

From the desk of the Executive Director

This current membership year, 2011-2012, will celebrate G.R.A.P.E.'s 20th anniversary! As Ellen O'Reilly stated in her President's message, we will be celebrating G.R.A.P.E. throughout the year with trivia about this great organization. I came across the article below when reviewing past documents on G.R.A.P.E. The article written by Cheryl Ann Bilski, Functional Interiors, and Chairperson of Membership in 2001, for the April 2001 GRAPEvine, is an excellent way for us to kickoff this 20th anniversary of G.R.A.P.E. Cheryl Ann was very pleased when I contacted her asking if we could re-use the article for this month's GRAPEvine. Cheryl Ann has continued to be a proud member of G.R.A.P.E. over the years. A true testament to the support of our members and as Cheryl Ann so fittingly describes in her closing sentence: "The growth of G.R.A.P.E.. continues with YOU!"

Kathleen Krauss, Executive Director

G.R.A.P.E. How did we start?

By Cheryl Ann Bilski

A casual telephone conversation between Nancy Stark, a case manager for Blue Cross and Blue Shield and Bev Groden, a representative with the Regional Council on Aging, now LIFESPAN, discussed the need in Rochester's community for a professional membership organization that would link all who had a service or program to offer those age 55 and over.

It was decided there was a need to disseminate information within a network of services and a broad-based structure was necessary. Twenty-five invited professionals attended a breakfast and brainstorming meeting on August 27, 1992. The group identified reasons for establishing a professional networking organization. The needs presented were: to learn more about each other's programs; coordinate calendars and events; link private and public systems together; assist with advocacy issues; improve communications between medical/health systems and long term care systems; fee structures; provide better information to physicians; easier access to existing systems; opportunities for collaborating a professional referral system; effective publication of events; identify special interest groups; professional development opportunities and co-operative programming.

The second point of interest focused on whom and what types of program specialists should belong to the professional networking organization. Numerous suggestions were made. Out of twenty-five attendees, fifteen started the Steering Committee. This was the beginning. Meetings led to the appointment of interim officers and development of a mission statement, goals and objectives. A second meeting on October 8, 1992 was attended by 50 people. From a slate of names presented, Greater Rochester Area Partnership for the Elderly was born.

Volunteers were recruited for specific needs. Committee chairpersons were identified and joined the Steering Committee to set priorities for each. By-laws needed to be written, programs developed, financials put in order and membership benefits and recruitment procedures stated. November's meeting, with 65 people in attendance, reviewed the organization's structure and financial support. Forty-five people contributed a total of \$1000+ to get G.R.A.P.E. off the ground. Over the first three months of 1993, a newsletter was issued; membership categories and guidelines were defined. A brochure and evening programs were developed and resource directory produced. They finished writing by-laws and formed committees for each task. Affiliation with RCOA gave credibility to apply for grant funding in order to support the directory.

March of 1993 was the first dinner program as a kick-off for membership drive, with 85 attending. June was the first annual meeting and formal election of the Board of Directors. From June through the following March, 240 people joined, representing over 100 organizations. During this time G.R.A.P.E. received its not-for-profit status, an \$8000 grant to fund the directory, and mailed 3,000 brochures announcing the "Professionals Guide to Elder Services." With \$10,000 in the operating budget, the receipt of the bulk rate mailing stamp and no longer dependent on the RCOA umbrella, G.R.A.P.E. was a strong vital organization.

Today nine years later, G.R.A.P.E. is still, and with everyone's support, will continue to be a strong and vital organization to the Rochester community. Our current membership count is 251. The growth of G.R.A.P.E. continues with YOU!