

Two Age-Friendly Champions to Form Stronger Bonds in the New Year

NJAAW Stepping Up Its Role in Administering Age-Friendly North Jersey Alliance

By Colleen Diskin

Ever-growing and always-evolving partnerships are the hallmark of the age-friendly movement.

In that spirit, Age-Friendly North Jersey (AFNJ) has recently strengthened its working relationship with New Jersey Advocates for Aging Well (NJAAW).

The AFNJ coordinating team has expanded to include Dr. Cathy Rowe, executive director of NJAAW and former coordinator of SOMA, Two Towns for All Ages, the age-friendly community initiative in South Orange and Maplewood.

NJAAW is an established and influential advocacy organization at the local and state levels for age-friendly action, a topic that is frequently explored in annual conferences, Aging Insights television programs, and other informational programs and platforms.

“NJAAW believes that expanding age-friendly community initiatives across the state is one of the best strategies New Jersey can employ to respond to the challenges and opportunities of population aging,” Rowe said. “Our organization sees great value in marrying the work we’re doing to influence state policy and practices with the efforts of those who are working to foster change within communities.”

Rowe already has begun working with the AFNJ coordinating committee to develop plans for bolstering advocacy and education efforts through a new collaboration on newsletters, website content, social media and other communication tools and strategies.

“This enhanced partnership facilitates the sustainability of Age-Friendly North Jersey and expands our reach and impact,” said Dr. Emily Greenfield, professor in the Rutgers School of Social Work and director of the Rutgers University Hub for Aging Collaboration. “It also increases exposure to the knowledge on age-friendly-community initiatives that we have been developing through years of collaborative practice, research, and evaluation.”

Through its newsletters, blogs, webinars and conferences, Age-Friendly North Jersey has helped elevate the goals of the age-friendly movement, not just at the local level but also at the county and state levels. The alliance’s coordinating team members - which includes representatives from Rutgers, the Grotta Fund for Older Adults and The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation - have developed strong relationships in state government to help inform New Jersey’s soon-to-be-released blueprint for age-friendly communities.

Beginning this month, the alliance's blog and other newsletter content will become part of NJAAW's monthly newsletter. Another change in the works is a redesign of the Age-Friendly North Jersey website, with the goal of highlighting the past successes and continuing developments of community and county-led age-friendly community initiatives.

"There has been significant progress in the age-friendly movement in North Jersey following nearly a decade of local efforts," said Julia Stoumbos, director of aging-in-place programs for the Taub Foundation. "We need to share these innovations with newer and bigger audiences so that more community and county leaders across New Jersey can see the benefit of taking an age-friendly approach to their work."

The new communications synergy that will result from this expanded partnership with NJAAW also will make it easier for community leaders to stay up-to-date on statewide legislative and policy discussions, thus ensuring that more of them can add their voices and testimony to important governing decisions affecting older adults' lives.

"The community leaders, partner organizations, and municipal leaders in our alliance are the ones with their boots on the ground, hearing daily about the needs and desires of older adults and the challenges they face in their communities," said Renie Carniol, executive director of Grotta Fund. "By partnering with NJAAW on our communication strategies and platforms, NJ's older-adult voices can be heard more regularly by those with the power to affect change at the state level. In addition, we see this partnership as an opportunity to assist with an NJ grant program for expanding age-friendly communities and to pursue a New Jersey Multi-Sector Plan for Aging."

As New Jersey's state government works to harness the age-friendly momentum of community leaders, Age-Friendly North Jersey will continue to fine-tune its collaborations with NJAAW and other partner organizations - to keep pace with this ever-growing and always-evolving movement.