



# Aging Issues

Southwestern CT  
Agency on Aging  
& Independent Living

## Southwest Staff and Volunteers Help Medicare Beneficiaries Understand CHOICES

**CHOICES**, Connecticut's program for Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information, referral, Counseling and Eligibility Screening has been a Connecticut resource since 1990. Over the Program's twenty-five year history, CHOICES has provided thousands of counseling sessions and educational presentations to help older adults and persons with disabilities select the best Medicare products for their unique insurance needs.

CHOICES is a partnership between the State Department on Aging, Center for Medicare Advocacy, the Area Agency on Aging and local aging and disability networks and volunteers. CHOICES Counselors receive specialized training from the partners. Individualized guidance and support come from the Area Agency Regional CHOICES Coordinator. State Department on Aging (SDA) Acting Commissioner Betsy Ritter states, "In 2014, roughly 54,500 individuals became eligible for Medicare in Connecticut. This is a crucial time when individuals must receive correct information on enrollment dates and options. Thanks to the excellent expertise and guidance from CHOICES certified counselors in the Southwestern CT Area Agency on Aging, over **eight thousand Medicare beneficiaries were able to get assistance this year.**"

CHOICES Counselors guide individuals through the complexities of supplemental options, Managed Medicare, prescription drug insurance, Long Term Care Insurance and the Medicare Savings Program. CHOICES is also Connecticut's number one referral for all issues related to aging including housing, home care, State benefits and adult day services. A CHOICES volunteer is never more than a few miles away!

SWCAA devotes this *Aging Issues* newsletter to the dedicated staff and volunteers of the CHOICES program.

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### UPCOMING EVENTS/NEWS

#### Tomando Control de su Salud Leader Training

March 24, 25, 31, April 1, 8:30am – 4:30pm  
Spanish Community Center, Wallingford, CT

#### Programa de Manejo Personal de la Diabetes

April 14 (9:00am – 5:00 pm) and  
April 15 (9:00am – 2:00 pm)  
Spanish Community Center, Wallingford, CT

#### Live Well Leader Training

May 6, 7, 13, 14 (9:00am – 4:00 pm)  
Southwestern CT Agency on Aging,  
1000 Lafayette Blvd., 9th Floor,  
Bridgeport, CT

#### Live Well Diabetes Training

June 16 (8:00am – 5:00 pm) and  
June 17 (8:00am – 1:00 pm)  
Southwestern CT Agency on Aging,  
1000 Lafayette Blvd., 9th Floor,  
Bridgeport, CT

*For more information and to register contact Gretchen James at 203-814-3620 or [gjames@swcaa.org](mailto:gjames@swcaa.org).  
Diabetes training is limited to those individuals having completed the Live Well Leadership training.*

#### Title III Grant Technical Assistance

Friday, March 20 at 9:00am.  
Program Narrative & 10:30am.  
Budget Review

#### Title III Application Due Date

Thursday, April 23 **at** 4:00pm.



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## Meet New Canaan's Bill Emmons



*New Canaan's Lapham Community Center's super stars Aggie Aspinwall, Bill Emmons and Lyn Bond.*

*On a cold day in February, SWCAA met Bill Emmons, volunteer extraordinaire and competent CHOICES Counselor working out of New Canaan's scenic Lapham Community Center. Modest, yet confident in the work performed, Bill took a moment to share his thoughts about CHOICES.*

**SWCAA:** The Lapham Community Center has always been an exemplary CHOICES counseling site. To what do you credit its success?

**Bill:** We have the unwavering support of the staff of the Lapham Community Center's Lyn Bond and Aggie Aspinwall. The staff make appointments, put information in the newsletter and make sure that we have the computer access and space necessary to do our job.

In turn, both Lyn and Aggie credit the CHOICES counselors as the "heart and soul" of the Lapham Community Center. Bill became involved in CHOICES after his wife learned about the Program from the town's municipal agent, Melba Neville (Thanks Mel!). Dick Neville (Mel's husband) and Bill maintain community counseling hours year round to help individuals with specific Medicare issues.

**SWCAA:** What is most rewarding about your experiences as a CHOICES counselor?

**Bill:** Everybody talks about the money saved but that's only a piece. CHOICES provides a "refresher course" for Medicare beneficiaries so they understand how Medicare works. Medicare works best when the beneficiary becomes more proficient in the use of the benefit. I estimate an average savings of \$800 per beneficiary. Most people are very happy to have stopped in for the information and assistance.

**SWCAA:** CHOICES must make you something of a community hero. Do you ever receive thanks while out and about in Town?

**Bill:** Leaving Church one day, a woman came up to me and my wife Louise. "Your husband is so wonderful!" stated the woman who had received CHOICES counseling earlier in the week. My wife just looked at her with skepticism and said, "He is the lucky one!"

## Meta Schroeter Pays it Forward

*You can feel the positive energy upon entering the Weston Senior Activities Center. The Center boasts newly renovated space, dedicated program rooms and great sense of pride from both staff and volunteers alike. Meta Schroeter signed on to support Weston's Medicare beneficiaries by joining the elite group of CHOICES counselors in 2008. Meta credits Christina Crain, former CHOICES Coordinator, with helping her get the information she needed when she transitioned from private insurance to the Medicare Program. Christina provided a clear understanding of Medicare that helped Meta gain a thorough understanding of her options. After four years, Meta decided it was time to give back.*



*Carla Jegen, Meta Schroeter and Wendy Petty pose in front of a photo taken by Carla at the newly renovated Weston Senior Activities Center.*

**SWCAA:** Why did you decide to commit your time and effort to the CHOICES Program?

**Meta:** CHOICES provides great training and really helps the volunteers feel prepared to take on the counseling role. There is instantaneous communication of changes or issues related to the coverage. The amount of information and the constant changes can also present the greatest challenges.

**SWCAA:** How could the Program improve?

**Meta:** More awareness is needed. People are just not familiar with how to shop for this type of insurance. Many assume that there is no benefit to an annual review of coverage, but there is! I try to keep Weston residents informed with a regular column in the newsletter including scam alerts. There is great synergy between my role as a SWCAA advisory council member, CHOICES volunteer and member of the Weston Commission on Aging. This helps me stay informed.

Meta is motivated by the joy and happiness she sees in the individuals she counsels. "One woman saved \$1,500!" said Meta reflecting on one of many successful counseling sessions. Weston Senior Center Director, Wendy Petty said, "I don't know if people understand how lucky they are to have Meta, but we [staff of Weston Senior Center] certainly know!"

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## The MedAssist Model – Public Private Partnership at its Best!



Judy Fishman and Dan Katz provide the Medicare connections for Stamford's beneficiaries.

Dan Katz and Judy Fishman agree that their collective experiences as part of the Stamford's MedAssist organization have been the best work experiences – volunteer or professional – of their lives. According to Dan and Judy, their partnership along with Mary Maarbjerg and Bill

Kaufman represent the “most cooperative, generous and smartest group of people they know.” You can find each counselor on their assigned week meeting with Stamford residents on the ninth floor of the Government Center.

**Dan:** MedAssist started as a nonprofit and developed a partnership with the City of Stamford. The City gave MedAssist office space, a computer and phone system. In return, MedAssist provides Stamford Medicare beneficiaries with

expert, unbiased information to help connect residents to the best Medicare insurance products for their individualized needs.

**Judy:** As a retired kindergarten teacher, I was looking for a volunteer assignment where I could feel useful. I started, as did Dan, with the AARP tax assistance program. We still participate by helping individuals complete their taxes. Thanks to our involvement with CHOICES, we know about other financial programs that can help improve the quality of people's lives.

**Dan:** I retired early and was recruited by MedAssist's founder, Bob Finsthwaite. Bob started MedAssist upon recognizing the difficulty he and others had understanding the Medicare program. I became involved in CHOICES after listening to a Medicare update by SWCAA's CHOICES Coordinator. This year, Stamford served 813 individuals and held open enrollment events in conjunction with the Stamford Senior Center.

Both Dan and Judy stated that they were amazed when an individual realized savings of \$100,000 annually as was the case for a Stamford woman taking oral chemotherapy medication. Just amazing! 

On behalf of SDA Acting Commissioner, Betsy Ritter; Sharon Gesek, SWCAA's regional CHOICES Coordinator; and SWCAA's Board, Advisory Council and staff, **we THANK YOU for your dedication and commitment to improving the quality of life for Medicare beneficiaries!**



SWCAA's Program Department – Back L-R: Nancy Lombard, Laurette Gachelin, Betsie Gutcheon & Soraya Principe. Front L-R, Director Sharon Gesek, and Lisa Alhabal.

## CHOICES Counselor Honor Roll

### Bridgeport

Douglas DeFauw  
Gail Miller-Klein  
Gwendolyn Wayne  
Karl Lurix  
Mayr Cabana  
Michael McDonnell  
Rosemary Wong  
Victor Diaz

### Darien

Ali Ramseck  
Inta Adams

### Easton

Alison Witherbee

### Fairfield

Alison Barker-Ford  
Eileen Gombos  
Jamie Fields  
Kateli Dressel  
Vi Guglielmi  
Julie DeMarco

### Greenwich

John Timm  
Lori Contadino  
Morley Kahn  
Sam Deibler

### Monroe

Barbara Yeager  
John Ostaszewski  
Kim Cassia  
Mary Ann Kalm

### New Canaan

Debra Casey  
Melba Neville  
Richard (Dick) Neville  
Peggy Faughnan  
William (Bill) Emmons

### Norwalk

Frank Phillips  
Gail Green-Singleton  
Karen Tulipani  
Laura Froelich  
Marna Schirmer  
Maureen Eustache  
Michele Jakab  
Paul Retter  
Suzanne Horn-Stone  
Tania Parrent

### Stamford

Bill Kaufman  
Daniel Katz  
Doris Freundlicsh  
Judy Fishman  
Leslie Freed  
Mary Maarbjerg  
Pauline Bolwell  
Victor Rubell

### Stratford

Betty Brandt  
Glenn Clafin  
Shirley Dominguez  
Shirley Rasmussen

### Trumbull

Jennifer Gillis  
Tim Ryan

### Weston

Meta Schroeter  
Susan Tracy  
Suzanne Friedman

### Westport

Kristen Witt  
Susanne Lebrija

### Wilton

Ellen Abend  
Louise Sass

### Other Towns

Brian Nicoletti  
Joseph Deegan  
Jean Darin



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## National Family Caregivers Support Program

The **National Family Caregivers Support Program** is designed to assist caregivers by offering services and support while providing them a much needed break from the caregiver role. The program provides up to \$3,500 to caregivers caring for a loved one over the age of 60.

This program can pay for in-home help such as a home health aide, companion and homemakers as well as adult day care, in-patient respite, emergency response systems and home-delivered meals. Please contact Katie Regan at 203-814-3652 or [kregan@swcaa.org](mailto:kregan@swcaa.org) for additional information or application. 

## SWCAA Has Moved!

**We are now located at:  
1000 Lafayette Boulevard  
9th Floor  
Bridgeport, CT 06604**

Telephone and website remain the same.  
Please update your records.

## Visit Us on Facebook, and Become a Fan!

**Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging, Inc.**

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