



Celebrate Aging

DANE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES



Division Administrator Angela Velasquez and husband Rene celebrating 40 years of marriage in Key West, February 2024

The Disability and Aging Services Division within Dane County Department of Human Services is committed to supporting all of us as we age – from managing changes in our physical and environmental needs to ensuring meaningful engagement through work and volunteering, and the building of strong social, spiritual, and intellectual connections.

In 2024 we will be *Celebrating Aging!* by challenging ageist thinking, recognizing everyday contributions of older folks, offering opportunities to engage about the realities and opportunities presented during this life stage, and looking at how **love and connection** make us stronger and more resilient as we get older.

We hope you will join us as we take a deeper dive into this process that we are all doing, getting older every minute! Find an event that looks interesting, share your experience

of aging, loving, or caring for someone who has needed your help, or just read along throughout the year.

We're helping folks make connections, build confidence, create opportunities and live with purpose during this life stage.

-submitted by Angela Velasquez, DA Disability and Aging Services

LOVE & CONNECTION THROUGH THE YEARS

Meaningful love and connection are important at all stages of life and promote emotional well-being and an overall higher quality of life. While the ways that we connect with change over time, we need companionship, human connection, closeness, and someone with whom to share our days especially as we age. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and as we age, the need for meaningful relationships becomes even more critical. Having a network of supportive friends, family members, and social groups provides a sense of purpose, belonging, and emotional stability.

Social connections can help combat feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are prevalent among aging individuals. The sense of connectedness that comes from regular social interactions can ward off the negative emotional impact of solitude, reducing the risk of mental health disorders and enhancing emotional resilience.

Moreover, social connections can bring joy, laughter, and fulfillment to one's life. Engaging in social activities, hobbies, and celebrations provides opportunities for shared experiences and emotional

Get involved in Celebrate Aging!

- Submit a photo for **Love & Connection through the years**
buckingham.tanya@countyofdane.com
- Help with the **book club**
Contact Paul Stahmer
Stahmer.Paul@countyofdane.com
- Contribute a story for an upcoming feature
- Join in the celebration by adding a signature line in your email, or download the social media template
www.dcdhs.com/CelebrateAging
- Check out the **calendar** on Page 6 to see if there is a topic you'd like to contribute

connections, fostering a positive outlook and a sense of fulfillment. By nurturing social connections, older adults can cultivate a rich and vibrant social life, contributing to overall happiness and well-being.

We will be featuring the relationships of older folks in Dane County throughout 2024. We start with the R.O.M.E.O.S. and the J.U.L.I.E.T.S out at the Waunakee Senior Center, and DCDHS's own Jane DeBroux. Jane is an expert on preparing for aging and authors the monthly Caregiver Chronicles.

Join us in the fun! If you'd like to create your own social media post tag DCDHS in your post on facebook or instagram: @danecohumanservices and use our frame, visit www.dcdhs.com/CelebrateAging. You can download a PowerPoint file that will allow you to add your own photo and save it for social media. You can also download a signature for your email.

R.O.M.E.O.S and J.U.L.I.E.T.S

You're never too old to make new friends and enjoy the old ones.

I began a R.O.M.E.O. (Retired Older Men Eating Out) group when I worked as the Director of the Monona Senior Center in 2000, where we provided a men's breakfast once a month. When I began my current position as the Senior Services Director in 2001, at the Waunakee Senior Center I wanted to continue the program.

Since then, the R.O.M.E.O.s have been stopping in at the Senior Center every Tuesday and Thursday morning for coffee and camaraderie. The faces have changed through years, but the conversations, joking, and laughter are always a part of the morning gatherings. The gentlemen show up around 9:00 a.m. and stay until about 10:30, no sign up required. There may be almost twenty of them some mornings and other times, depending on who's playing golf or has an appointment, the number may only be six or seven.

Many who attend are Veterans. Some have lived in Waunakee or a surrounding municipality their whole life and others moved here from out of the area. They have all found this to be a group with which they connect.

The guys are welcoming to new gentlemen joining them for coffee. They have also been a source of support for those who have lost their spouse and I've seen them be patient, understanding and concerned for those who are declining due to mental or physical challenges.



It helps to have a sense of humor with this group, because the jokes and jabs at one another are endless. I was even called on the carpet for doubling the price of coffee – from 25 cents a cup to 50 cents!

Once a month the Senior Center offers a R.O.M.E.O. Breakfast for \$6 and includes a full breakfast followed by a speaker.

In 2015, a few ladies who were in a painting group began meeting and decided they would start their own coffee group and the J.U.L.I.E.T.s (Just Us Ladies Idle Every Thursday) began. They meet each Thursday morning and as the size of the group has grown the sound of their laughter has grown along with it. They have a great deal of fun celebrating birthdays, dressing up for holidays, and bring home made goodies to share.

Like the R.O.M.E.O.s, some of the women knew each other prior to when they began meeting. Others moved here to be closer to family and knew

no one, and for them this is where new friendships have been made. The ladies meet up once a month at a local restaurant for breakfast and may do other things together.

For both groups when someone doesn't show up there's concern about them and if they're doing okay. Get well cards are passed around and signed if someone is ill.

At a time when there is a concern for older adults feeling isolated and alone both these groups offer folks a chance to step out of their homes and into a place where they feel they belong and friendly faces greet them.

If laughter truly is the best medicine, the R.O.M.E.O. and J.U.L.I.E.T. participants get a good dose every time they're together.



-submitted by Cindy Mosiman, Waunakee Senior Services Director

SHARE YOUR STORY

DCDHS is launching the Celebration of Aging! for 2024. Our first theme is "Love and the importance of connections with others." we will be collecting photos and stories of the importance of love as we age throughout the year. We are looking for photos of older adult couples (signed release found at the link: <https://bit.ly/DCDHSrelease2023>) who have:

- Been in love for a long time – a quote or piece of advice from the couple if they are willing to share
- Connections with friends, e.g., ROMEOS & JULIETS Club, walking/workout groups, book group, cultural gatherings, or other ways you connect
- Found love in later life or reunited with a love later in life

We would love to hear your story and learn about why your connections are important, especially as you age, share your photos or stories with Sri Mohan Mohan.Sridevi@countyofdane.com. These pictures will be featured on DCDHS social media, newsletters, or other *Celebrate Aging!* materials.

You can find templates to make your own frame at www.dcdhs.com/celebrateaging

*-submitted by Sridevi Mohan,
Area Agency on Aging Manager*

Cloo Stevenson and Jane De Broux (in photo with grand nephew Benjamin) will celebrate their 30th year together on March 26. They were married in 2017.

Ever since Cloo and I were introduced by a friend more than 30 years ago it was always easy for us to be together.

Of course there have been many challenges—illness, job loss, and parents' deaths to name a few but we are able to be there for each other. Cloo is an artist and I am a writer—we support each other's art and have collaborated on some projects.

We laugh a lot, enjoy each other's company, and don't take one another for granted.

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BOOKCLUB: THIS CHAIR ROCKS

Plan your summer book read now and get involved in a discussion about the book: *This Chair Rocks* which comes highly recommended from our Disability and Aging Services team.

From the author, Ashton Applewhite

“ Aging isn’t a problem to be solved. Or a disease to be cured. Or something icky that old people do. It’s how we move through life, and more of us are doing more of it than ever before in human history. What stands between us and making the most of these longer lives? Ageism: judging, stereotyping, and discriminating against people on the basis of how old we think they are. Solve for ageism and we also address sexism (aging is gendered), ableism (disability is stigmatized), and racism (which denies multitudes the chance to age at all). So I’ve written a book. I blog about it. I led the team that developed Old School, a clearinghouse of anti-ageism resources. I am the voice of Yo, Is This Ageist? (Go ahead, ask me.) I speak widely. All efforts to help catalyze a grassroots movement to raise awareness of ageism and how to dismantle it.

You can learn more about the book and notes from the author at the website: <https://thischairrocks.com>.

We hope you’ll take the time to read the book and reflect on how you see yourself and your work in it. If you would like to host a discussion group, please reach out to Paul Stahmer (Stahmer.Paul@countyofdane.com).

-submitted by Paul Stahmer, Administrative Assistant



BLACK HISTORY MONTH: an interview with Annie Weatherby-Flowers



Interview by Gloria Reyes

In the heart of Dane County, the Division of Disability and Aging Services is a hub of services for all aspects related to aging. This year we are doing a deep dive on the process of aging and celebrating the incredible wealth of contributions and knowledge of Dane County residents over 60 years.

Today, we have the pleasure of sitting down with Annie Weatherby Flowers, a dedicated professional who stands as a testament to a life devoted to public service and uplifting community. With an impressive tenure of 24 years as a city employee, Annie has been deeply involved in shaping the Madison community. In this interview, she shares her experiences, reflections on her journey, and her commitment to fostering wisdom and unity in the face of evolving challenges at the forefront of our Dane County community to discuss her reflections on her work and incredible journey that brought her to where she is today.

*Annie Weatherby-Flowers,
Madison community leader*

Q: Thank you for joining us today. Could you please introduce yourself and tell us about your current role?

AWF: Certainly. I'm Annie Weatherby Flowers, currently working with the Madison Public Library. My journey in Madison began in 1989 when I joined the City's Equal Opportunities Department working with Reverend James C. Wright. Reverend Wright played a pivotal role in my early experiences, and I've remained an active member of the King Coalition for 34 years. Over time, I've witnessed changes in Madison, especially in the dynamics of our collective communities.

Q: You've been deeply involved in civil rights and equity work. How has that shaped your perspective on the challenges faced by communities of color in Madison?

AWF: Reverend Wright, Ms. Milele Chikasa Anana, and other elders were instrumental in shaping my understanding of civil rights, the foundations in recognizing our role as gatekeepers of history and equity. Our elders hold the wisdom gained from years of experience, and it's crucial that we share this knowledge. I aim to be a wise counsel, following in the footsteps of leaders that come before me. We must guide the younger generation with the strategies and insights gained from being at the tables where decisions were made. Today, the challenges lay in maintaining unity among communities of color. We were once a collective force, and the separation among us weakens our impact. Unfortunately, I have seen a separation among communities of color. This division weakens our collective power. Issues like racism and power inequity are collective challenges that require a united front. We must recognize ourselves as one unit of people, disenfranchised by a system that thrives on division.

Q: Tell me a bit about the work you feel most passionate about that you have done in your life.

AWF: The work that truly ignited my passion was when I served as a clinical substance abuse counselor at Journey Mental Health within Dane County Mental Health. Engaging directly with families, especially women transitioning from prison and those involved in substance abuse and criminal justice, was incredibly fulfilling. Being a part of the founding of "Joining Forces" for Families within Dane County and the City's Neighborhood Resource Team allowed me to work directly within communities, particularly collective communities of color. This hands-on, community-based work is where my passion lies.

Q: Many people often say that life only makes sense when you play it backward. Can you think of a time when your life took a different path that makes more sense now that you reflect back on it?

AWF: Absolutely. The moment that comes to mind is when I moved to Madison in 1989. At the time, I was coming out of a challenging relationship, and I moved here with my teenage boys for a fresh start. Back then, playing it forward, I thought I would give it a shot and be back in a year or two. Yet, 34 years later, in my second house, I find myself still rooted in Madison.

Initially, I couldn't have played this back and seen the incredible rewards I've experience in Madison. The benefits of life, the connections with the right people-all the unforeseen. Now as I reflect, it all makes sense. I see how God connected me to certain individuals who opened doors and pathways for me. These connections have not only enriched my life but also positioned me to do the same for others, opening doors and facilitation of relationships, just as others did for me. It has inspired me to pay it forward. It is a beautiful cycle of community building and empowerment. I couldn't have foreseen this role for myself when I moved to Madison, but now it's a crucial part of my life.

Q: What has the role of the community and relationships had in the satisfaction of your life? How do you prioritize those?

AWF: Planning of Juneteenth (<https://kujichaguliamcsd.org/register>) is a great example of community and relationships. I have been doing Juneteenth for 34 years. It is a joy to witness the next generation embrace Juneteenth, fostering its growth and ensuring the community takes ownership. It is incredibly fulfilling to witness the young people having those "aha" moments and seeing their enthusiasm and after 34 years the interest from those who grew up with Juneteenth and now want to contribute and offer help is amazing. Currently we are creating a new advisory board with young people leading the planning. I guide and support, but I believe that holding onto something too tightly hinders its growth. I want the community to own it, especially young people. It is important to preserve the significance of Juneteenth, a celebration rooted in black history, and I am committed to passing the torch to younger generations echoing the spirit of community pride and resilience.

Every month when I receive the Umoja Magazine (<https://www.umojamagazine.com>), it takes me back to the basement where I helped Ms. Milele edit the publication. It's a reminder of the roots of Juneteenth and the cool legacy we've built. It's more than just a celebration; it's a connection to history and community resilience.

Q: What do you want people to think of first, when they think of you?

AWF: That I cared. That I cared about people. That I was here, and I made a difference. Some people come and go, and we don't even know they were here. Others leave a lasting presence that we miss. I want people to think of me as someone who cared and made a positive impact. When someone is gone, and we feel their absence, like in the case of Juan Lopez, it's a testament to the impact they had. Losing people is a part of growing old, and the more you age, the more losses you experience. However, with the loss, there's also an increased appreciation for the connections and the moments shared. It's about cherishing those relationships and the mark they leave behind. The older I become, the more I realize the significance of caring and making a difference.

Q: How do you prioritize your physical and mental well-being? How has that changed throughout your life?

AWF: When I turned 50, I was diagnosed with Lupus, which brought about a significant change in how I manage my health. I must be more mindful of how I prepare in the mornings, manage pain, and overall take care of myself. I experienced long-term COVID symptoms before officially contracting the virus. This added another layer to managing my health, introducing fatigue and other challenges that have noticeably changed my daily life.

My health journey has sparked a deep involvement in research. I'm part of the *All of Us* (www.allofus.nih.gov) program and also serve on the emeritus review board. The review board assesses various research projects, ensuring community representation. For instance, we are currently looking at infant mortality and prenatal issues, areas where women and children of color face significant risks. My experience with Lupus and its treatment complications, such as rogue electrodes in my heart from medication, underscores the importance of diverse representation in medical research. The challenge lies in allowing those most impacted by health disparities to be at the tables and participate equitably. Many marginalized individuals, particularly people of color, lack the luxury of taking time off to engage in trials or research to survival priorities. My involvement in these research initiatives aims to bridge that gap and advocate for equitable participation.

Q: What advice would you give someone just considering their career about how to move forward?

AWF: My advice would be to find your passion and navigate the challenges of balancing passion with financial feasibility in their careers. It is about being strategic. If you love working with children but the money is in a different area, look at creative ways to bring your passion into the forefront. If there is a shift due to funding cuts, explore how you can continue doing the work you're passionate about. The world tells us that we all have gifts, and we should use them to build the kingdom, love people, and serve our community. If we're not using our gifts due to financial constraints, the entire community suffers.

Q: We know that aging isn't all roses, right? What are the biggest challenges related to aging that you've experienced?

AWF: Oh, you can't jump out of bed anymore. The back and the knee and your overall physical capacity. However, your spirit doesn't change, the essence of you, doesn't age. I still feel like I'm 21 but God gives me the wisdom to know that my age is 65. Balancing those two is hard because my body can't do what my spirit wants it to do. It's a contradiction. The biggest battle is watching your body and your spirit shift. My inner self would say "Oh, we can still do that!" but my body is a contradiction to my spirit. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. That's the essence of the contradiction: balancing the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of aging. You must find a balance and embracing the wisdom that comes with aging. Recognizing that while my spirit is eager, my body has limitations. It's a constant negotiation between the two.

Annie Weatherby Flowers, with her rich history and commitment to unity, serves as a beacon of wisdom and advocacy in Madison and Dane County. As she embarks on the next phase of her life, I know that she will continue to serve our community through her wise counsel and desire to nurture the next generation, emphasizing the power of community driven impact in the face of systemic challenges.

Annie's story reflects on the beauty of embracing life's journey and celebrating the aging in our community. It was an honor to sit down with Annie for this powerful interview in our first interview for Celebration of Aging and Black History Month. - Gloria Reyes



COMMUNICATIONS THEME, 2024: CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

- **Black History** Month
- Valentine's Day: Kick off **Love and Connection As We Age**

MARCH

- Feature of **skilled nursing**, Badger Prairie Health Care Center
- **National Nutrition** Month: learn about meal sites around Dane County

APRIL

- Economic Support/Case Managers: Elderly, Blind, and Disabled services
- National **Volunteer** Month

MAY

- **Older American's** Month / ADRC Month (9 – Aging Advocacy Day)
- **Mental Health Awareness** Month
- **South Asian / Asian Pacific American** Heritage Month
- **Jewish American** Heritage Month

JUNE

- **Pride** Month
- **World Elder Abuse Awareness** Day
- **Alzheimer's** Longest Day

JULY

- **Benefit Specialist Week**, ADRC & AAA

AUGUST

- Join staff **book read**: *This Chair Rocks*
- **Overdose Awareness** Day

SEPTEMBER

- **Fall Prevention**
- **Suicide Awareness** and National Recovery Month
- **Hispanic Heritage** Month
- **Kinship Care** Month

OCTOBER

- **Domestic Violence Awareness** Month
- **Ageism Awareness**
- **Medicare Part D Enrollment**
- **First Responders** Day

NOVEMBER

- **Alzheimer's** Awareness Month
- **Caregivers** Month
- **Homeless Awareness** Month
- **Hmong New year**
- **Veterans** Day