Executive Director
Understanding My Grandparents
By Kathy Gale

How did our country get through the Great Depression? As I have recently celebrated my 54th birthday, I don’t have personal memories of the 1930s. However, my late grandparents, who started their family in the mid-1930s, survived that period in our country’s history.

I confess that when I was growing up, I didn’t understand some of my grandmother’s habits. Why did she wash plastic bags and reuse them, when there were boxes and boxes of plastic bags for sale at the grocery store? Why did she have such a modest clothes wardrobe all the years I knew her, telling me that she didn’t need more than what she already had?

Entertainment for my grandparents focused on time together with family and friends, often playing cards. We rarely went to restaurants, and I don’t remember my grandparents spending money on theatre tickets or even going to movies.

As our country is weeks into a time of turmoil, there are stories on the internet of how people are creatively connecting with one another. We are all changing our habits, figuring out how to stretch our finances while still supporting local businesses. Going for a walk outside is part of the new entertainment plan.

Let me be clear - I’m not comparing our past weeks to what the country endured during the Great Depression. However, I have renewed understanding and respect for my grandparents, and all who lived through the 1930s. Their thrifty habits make a lot more sense now.

Community Connections Can Make Us All Stronger

Times like these make us remember the value of community – our families, friends, neighbors and those with whom we have repeated contact. We’re all here for each other. You might help someone by telephoning to check on their welfare and someone else might assist you with picking up groceries.

It’s a similar situation with the team at Eras Senior Network and our 1,800 volunteers. Because of these volunteers, we can ensure you receive food and medications as well as transportation to important medical appointments.

“We are as committed as ever to making certain you receive services so you can continue living safely and independently during this emergency,” says Kathy Gale, executive director of Eras Senior Network. “Even though we are met with challenges of keeping a distance from each other, we have found ways to still provide services and be safe.”

You will notice that Eras has changed a few processes during the coronavirus outbreak – for instance, volunteers are no longer taking clients to the grocery store and are instead picking up groceries and delivering them to you. And volunteers are only taking clients to essential medical appointments – which is in line with what doctors are requesting.

In addition, we are spending time connecting you with the appropriate resources when you have questions about something. That can be stock box services, health concerns, taxes, utility bills or your telephone bill.

“We are busier than ever answering these types of telephone calls from you right now,” says Gale. “We have connections within the community so if we cannot answer your questions, we work to find someone who can.”

We want to remind you to please be careful during this time - keep a safe distance from others, wash your hands frequently and disinfect surfaces which you often touch. Stay away from people who are ill and be sure to alert your health care provider if you do not feel well.

And we urge you to keep communicating with people – whether it is by telephone, old-fashioned letters or even through emailing and online social media applications like Facebook.

As with everything, this emergency shall pass. And we will look back and be grateful we all had each other to lean on.

Eras Milwaukee: (414) 488-6500, Eras Waukesha: (262) 549-3348
Volunteers Still Picking Up Groceries/Prescriptions and Driving Clients to Medical Appointments

While we are no longer transporting clients to the grocery store or food pantry, volunteers are instead taking grocery lists by phone and then going shopping for you (or picking up pre-ordered items at the grocery store). “This is a safer method in which to get your groceries”, says Sophia Franklin, Program Manager for Faith in Action, Milwaukee County.

“A lot of our clients are going from having someone taking them shopping to having a volunteer shop for them,” she says. “We know this is a big change. But if you need food, we will make that happen. To make this easiest and most efficient, there are several things we’re asking you, as a client, to help with to make this work.”

- **Plan.** Consider what grocery items you need for the next two weeks.
- **Be Specific.** If there is a certain product/brand you want – or be okay with having an alternative.
- **Organize Your List.** Group your list according to descriptions (such as dairy, produce, frozen, meats, canned goods, cereal, baking).

Volunteers are still delivering stock boxes to established senior stock box clients but due to the emergency, new clients do not have to be pre-registered. “If a client has not already signed up for a stock box, and wants one, they can get still get one each month,” Franklin says. Food pantries are still assisting clients with stock boxes for those that qualify and are in need. If you need further assistance, we can help.

We’d also like you to consider on-line shopping and delivery. If needed, Eras can offer some guidance on how to get the process started and possibly assist with ordering groceries. “We will help you open the account and learn the process,” says Shannon Fogle, Program Manager for Faith in Action, Waukesha County.

Volunteers are taking older adults to medical appointments but only to those which are deemed critical or essential. “We have not turned anyone away who needs transportation for medical appointments,” says Fogle. “We’ve had a real good success rate. We are doing our best to ensure older adults get to where they need to go.”

However, precautions are taken when transporting older adults – for instance, volunteers are now asked to sanitize the inside of their vehicles and clients are asked to sit in the back seat. Franklin explains, “All of this helps minimize risk to both you and the volunteer.”

If a volunteer cannot be found to transport you to a medical appointment, we are able to coordinate and pay for a cab ride to ensure you can attend an essential medical appointment.

Eras volunteers are now also starting up occasional telephone wellness checks to see if you’re okay, if you need anything or if you have any concerns.

Spring yard cleanups will likely be delayed to late May or June – depending on when the emergency precautions will be lifted. If you need spring work done at your home, please telephone us so you can be placed on our list.

Many calls Eras has been receiving involve linking you to other community resources, Fogle says. “We’ve done a lot more conference calls than ever before,” Fogle says. “We can reach out directly to a provider who can assist you. Our mission and our vision have not changed. We are continuing to move forward with helping our clients in the best way possible.”
Physician Tips During Virus Emergency

While older adults are more apt to become seriously ill with COVID-19 than other populations, there are many things seniors can do to remain healthy. Keeping a safe distance from others and staying home sits at the top of the list. Dr. Edmund Duthie, Chief of Geriatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin, Froedtert and the VA, says six feet distance is the generally accepted rule. But, he notes, it’s also important to wash hands regularly and clean and disinfect surfaces.

Duthie, who has an 88-year-old great aunt and whose patients are all older adults, believes distance and keeping the number of contacts to a minimum are critical. “I don’t think this is a time to be holding a family dinner, but family can get help with shopping and other things,” Duthie says. “Keep the number of contacts as lows as possible and be confident that those people are safe.”

Walking down an apartment hallway is generally acceptable provided the older adult keeps a safe distance from others in the hallway, Duthie explains. A simple set of gloves could be worn when getting mail out of a mailbox in an apartment building’s common mail room, he says. Use good judgment – don’t walk down a hallway if someone is coughing. Be wary of individuals who don’t pay attention to social distancing recommendations.

Duthie says walking outside is a good idea and the upcoming warm spring weather should make those walks comfortable. “It’s a great idea to get outside and walk but always remember to keep your social distance from people.”

While many older adults have flip phones, there are still a good number who don’t have smart phones or tablets – which allow for better communication with medical professionals, families and friends. Duthie says a family member or friend could pick up a smart phone or tablet for you and set it up prior to delivering it.

“A 15-year-old is a whiz at these devices and can easily get them ready for you to use,” Duthie says. “Dropping off the device can be safe. Keep your distance from the person delivering the device and ask that the device be left on the table. Then you can get the device after they leave, wipe it down and you’re good to go.”

Duthie acknowledges that social isolation during the pandemic is challenging for everyone but can be overcome. “It can’t be business as usual. If you have a card group, you’re just going to have to call it quits because that’s just inviting trouble in a closed space. You just don’t know what people have been exposed to. And the virus can’t get there unless someone brings it in.”

To help alleviate the monotony of being isolated at home, Duthie suggests older adults keep frequent contact with family members and friends, and perhaps starting a “buddy system”. “The geriatric population has more widows and they are more likely to be living alone,” Duthie says. “If you have a buddy system in place, you can watch out for each other in addition to having contact with family. And if a buddy hears you coughing, the buddy can urge you to call your doctor.”

Duthie advises older adults to call your doctor if you have a fever, cough or shortness of breath. Even though Duthie says you can “never say never” in medicine, he believes that people can increase their likelihood of remaining safe during this time. “If you’ve not been exposed, if you’ve been following social distancing and if you’re being prudent, that really reduces the odds of becoming ill with the COVID virus.”

Important Phone Numbers

MILWAUKEE COUNTY:
Transportation, Grocery and Yard Work Service Requests (Milwaukee County): (414) 488-6500
Telephone reassurance for Homebound Older Adults Living in Milwaukee County: Vital Voices: (414) 771-4368
Milwaukee County Transit Plus: (414) 343-1700
Milwaukee County Department on Aging Transportation (Able Access):
• For new riders (to enroll):
  Aging Resource Center
  (414) 289-6874
• To schedule a ride (once enrolled):
  Able Access (414) 536-5800
Aging and Disability Resource Center of Milwaukee County: (414) 289-6874
Milwaukee County Energy Assistance: (414) 270-4653
Hunger Task Force: (414) 777-0483

WAUKESHA COUNTY:
Aging and Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County: (262) 548-7848
Transportation, Grocery and Yard Work Service Requests (Waukesha County): (262) 549-3348

BOTH COUNTIES:
IMPACT 211: 2-1-1
National Elder Fraud Hotline: 833-FRAUD-11 or (833) 372-8311

Edmund Duthie MD
Communicating Helps Combat Social Isolation

The social isolation of COVID19 is difficult for all people around the world, including you. It’s hard to not see friends and family members, to hug them or visit restaurants or stores. But there are things you can do to remain emotionally healthy during this crisis.

Experts say it is important to talk with family and friends regularly – and not always wait for the phone to ring but to make regular calls to find out how others are doing. “People of all ages are adjusting to staying safely at home and a phone call can be a bright spot in someone’s day,” says Kayla Steinke, information and assistance program coordinator for the Aging Resource Center of Milwaukee County.

Fortunately, we have many ways to talk with each other in addition to face-to-face conversations: telephone, by mail, by email/texting and by video with smart phones and electronic devices. If you do not have a smart phone or tablet device, reach out to your family, friends or faith community to ask if someone can pick one up for you. Using social distancing measures, they can safely deliver the device to you and then over the telephone, teach you how it works. This will enable you to easily communicate with many people, including your medical team.

An electronic device allows you to join social media websites, such as Facebook, to stay in contact with family and friends, suggests Steinke. “A child or grandchild can help set up the account for you,” she says. You can also check out e-books from the library to read on your smart phone or device, Steinke says.

Children (and their parents) always need help with homework – even if all you do is encourage them to do their best. “Offer to assist a grandchild, great grandchild or other child in your life with their homework using online video chat or your telephone,” Steinke recommends.

If you don’t have the electronic access, telephone the children in your family or friend network. Consider calling at a certain time every day and maybe read a book to them or tell them a story while they snuggle up with a blanket.

Consider being a pen pal to a child. Introduce the concept to them and write them a short letter. And don’t forget to write at the end, “P.S. Write Back Soon!”

And don’t underestimate the interesting lives your older grandchildren have. Now is the time to learn more about them, what their lives are like, and what type of work they are doing in school or even at their jobs. They have the time to talk – and you have the time to listen.

April Word Search

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By Evelyn Johnson - www.qets.com