A Couple’s Vows Create Opportunities to Age Well

Kirsten Jacobs is no stranger to organizations assisting older people in Washington, DC. For the past four years, she has worked in the Education and Development Division of American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA). She is so passionate about her work on issues related to aging that two years ago she was trained as a volunteer at Iona and every other week visited a woman who was homebound.

When she and long-time partner Jake Kirsh decided to get married this summer, there was no question about what they wanted for their wedding. Kirsten and Jake made a list of all their favorite non-profit organizations as a gift registry and sent it to their guests. “We were so overwhelmed by the responses we got. People had looked up every website on the list and called us to say how much they enjoyed reading about these organizations,” says Kirsten. Iona was one of the charities listed and received gifts from all over the country in honor of their wedding day. These gifts will be used to ensure that Iona’s essential programs and services are available to all who need them, regardless of income level.

Kirsten and Jake were married on August 14, 2010 in their hometown of Portland, Oregon, where they will now make their home. Kirsten continues to work for AAHSA and has started a Master of Social Work at the University of Portland, where she is planning to do a certification in gerontology.

Aging with Purpose

In October Iona hosted two gatherings of active seniors, recent retirees and those planning retirement to discuss roles and relationships in retirement.

These seminars, led by Deb Rubenstein, MSW, LICSW and Lylie Fisher, a certified life coach and Director of Community Engagement at Iona, focused on strategies to help participants think about their next steps and what really matters in their lives, and how they want to engage in the community, particularly through volunteering. The discussions were lively and the feedback positive. One participant commented: “I learned steps I could take to identify opportunities of where I would add value and be fulfilled in the process.”

For participant Mary Lou Coss, putting together a volunteer resume has been a helpful exercise, not only to find a volunteer position that utilizes her skills, but also for another more personal reason. “I realized that homemaking has been a very large and satisfactory part of my life, but that I had denigrated the skills that I had learned and employed.” For example, one of the skills that she was able to claim after the process of reviewing her experiences was her ability to facilitate groups. The session at Iona also helped Mary Lou see why some of her volunteer experiences had been less than successful. “I have so many interests that it was easy to say ‘yes’ to every opportunity and then I’d end up regretting it.” Now she is being proactive about her choices, networking with others to find opportunities for service and researching organizations where she might want to invest her time and talents as a volunteer.

In order to continue this meaningful and creative dialogue, Iona will launch the Take Charge/Age Well Book Discussion Group in March 2011. This group will discuss books that creatively explore the positive aspects of aging, and inform ways to live later life to one’s fullest potential. The first book to be discussed will be Mary Catherine Bateson’s Composing a Further Life in which anthropologist Bateson interviews six older individuals, from a retired Maine boatyard worker to Jane Fonda. Bateson says life in this stage is an ‘improvisational art form calling for imagination and the willingness to learn.’

To join in these conversations or to schedule a consultation about how to flourish in later life, please call (202) 895-9448.
Dr. Barbara Soniat and Monica Melady Micklos, MSW come to Iona to sign their new book *Empowering Social Workers for Practice with Vulnerable Older Adults*. (See front-page article for more information about the authors and the book.)

4-7 pm

December 1, 2010
Caregiver University
4-5:30 pm and repeated at 6:00 – 7:30 pm

December 4, 2010
Volunteer Companion Training
9 am-12:30 pm

December 9, 2010
Roles and Relationships in Retirement
*Take Charge/Age Well* Seminar
1-2:30 pm

January 3, 2011
Classes begin at Iona. Iona is pleased to present new classes in the arts this winter. Program schedules are distributed on Dec. 1. If you would like a program schedule emailed or mailed to you, please call (202) 895-9448.

February 17, 2011
Meet the Artists Reception with printmaker Liz Wolf and sculptor Hermann Burger, featuring live music.
5-8 pm

Hold the dates for these special events:

March 29, 2011
Iona launches the *Take Charge/Age Well* book discussion group. The first book to be discussed will be Mary Catherine Bateson’s *Composing a Further Life*. (See article about this group on page 5.)
10 am-12 pm

May 4, 2011
The third annual Art of Caring benefit luncheon.
12-2 pm
Some people fear aging because of the perception that they will have little or no say in where they live or how they will be cared for in their later years. Iona works towards a vision where aging is not feared because the community celebrates, values, respects and protects the contributions and possibilities of every individual. In the Adult Day Health, Wellness and Arts Center, this vision becomes practice through an emphasis on person-centered care. Art therapy, activities that are tailored to a participant’s background and preferences, and caregiver education and support puts the needs of the individual at the very center of the work.

Respect for the individual is also at the center of the work Iona’s care managers do in the community, even though on many occasions there is a natural tension between respecting the self-determination and protection of a vulnerable older person. Iona has been fortunate to have had the wisdom and guidance of Dr. Barbara Soniat, associate professor at the School of Social Work. Dr. Soniat’s continued focus on the importance of respect for self determination and choice at Iona has been an inspiration to all of us.

Sibley Physicians Now Practicing at Iona’s Breckinridge Building

In October Iona announced an exciting collaboration with Sibley Memorial Hospital. Two physicians from the Sibley Physician Group will keep regular office hours on the second floor of Iona’s Breckinridge Building. Both doctors are internal medicine physicians and accept Medicare, Medicaid and all insurances accepted by Sibley.

“Adding medical care to the variety of programs and services offered at Iona is a tremendous step forward and a unique partnership benefiting older residents of the District and Maryland,” says Sally White, Executive Director of Iona Senior Services. “Since Iona’s founding 35 years ago, we have counted Sibley as one of our most supportive partners. We are so pleased that our partnership has deepened and strengthened in this way, and that together Sibley and Iona will be able to offer our community an amazing synergy of services to help people age well and live well.”
Currently at the Gallery at Iona until January 4: Photographs by Lee Goodwin, Artist-in-residence and sculpture by Marilee Shapiro. Gallery hours are Monday – Friday 9 – 5 pm.

Welcome Sharon O’Connor

After three years on staff, most recently as Senior Manager of Iona’s Weinberg Adult Day Health, Wellness and Arts Center, Dana Jefferson Burse is heading for Ohio, where her husband’s work is relocating. Dana’s affection for the people she serves made her go the extra mile when she announced her resignation. She asked Sharon O’Connor, a former colleague she respected, to come by for a tour and a look at the job description.

Luckily for Iona, the job description and interviews with the team underscored the feeling Sharon had gotten about the Center from Dana. Sharon started as Director of the Adult Day Health Wellness and Arts Center in October, bringing to Iona 16 years of health care experience, including working with seniors in assisted living settings for the last eight years “I’m thrilled to be here and carry the Center’s vision forward,” Sharon says, including new programming ideas to increase brain fitness, physical fitness, social connectivity and wellbeing for participants.

Sibley Physicians at Iona  cont’d from page 1

Dr. Mark D. Strong is a board certified internist with a special interest in malignant hypertension, dermatologic disorders and rheumatologic problems. He received his medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine and did his internship and residency in internal medicine at the Washington Hospital Center. Dr. Strong has been in private practice for six years.

Dr. Matty Mathivannan is a board certified internist who completed his internal medicine residency at the Albany Medical Center in Albany, NY. For the past twelve years, he has worked at the Washington Hospital Center. His interests include hypertensive, diabetes, thyroid and cholesterol management, well-woman exams, routine physical exams and preventive health maintenance. Dr. Mathivannan is also certified in High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA).

Both Dr. Strong and Dr. Mathivannan are accepting new patients. For appointments call (202) 660-7800.
Work at The Catholic University of America, helping to ensure this dichotomy is balanced and focused on respecting the choices, values and preferences of an older person needing help in the community.

Dr. Soniat is the former long-time director of the George Washington University (GWU) and Iona case management programs where for over 20 years she integrated clinical practice, research, teaching and interdisciplinary field-based education of professional students. This relationship produced a groundbreaking concept in geriatric care management called the capacity-risk model. Iona staff including Deborah Blum and Deb Rubenstein, who now directs the Consultation, Care Management and Counseling program at Iona, were part of this feedback loop of practice informing academic research and research informing practice.

The capacity-risk model has contributed to the field of geriatric care management by giving professionals an intellectual framework on which to develop appropriate and person-centered responses, especially for people who are reluctant to accept assistance. When a geriatric care manager goes to the home of Ms. Jones, an 82 year old who lives alone and is showing signs of memory loss, Ms. Jones may insist that she is doing just fine and needs no help from anyone. Following assessment using the capacity-risk model, the care manager works to form a respectful relationship with Ms. Jones and to judge her risk of harm against her physical, mental and social capacity to manage day-to-day and make decisions. If Ms. Jones has high capacity and low risk, it may be right to withdraw. If she is in crisis, it may be necessary to intervene, sometimes against the client’s wishes, through adult protective services or guardianship.

Most people who are referred to Iona for help fall in the middle; that is, they have some diminished capacity and their situation presents some risks. In this case, the capacity-risk model prescribes certain interventions, which are developed through an ongoing dialogue and a relationship built on trust. Through this relationship the care manager determines what assistance is necessary to lower a person’s risk or increase their capacity. Would home-delivered meals help Ms. Jones get stronger and lower a risk of a fall? Could a volunteer companion help her combat loneliness and isolation? Are there family or friends that could be involved in helpful ways?

Iona is one of very few voluntary non-profit organizations in the nation that uses the capacity-risk model in all the work that our care managers do in the community. Rubenstein and her team train new social workers using the model, and the model is central to every case presentation in weekly team meetings. Rubenstein has found that as a supervisor of seven dedicated professionals and several social work interns each year, the capacity-risk model gives the team “a common professional language and a way to frame professional judgment.”

The capacity-risk model also ensures that the team is focused on a holistic approach and balance between the value of respect for self-determination and protection of our community’s most vulnerable older people.

Dr. Soniat and her colleague Monica Micklos have recently published Empowering Social Workers for Practice with Vulnerable Older Adults, a book which will continue to inform the field of geriatric case management in new and energizing ways. Iona will host a book signing and opportunity to meet the authors and fellow professionals on November 18 from 4 – 7 pm.

Sally White, Executive Director of Iona, says that she hopes more organizations will embrace the concept of capacity-risk modeling in their service to older people. “One of the many reasons Iona has enjoyed a reputation for excellence in service is because of the way in which we embraced Dr. Soniat’s model as a way of responding to needs in our community. We are indebted to her because our reputation means people call on Iona for help and we are able to respond compassionately and appropriately.”

What do you do if an older person who needs help is reluctant to accept it?

• Don’t try to “sell” the senior on getting help. Instead, listen and be sure you understand what is important to the senior.

• Research options so you can present the senior with clear, understandable choices.

• Get help from a care manager. Contact Iona at www.iona.org or call the Questions and Answers Helpline at (202) 895-9448.
Brenda Moseley has been a caregiver most of her adult life. She received a Masters degree in Special Education and taught in Richmond before her mother Mary had a stroke fifteen years ago. Since she is an only child, Brenda became Mary’s long-distance caregiver, driving up to the city every two weeks to ensure that her mother was doing well. After about five years, Brenda was coming every weekend.

A life-long learner, Brenda turned to higher education as a coping mechanism, starting another Masters in Gerontology at Virginia Commonwealth University to learn more about her mother’s issues and ways that she could become a better caregiver. Then a year ago, Mary fell while they were on vacation in Buckingham, VA. After her broken bones healed, it was obvious that Mary’s dementia had worsened.

Brenda tried assisted living in Richmond but determined that it wasn’t a good fit for her mother. Mary, who had been the Chief of Biometrics at Walter Reed Medical Center, was dismayed at the “elderspeak” which Brenda describes as a form of baby talk that the staff used with the residents of the home. Mary insisted that the staff thought she was stupid and she began to spiral into depression. “I had to become a much more proactive advocate,” Brenda says. Since Mary wanted to return home and there was no medical reason not to have her return to her beloved house in northeast Washington, Brenda made the decision to move back to the city to care for her mother.

Upon returning home, one of the first places she called was Iona. After she called the Questions and Answers Helpline, she received information about all sorts of assistance, including the Adult Day Health Wellness and Arts Center at Iona. Now a regular in the Center, Mary comes home happy every evening talking about all the activities she did that day. Brenda was granted permission to do her last two credits towards her Masters degree through volunteer work for Iona. Today, holding a brand new diploma in Gerontology, Brenda is networking and looking for a job helping elders in the community and the people who care for them. ”I don’t know what I would have done without Iona. You all are a godsend.”

### New Ways to Age Well at Iona

**Roles and Relationships in Retirement**  
Thursday December 9, 2010 1 – 2:30 pm

**Try Your Hand at Art with Rose Mosner**  
Tuesdays 2 – 4 pm beginning January 11, 2011

**Opera Appreciation with the Washington Concert Opera Guild**  
Fridays 1 – 3 pm beginning January 7, 2011

**Take Charge/Age Well Book Discussion Group**  
Tuesday, March 29, 2011 10 am – 12 pm

Are you receiving Iona’s Program Schedule? Contact (202) 895-9448 and ask to receive it electronically or in the mail. The new program schedule will be out Dec. 1.