to explain the hesitancy of many African Americans to volunteer for studies, and why minorities continue to be under-represented in research. Unfortunately, this Catch-22 makes it harder to conduct the studies that might help to reverse the disparities in health.

MCUAAAR’s strategy to rebuild the relationship between research and the African American community required a long-term commitment to forming strong community partnerships, and providing free health and education workshops in senior centers, churches and other trusted organizations. Medical and scientific experts spoke about the importance of scientific research and encouraged attendees to consider volunteering.

### Helping Researchers

Today, after 20 years of consensus and trust building, MCUAAAR proudly maintains a database of 1,600 older African Americans volunteers. This Participant Resource Pool (or PRP) of Detroiters keeps their contact and health information up-to-date, and considers helping with research projects of interest to them. MCUAAAR stays in contact with participants through regular phone surveys, yearly birthday cards, newsletters and Lunch & Learn events. This verifies each person’s data and results in an unusually high 80% retention of members year-over-year. The

PRP is cited nationally as a model of how to create a successful participant registry for minority research.

The PRP database is available to any researcher whose project achieves Internal Review Board approval and is approved by the Community Advisory Board (see related story). Primarily, researchers at WSU and the University of Michigan access the recruitment pool. About 20 studies are accessing participants from the database at any given time, with about 25% of older adults referred to a study.

### What Next?

Our biggest challenge is to continue our momentum,” Dr. Lichtenberg said. For MCUAAAR V, the fifth round of NIA funding, the big news is the inclusion of Michigan State University and the expansion of research recruitment and educational workshops to the Flint area. “MSU will partner in all aspects of MCUAAAR, including community engagement in Flint,” Dr. Lichtenberg said. For the past several years, Flint residents coped with dangerous levels of lead in their drinking water. The area also rates high in environmental toxins from abandoned industrial sites. Nearly 40% of Flint residents live below the poverty line. MCUAAAR’s leaders intend to increase research into Flint’s older minority residents by supporting and mentoring interested pilot scholars and creating a Flint-based participant registry modeled after Detroit’s PRP.

The Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research has improved the relationship between African Americans and research, launched scores of talented minority scholars into meaningful research careers, and educated tens of thousands of older adults on ways to improve their health. “We still have much to do,” Dr. Lichtenberg said. “No one is resting on previous accomplishments. Until health disparities no longer exist, our mission will continue.”

## Spotlight on Successful Aging



### Marion McCarthy

For nearly two decades, Marion McCarthy’s work and interests have aligned closely with those of the IOG. She helped to organize the very first Art of Aging Successfully event in 2002 with a team that included political and social activist Mildred Jeffrey and Maryanne Mahaffey, a Detroit city councilwoman for 32 years. Marion has donated generously to support the IOG. Social justice and the rights of all citizens, especially women and older adults, are her passion.

We are pleased – but not at all surprised – that Marion won this year’s Faye Lyksett Award for her lifelong commitment to the League of Women Voters. Marion was selected for devoted service, performance excellence and enthusiasm for the League. “How exciting and humbling,” she said. “You never know what good things are waiting around the corner.”

# IOG Endowment Inspires Leadership Gifts

Several members of the IOG's Board of Visitors marked their dedication to helping older adults with generous gifts to the IOG endowment. Board Chair Michael Damone announced a \$50,000 gift from Cedarbrook Senior Living, Mike is president of Cedarbrook which has housing communities for older adults in Northville, Bloomfield Hills and Rochester. He "appreciates the excellent work of the IOG," he said, and knows many others do as well.

Sandy Adams, a board member who "knows well the value of the IOG," pledged \$25,000. Sandy is a certified financial planner and a partner in the Center for Financial Planning in Southfield. She's heard lectures on IOG research and



attended community events in which older adults praised the work of the IOG. Dr. Lichtenberg's work to prevent financial fraud and exploitation in older adults resonates strongly. "The IOG is critical to the success of older adults now and into

the future," she said. "Its work in financial literacy, diminished capacity, exploitation, and longevity related to financial security is core to what I do. I want to make sure its mission continues." James

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## PARTNERSHIP CORNER

# Senior Caregiver Resource Network Grows & Gives

An older woman with Alzheimer's is being released from the hospital after a minor fall. The social worker asks the woman's daughter if they need further help. "Can you fix my mom's basement?" the daughter asks half-jokingly. "Every time it rains, it floods." Twice the family hired a contractor to fix it and was duped out of their deposit. "We want to sell the house so mom can move into a memory care unit and get the care she needs. We can't sell with a flooded basement."

These kinds of stories inspired James Speir to create the non-profit Senior and Caregiver Resource Network, or SACRN, nearly 14 years ago. Jim is a member of the IOG's Board of Visitors and the founder and president of Speir Financial Services in Southfield, MI. "What I and others have seen in our personal and professional lives, is that needs change as we get older. We need help in many



Jim Speir hosted Murder Mystery Night, raising \$18,000 for Jewish Family Service.

areas, not just health," Jim said. "Most people don't know where to find it."

SACRN is the starting gate. Jim pooled providers in respite care, home health aides, medical monitoring, construction and repair, house call physicians, downsizing specialists, and more – and vetted them for quality, reliability and accountability to customers. He is proud of SACRN's culture,

the attitude and commitment of its members. "Lots of people go to a networking organization to see how much business they will get," Jim said. "Our members go above and beyond. They volunteer to make SACRN events successful." SACRN's annual fund-raiser supports non-profits dedicated to older adults, like the Alzheimer's Association Greater Michigan Chapter or Jewish Family Service.

Last year's rollicking Murder Mystery night raised \$18,000. This year's Motown Magic features dining, an auction, dancing and a strolling magician.

And the woman with the flooded basement? A SACRN contractor fixed the problem in 30 days and the house sold in another 30. She happily resides in an American House Senior Living apartment. "Many

members have told me they would belong to SACRN even if it never increased their business," Jim said. "Because it's the right thing to do."



Support the work of the Senior & Caregiver Resource Network by attending their Motown Magic fundraiser on Oct. 25 at the Fairlane Club in Dearborn (tickets \$75) or by making a donation. Contact Jim Speir at [james@speirfinancial.com](mailto:james@speirfinancial.com) for details.



## AWARDS & HONORS



### Students Win Blue Cross Blue Shield Grants

Three IOG trainees, working to complete their doctorates, won competitive student program grants from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation. **Chaitali Anand**, **Qijing Yu** and **Jonathan Sober** will each receive \$3,000 toward their research. Chaitali and Qijing work in the IOG's Lifespan Cognitive Neuroscience Program directed by **Dr. Naftali Raz**. Jonathan studies clinical psychology and aging and is mentored by **Dr. John Woodard**. The Blue Cross Blue Shield program supports medical and doctoral students in Michigan who aim to improve health care in the state. At least one IOG Trainee has won the grant for the past four years.

### Who Ages Successfully at Work?

Two recent alums of the IOG trainee program answered that question in a journal article featured on the U.S. Department of Labor's website. **Greg Thrasher** and **Reed Bramble** (with **Keith Zabel** and WSU Professor **Boris Baltes**) published a latent profile analysis to research successful agers and their work motives. Their results appeared in the March 2018 issue of *Work, Aging and Retirement* and were spotlighted in May on the DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics website. Results showed that older workers with high development and promotion motives, who see themselves as healthy and feel youthful, aged more successfully.

### SAFE to Empower Caregivers to Prevent Financial Abuse

Detecting financial mismanagement is often the earliest sign of dementia that adult children discover in a parent. Cognitively impaired older adults can also be vulnerable to financial fraud and exploitation. **Peter Lichtenberg, PhD** and PI of SAFE (Success after Financial Exploitation) received \$40,000 from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan and

\$10,000 from the Westerman Foundation to create a five-part educational program tailored specifically to caregivers. Topics will include *Managing Someone Else's Money*, *Understanding Scams* and *Preparing for Difficult Conversations*. The IOG will conduct workshops on these topics throughout the year.



Dr. Lichtenberg, Mohammed Toseef and Dr. Jensen

### Best Paper in Gerontology

IOG trainee **Mohammad Usama Toseef** has won the 2018 Olson Memorial Award for the Best Paper in Gerontology. Congratulations, Mohammad, on this fine achievement. The selection committee judged his manuscript, *Effects of Medicaid Health Maintenance Organizations on the Incidence of Avoidable Hospitalizations*, the best submission of the year.

### Training APS Workers to Identify Clients at Financial Risk

**Peter Lichtenberg, PhD (PI)** received a \$135,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to build on his team's work on <https://olderadultnesteegg.com>, a website to help professionals assess an older client's financial decision-making abilities. The site now offers narrated e-trainings, certifications and continuing education credits. This year's goal is for all Adult Protective Services workers in Michigan to be certified in conducting the interviews and to test them across four market segments: legal, financial, social services and mental health. The site scores the older adult's risk of being

victimized financially and suggests next steps for prevention. The grant is through Michigan's Prevent Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse, Exploitation, Neglect Today (PREVNT) initiative.

### \$3.3M to Detect Earliest Signs of Dementia



Early and accurate detection of cognitive problems in older adults is a valuable weapon in the fight against Alzheimer's and other dementias. **Voyko**

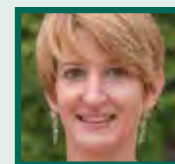
**Kavcik, PhD**, won \$3.3 million over five years from the National Institutes of Health, to conduct a large-scale evaluation of a safe, non-invasive, low-cost, portable method to test older African Americans for brain changes that may presage Alzheimer's. He partners with Dr. Bruno Giordani of the University of Michigan on the project.

### Genetics of Brain Aging



**Naftali Raz, PhD**, received a boost grant of \$121,000 to include the sequencing of mitochondrial DNA in his study of differential brain aging. The work is part of Dr. Raz' five-year, \$3.6 million Neural Correlates and Modifiers of Cognitive Aging project. Mitochondria produce cellular energy that affects the performance of the brain's neural networks.

### Rural Cancer Survivors



Surviving breast cancer is a formidable feat, but for women who live in rural areas, with limited access to health care, other health needs may continue to go unmet. **Heather Fritz, PhD**, will evaluate whether rehabilitation and lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome in these women. Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of conditions, including high cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar that increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. The American Cancer Society awarded \$30,000 for the project.



## INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

Promoting Successful Aging in Detroit and Beyond

Pauline Knapp Building  
87 East Ferry Street  
Detroit, MI 48202

313-664-2600  
www.iog.wayne.edu

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Editor/Writer - CHERYL DEEP  
Designer - CATHERINE BLASIO



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## ENDOWMENT

Spier, IOG board member and president of Speir Financial Services, also committed \$25,000 to the endowment. (See related story, page 4.)

Long-time board member Frances Shani Parker pledged \$25,000. Frances is an elder-care consultant, advocate, author *Becoming Dead Right: A Hospice Volunteer in Urban Nursing Homes* and hospice volunteer, devoted to easing older adults through their final transitions with peace and grace. She has presented at IOG educational events and was a recent guest on a Black Aging Matters webinar on the stress of racism on older African Americans.

Frances believes passionately in the work of the IOG. Her blog featured Dr. Lichtenberg's work to prevent financial abuse in older adults as part of an overall call to action. "I am happy to help the IOG in any way I can," she said.

## HELP IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OLDER ADULTS

Would you like to help build the IOG Endowment? Our goal is \$1.5 million by 2022 to generate more than \$60,000 each year for IOG projects and programs – without touching the endowment's principal. We've raised \$1.1 million so far. With your generosity, we can raise more, and do more, to help older adults everywhere.

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