

Creative Aging Festival

May 2015





The ***Creative Aging Festival*** of May 2015 featured over 100 events held throughout Arlington County, Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, and the City of Alexandria.

The events included:

- Art exhibits
- Dance
- Musical performances
- Poetry readings
- Lectures
- Classes in watercolor, woodworking, knitting, clogging, tap, piano, and photography





The festival also included programs that unlock the creative spirit through yoga, Tai chi and even a walk through a beautiful garden labyrinth.

Our partners included:



- **AARP Virginia**
- **Arlington Cultural Affairs/Arlington Arts**
- **Arts Council of Fairfax County**
- **City of Fairfax**
- **Fairfax County:**
 - **Fairfax Area Agency on Aging**
 - **Neighborhood and Community Services**
 - **Park Authority**
 - **Public Library**
 - **Health Department/Long Term Care Council**
- **Goodwin House Inc.**
- **Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia**
- **National Alliance of Community Economic Development Authorities**
- **Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University**
- **Pure Prana Yoga Studio**
- **The George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership**

Points of Engagement:



Each partner came to the table with a deep interest in promoting creative aging and an emerging sense of how this concept advances their organizational mission.

Points of Engagement:



For Fairfax County:

Promoting arts programming is one of the initiatives of the Board of Supervisor's [Fairfax 50+ Community Action Plan](#). The plan was adopted in September 2014.

The plan included 31 initiatives covering health, safety, transportation, community engagement, services and housing.

For Arlington County:

Arlington Cultural Affairs/Arlington Arts had been exploring the possibilities of engaging with new communities.

It considered the festival an opportunity to:

- Explore connecting with Arlington's vibrant older adult community; and
- Developing working relationships with the county's Aging and Disability Services and the Department of Recreation's Senior Centers.

Where did the interest in arts programming for older adults come from?

The local interest in arts programming for older adults echoes research that challenges past theories on aging and explores the association of *art as an important ingredient for healthy aging.*



New Understanding of Aging:



- Past theories proposed that aging is an inexorable process of withdrawal, disengagement, and decline.
- In the 1980's and 90's, research on aging began to challenge this finding.
- Perhaps the most significant name in creative aging research is the late **Gene D. Cohen, M.D, Ph.D.**
- Dr. Cohen served as acting director of the National Institute on Aging, headed the Center on Aging at the National Institute of Mental Health, and was later the first director of the Center on Aging, Health, and the Humanities at the George Washington University.

In “*The Mature Mind*” (2006), Dr. Cohen reviewed two decades of neurological & gerontology research and concluded that:



- The brain continually re-sculpts itself in response to experience and learning;
- New brain cells form throughout life;
- Emotional circuitry matures and becomes more balanced with age;
- The brain hemispheres are more equally used by older adults; and
- Involvement in the arts late in life leads to a lower incidence of illness and injury.

His concept, *Creative Aging*, proposes that:



- Neurological, emotional, intellectual and psychological capacities integrate over the life span and this is expressed as wisdom, judgment, perspective and vision as we age;
- Older adults are capable of functioning at high levels of creativity and intellectual rigor; and
- Creativity can bloom with more “depth and richness in older adults because it is informed by their vast stores of knowledge and experience.”

National Center for Creative Aging



- Dr. Cohen helped establish the [National Center for Creative Aging](#) in 2007.
- This organization fosters an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging and develops programs that build upon this understanding.
- The center proposes that late life can be a time of *meaningful exploration, engagement and contribution*.

National Creative Aging Movement



- Over the last several years, the National Center for Creative Aging touched off a ***national creative aging movement***.
- The group held its second national conference at Arena Stage in May – bringing together artists, arts administrators, recreational programmers and art therapists.
- On May 18, 2015, the group co-hosted the White House Summit on Creative Aging which focused on creative aging advocacy, policy, and practice over the next decade.

Creative Aging Festival

Objectives:



- The committee decided to launch the festival in May 2015 for **Older Americans Month**.
- It also agreed to the following objectives:
 - Develop audiences for the arts, especially for art created and performed by older adults;
 - Encourage older adult participation in the community's many art programs;
 - Promote public understanding of the benefits of older adult participation in the arts;
 - Establish the festival as an annual event to celebrate Older Americans Month in May.

Planning Process Milestones:



- Established an online event submission process posted from late January to mid-February 2015;
- Organized a program committee that reviewed and approved submissions;
- Developed and implemented a marketing plan;
- Planned a launch event for May 1;
- Developed a plan to photograph and video as many events as possible for post publicity and possible future publicity.

No budget! So how did we do it?



- Most programming was already in the works, so we provided a *marketing wrap* to expose these programs to the greater audiences;
- All participants agreed to co-promote the festival with their individual marketing efforts;
- All programs were provided an online promotional package of messages, graphics and customizable materials;
- Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, as the lead communicator, promoted all programs via web, video, podcasts, social media, contact lists & news media;
- The Arts Council of Fairfax established a searchable calendar of events.

Outcomes:



- 100+ participating programs.
- No real participant numbers – however, we estimate about 2,000 people participated;
- Excellent coverage by [Connections Newspapers](#) (print & online);
- WMAU story;
- 2 Fairfax County podcasts, 2 Mature Living programs broadcast on Channel 16 & posted online, 2 Golden Gazette articles;
- George Mason University is exploring developing a Creative Aging group composed of researchers, artists, programmers and art therapists.
- Partners are exploring programming that continues the theme of Creative Aging.

Accolades!!



- The planning team received a **Fairfax County Distinguished Partner Award**;
- The Fairfax County BOS noted the festival in its **Older Americans Month** resolution;
- Virginia Governor Terence R. McAuliffe's [Older Virginians Month 2015 Proclamation](#) cited the festival.

Take a look back!



- [Creative Aging Festival 2015](#) – Archives important festival information including the list of events, podcasts and videos.
- [The Photo Album!](#)