

# Farmington resident wins award for senior services work

By: Mark Vest (/reporterbio/mark-vest) | Farmington Press (<https://www.candgnews.com/newspaper/farmingtonpress>) | Published September 17, 2021

FARMINGTON — During a Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging meeting this past June, Farmington resident Peter Lichtenberg learned some news that he said came as a “total shock” to him.

Lichtenberg was appointed to the commission by former governor Rick Snyder.

He said he served six years on the commission, but decided not to reapply due to a role he is set to take on this January as the president of the Gerontological Society of America.

At the last virtual meeting he was a part of for the Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging in June, Lichtenberg was informed that he was the recipient of an Exemplary Service Award for his contributions to aging services in Michigan.

“It was so touching,” he said. “I became a little bit tearful. ... I totally did not expect it. When people think that what you’ve done means something, it’s very meaningful.”

Aside from his role as the director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University, Lichtenberg said he also trains doctoral students “in my area of clinical psychology, especially with (a) focus on aging.”

His career spans approximately 35 years, and he has been involved with initiatives at both the state and the national level.

Along with serving on the Michigan Attorney General’s Elder Abuse Task Force since 2019, Lichtenberg has worked as a clinical geropsychologist, researcher, program director and national leader in gerontology, according to a release from Wayne State.

He has also “contributed significantly” to the practice of older-adult psychology, including in the areas of financial exploitation, Alzheimer’s disease and late-life depression.

“Words, even carefully chosen, cannot capture all the essence of the service Peter brought to his work with the Michigan Commission on Services to the Aging,” Dona Wishart, who was chair of the commission when Lichtenberg was recognized for his service, stated in the release. “He was willing and generous in rolling up his sleeves to share information and expertise in topics critical to the work of the commission. In doing so, he expanded the learning and influence of his fellow commissioners, the State Advisory Council, partner agencies in services to the aging, and older adults and family caregivers throughout our state.”

Lichtenberg is the author of nine books and author or co-author of more than 215 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, according to the release.

He shared his perspective about what helped lead to his Exemplary Service Award recognition.

“One of the things that I’ve done over the last decade is work a lot (on) the issue of financial exploitation of older adults,” said Lichtenberg, who, according to the release, became one of the country’s first board-certified clinical geropsychologists in 2012 and received the American Board of Professional Psychology’s 2020

Specialty Board Award in geropsychology. “I do research on that, and we set up (a) service program whereby we provide economic advocacy and financial coaching for older adults who’ve been the victims of scams or identity theft. So, that’s been one of the big roles that I’ve had as part of the attorney general’s task force on elder abuse.”

Lichtenberg, who grew up in Philadelphia, said, “My mother remembers that when I was in high school, I told her I wanted to work with older people and become a psychologist.”

He went on to earn master’s and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from Purdue University in Indiana before moving to Michigan in 1991 for a job at the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan, which was looking for a geriatric neuropsychologist.

Lichtenberg said the issue of financial exploitation among the elderly is a “huge, growing problem.”

“The biggest reason being that older people often have some wealth and regular income,” he said. “And of course, at times, depending on their own experiences, (they) perhaps have some cognitive changes or some isolation. They’ve been targeted more and more.”

**Farmington resident Peter Lichtenberg received an Exemplary Service Award “for his years of extraordinary contributions to aging services in Michigan.”  
Photo by Patricia O’Blenes**



The majority of the exploitation comes via family and friends, with about 40% coming from scams from strangers, according to Lichtenberg.

Some of the scams can include victims being told they owe money to the IRS, someone contacting them claiming to need money for a loved one’s surgery or to get somebody out of jail, and lottery scams via mail.

Another scam to be on the lookout for, according to Lichtenberg, is, “I’ve hit somebody with a car; (it’s) \$5,000 just to talk to a lawyer.”

The scams can occur via mail, phone and a computer.

Lichtenberg shared his advice for how to avoid being scammed.

“If it’s too good to be true, it is,” he said. “Two, it is so important to get a phone system that shows who’s calling— caller ID. Don’t answer the phone if you don’t recognize the number. ... Number three, if this sounds like it’s serious and important, check it out with somebody else.”

Lichtenberg elaborated on that point.

“Especially if it’s dealing with a family member (or) something like that, don’t react instantly,” he said. “Give yourself time to think through and check (it) out with somebody else. ... Scammers really push that threat of time; ‘this needs to be done now.’ Don’t give in to that.”

Lichtenberg said that scams from family members or known persons are a “very difficult situation.”

“Part of the plan would be to make sure that other people you trust, whether it’s professionals or other family (members), read to you financial accounts on a regular basis,” he said. “An older person should be reviewing their (checking) and savings account statements very carefully. ... If you find that somebody is exploiting you, and they’re probably doing it because you either gave them a credit card to use that one time or an ATM card, cancel it. Also, check your credit. This is where you can find out where people used your identity to purchase other things.”

Lichtenberg said scams are the second leading form of elder abuse, with the No. 1 form being emotional abuse.

For more information about financial exploitation and to view financial decision-making scales and vulnerability scales, visit Lichtenberg’s website at [olderadultnestegg.com](http://olderadultnestegg.com).

Lichtenberg said he “could not be more thrilled with my career.”

He shared what continues to motivate him in his career path.

“Just the other week I interviewed a gentleman who I did an assessment on,” Lichtenberg said. “His life story was so amazing, and that’s what motivates me, when I meet older people, hear their stories, and see how they age with dignity and grace. It’s just inspiring to me, and it always has been.”