



VAN FORUM

February 2011

Assistive Technology

What Is It and How Can It Improve Your Life?

Consider this scenario. The year is 2015, and a robotic personal care attendant is providing feeding and cleaning care; people are using voice activation to enter their homes or offices; computers are providing global positioning for individuals; and wheelchairs are so high tech that people can cover new terrains. These technological advancements are a part of assistive technology.

Courage Center is a leading authority on what assistive technology is and how it can improve lives. At this forum, participants will:

- Learn about equipment and methodologies that make lives easier and safer, including products for vision, physical limitations, cognitive strengthening, and mobility.
- Understand how resources can have a positive influence on their lives.
- Participate in hands-on activities.

Presenters:

Jennifer Mundl, Assistive Technology Specialist, Courage Center

Sue Redepening, OTR, Assistive Technology Supervisor, Courage Center

Register now!

Call 651-917-4652 or click on the date below to register:

- [February 8 forum](#)
- [February 11 forum](#)

These forums are free and open to the public.

Questions? Need a ride? Call VAN at 651-917-4652.



Assistive Technology

Tuesday, February 8, 2011
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Family Means
1875 Northwestern Avenue
Stillwater, MN 55082

[Map to Stillwater](#)

and
Friday, February 11, 2011
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Courage Center
3915 Golden Valley Road
Golden Valley, MN 55422

[Map to Courage Center](#)

Free and Open to the Public



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MARCH FORUM

Lifelong Housing Design

Monday, March 14, 2011
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

[Additional information on page 7](#)

Cool Tools for Older Adults

By Jennifer Mundl, Assistive Technology Specialist, Courage Center,
and Sue Redepenning, OTR, Assistive Technology Supervisor, Courage Center

New digital technologies, such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), have changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. They allow us to be independent and still connected in our communities. These digital tools are some of the most recent additions to a large family of *assistive technologies*—devices that improve a person's ability to live and function independently. For example, individuals who have difficulty with speech after a stroke might use a device that helps them communicate in other ways. Individuals with arthritis can use tools that assist them with opening a jar and getting in and out of a car. Assistive technology possesses unlimited potential.

We all use assistive technology. Without it, we would not be able to perform many daily tasks. We could call a pencil assistive technology because without it we would not be able to write notes. Some individuals are not capable of using a standard method of writing and, therefore, need an adaptation that allows them this ability.

[Courage Center](#) realizes the importance of assistive technology and has implemented services to meet these needs. For example, its Drivers Assessment and Training Services offers solutions to help older citizens continue to drive safely. Using a larger mirror or a car-door support for exiting a vehicle are two ways to use technology to prolong safe driving.



Image courtesy of Courage Center

Transportation is not the only area for which Courage Center provides options. In one instance, the center helped an individual learn adaptations and strategies that allowed her to continue living independently in her home rather than moving to an assisted living center. In another instance, a man sustained an injury that took away his ability to communicate with his wife and family. The wife cried when he finally was able to press a switch to indicate "yes" or "no" to a question, and he eventually learned to use a more complex adaptation where he could speak as he did prior to the injury. The possibilities are endless.

Keep in mind that a low-tech solution may be as good as a high-tech one.

If hearing is difficult and the ring of a telephone is not audible, a flashing light can alert the individual that the phone is ringing. Products that amplify sound also are available on the market.

Reading is important to many of us and becomes problematic with visual limitations. One solution is to magnify and display the book on a television screen. Digitally formatted books, read on an [iPad](#) or a [Kindle Reader](#), provide options for audio reading or increasing the size of the text. For low-tech solutions, the library system loans large-print books, and the [State Services for the Blind](#) provides a communication center that places popular books on reading machines or computers at no cost.

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Cool Tools for Older Adults (continued)

If the right technology is applied, technology solutions can be easy and effective. For some, they are necessary components for being able to function independently. But assistive technology is not just for individuals with a disability or limitation. We can all benefit from assistive technology and accommodations.

Many opportunities are available for people to discuss options with experienced users, and you may want to investigate blogs, websites, or consumer guides to become better informed before purchasing a product. Two good places to start learning about possibilities are www.abledata.com and www.axistive.com.

Courage Center and the Vital Aging Network will offer two forums on assistive technology in February. To sign up, visit the VAN website at www.vital-aging-network.org.

Jennifer Mundl and Susan Redepenning both have over 20 years of experience with assistive technology. Jennifer Mundl completed a master's degree in special education and an undergraduate degree in computer science. Additionally, she is certified as an assistive technology practitioner. Susan holds a four-year degree as an occupational therapist. Both individuals conduct trainings and assessment on assistive technology and have spoken on a national level.

Courage Center is a nonprofit rehabilitation and resource center that advances the lives of children and adults experiencing barriers to health and independence. Courage Center specializes in treating brain injury, spinal cord injury, stroke, chronic pain, autism, and disabilities experienced since birth. For more information, visit www.CourageCenter.org.

Connect with Courage Tours are offered the third Thursday morning of each month (times vary). They provide an overview of the organization and include department visits and stories that tell who Courage is and why we exist. The guides tell how Courage Center changes lives and about how community members, clients and volunteers can connect with Courage. To RSVP for a tour, please contact Kathy Hayes at 763-520-0255 or Kathleen.Hayes@CourageCenter.org.

Nominations for the 2011 Dutch Kastenbaum Award

Minnesota Gerontological Society (MGS)

Deadline: Friday, February 11, 2011

The Minnesota Gerontological Society invites nominations each year for the Dutch Kastenbaum Award to recognize an outstanding gerontologist who has demonstrated his or her commitment to the field of aging through practice, research, or academics. The award is named after Abraham "Dutch" Kastenbaum, who for almost 25 years hosted the weekly television show *Senior Citizen's Forum*. To nominate someone for the Dutch

Kastenbaum Outstanding Gerontologist Award, visit the Minnesota Gerontological Society's website at www.mngero.org to download the form and to obtain further instructions. MGS will announce the winner at the MGS Conference on Friday, April 29, 2011. For further questions or inquiries, contact Emily Strand at 651-917-4648 or emily@vital-aging-network.org.

From the Chair

As Boomers Age, We Can Expect More and Better Assistive Devices

This month's e-Bulletin and forum focus on assistive technology, also known as adaptive devices. As many readers know, I have a spinal-cord injury due to a car accident and am paralyzed from my chest down. Accordingly, I use a variety of adaptive devices, including a wheelchair, a back brace, voice-activated software, and a van equipped with hand controls and a ramp.

I also use adaptive devices not associated with my injury, such as eyeglasses. These and other devices make my life possible, and I am enormously grateful for them. Because others may not be as lucky as I have been in obtaining such aids, I would like to comment on a couple of barriers I've observed.

One barrier is the stigma that some people attach to using these aids. This stigma exists even for eyeglasses, although perhaps less so in our aging nation. I've been wearing them since second grade, and as a preteen and teenager, was very aware of the taunt "Boys don't make passes at girls who wear glasses." A wheelchair is perhaps the most stigmatizing of the devices I use, and in my experience as a woman in middle age, guys definitely don't make passes at women in wheelchairs! Wheelchairs are also limiting in other ways; for example, I can't visit friends in their homes because I can't get up their steps.

Some may avoid using assistive technology such as a hearing aid or reading glasses to hide a disability, especially if people consider that disability to be a sign of aging. A wheelchair makes mobility much easier and less stressful, but

individuals also can view it as a sign of giving up.

Another and more serious barrier is associated with learning about and obtaining assistive technology. Despite the broad array of assistive technology on the market today, it's hard to know what is available and whether it will be helpful in any individual situation. Many technologies are available only through a gatekeeper, a medical professional who makes a diagnosis and writes a prescription. Such devices are often expensive, making it difficult for people who lack health insurance to afford them. Health insurance often pays only part of the bill, and coverage is often very limited.

Other devices, such as voice-activated software or devices to reduce symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome, are available most easily in the workplace, however people who are temporarily out of work or retired must find another way.

Because of quality concerns, insurance rarely will cover costs for used medical devices. Hence, it is difficult to find less expensive devices, particularly if only short-term use is anticipated. Some organizations get around this limitation by loaning equipment or providing a website or other means to advertise used equipment. An example is the Equipment Exchange service of the [Multiple Sclerosis Society of Minnesota](#).



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From the Chair (continued)

Luckily, as more and more of us need assistive technology and adaptive devices, the marketplace is beginning to serve us better. For example, I have found that the Sears Health and Wellness catalogue is a good source for a number of items. Another way to learn about available devices is to scan www.abledata.com, a wonderful website.

I eagerly await hearing the speakers at our upcoming forum to learn more about additional useful devices and places to get them.

Nancy Eustis
Chair, Vital Aging Network

Minnesota Creative Arts and Aging Network (MnCAAN)

Creative Aging Around Town

Learning together about aging and the arts

*How to Attract Older Adults to Your Classroom**

Free Admission

- What:** Learn-and share what you know:
- What kind of classes most appeal to people 55+
 - What special interests, needs, or considerations they may have
 - How to reach them and get them in the door

When: Wednesday, February 2, 2011, 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Where: MacPhail Center for Music, Antonello Hall,
501 South 2nd Street, Minneapolis

Presenters: *Jeanie Brindley-Barnett*, Partnership Coordinator,
MacPhail Adult Education
Sarah Millfelt, Deputy Director of Programs,
Northern Clay Center
Bill Helgeson, Vice President of Accounting Supervisor,
Risdaal Marketing Group

More info: See www.MnCAAN.net or call Pat Samples at 763-560-5199.

For parking and directions: http://www.macphail.org/locations_parking.html.

* This event will be of special interest to artists and organizations offering classes in the arts to the public, but everyone with an interest in arts and aging is welcome.

Volunteering Spotlight

Can we help spread the word about a volunteer opportunity in your organization? Send us information by the 10th of the month for publication in the e-Bulletin for the next month. While we will make every effort to include what you send us, space is limited.

Minnesota Academy of Science State Science and Engineering Fair Judges

The Minnesota State Science and Engineering Fair will take place at the Sheraton Bloomington Hotel from March 19 to 22 and needs volunteer judges. Judges read papers or listen to presentations by middle-school and highschool students. Judges should have at least a BA or BS degree or equivalent research in science or engineering. For more information, visit www.fair.mnmas.org.

The Emergency Foodshelf Network Various Volunteer Opportunities

The Emergency Foodshelf Network provides access to nutritious culturally specific foods to serve the changing needs in the community and has many volunteer opportunities available. They range from food-sorting to office support to assembly of food packages. The agency has projects for groups or individuals. For more information, contact Sarah Nelson by email at snelson@emergencyfoodshelf.org or visit www.emergencyfoodshelf.org.

Student Mentor Mentor

Student Mentor is looking for mentors for college students on professional or academic topics. Mentors define the mentorship and choose who matches them. It's free and on your own schedule. This California-based organization



wants to spread mentorship opportunities across the United States. For more information, visit www.StudentMentor.org.

Arc's Value Village Project Coordinator

Join HandsOn Twin Cities and lead a group of volunteers in preparing donations for the sales floor at Arc's Value Village. Project Coordinators help sort clothing, accessories, household items, books, toys, and jewelry. Volunteers might also hang clothing, price donations, and stock merchandise. The Project Coordinator acts as liaison between Arc Greater Twin Cities, HandsOn Twin Cities, and volunteers and provides leadership for each project. The commitment is approximately four hours per month. For more information, contact Matt Bielefeldt at 612-379-4900 ext.18 or visit www.handsontwincities.org.

Courage Center Cars for Courage Driver

Do you like cars and engines? Enjoy driving a variety of vehicles? Like a challenge? Work in teams to pick up donated vehicles from donors residences or drop-off locations and transport them to *Cars for Courage* in Brooklyn Center. [Courage Center](http://www.CourageCenter.org) sells the vehicles; proceeds support programs and services. Volunteers

must have a good driving record and undergo background checks. Courage Center provides training. Times: weekday mornings and early afternoons; approximately three hours per week. Contact Kathy Hayes at 763-520-0255 or Kathleen.Hayes@CourageCenter.org.

For Your CALENDAR



[Directions to the Goldstein](#)

MARCH VAN FORUM

Lifelong Housing Design

Options and costs for upgrading your current home

Where do you want to live when you grow older? For many people, the answer is "at home." This forum and exhibition explores the products and technologies that will make that possible.

Monday, March 14, 2011

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Goldstein Museum

St. Paul Campus, University of Minnesota
1985 Buford Avenue, Room 364
Saint Paul, MN 55108-6134

Presenters:

Lyn Bruin, Housing Studies Associate Professor, College of Design, University of Minnesota

Jodi Riha, Masters Student, College of Design, University of Minnesota

Diane Sprague, Lifetime Home Project

Ron Peterson, Residential Energy Auditor, ENERVISION

Steve Johnson, Sustainable Resources Center

MOVING THE DREAM FORWARD

Saint Paul Public Libraries

Sunday, February 6, 2:00 to 3:00 PM

St. Paul Public Libraries is celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during Black History Month. *Moving the Dream Forward* features poetry, music, and song with Mychael Rambo. For more information, visit the [website](#) for the event.

SCOTTISH RAMBLE

Saturday, February 19, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Sunday, February 20, 12:00 to 5:00 PM

Time to bring out the tartan! Enjoy bagpipes, a highland dance competition, Scottish meat pies, shopping, educational presentations, and access to information on Scottish organizations, activities, and music in the area as the Scottish Ramble invades Landmark Center! Nothing's cooler than kilts in February! General admission is \$5; free for people 62+. For more information, visit www.scottishramble.org.

WHO WERE YOUR ANCESTORS? FUNDAMENTALS AND PRINCIPLES OF GENEALOGY

College of Continuing Education

Monday, February 21, 7:00 to 9:00 PM

Do you know who your ancestors are? Do you know enough to describe their lives? During this course, participants will learn the principles of modern genealogical research, including how to discover information about your ancestors and their lives using key records. A key topic will be effective use of the Internet as a genealogical research tool. Tom Rice, Ph.D. in microbiology and certified genealogist, is a full-time professional researcher, lecturer, and writer who will facilitate the course. The College of Continuing Education's LearningLife program offers this three-session short course. The cost is \$125. To obtain more information or register, visit www.cce.umn.edu.

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For Your CALENDAR (continued)

KILLING US SOFTLY 4: ADVERTISING'S
IMAGE OF WOMEN

Merriam Park Branch Library, St. Paul
Tuesday, February 22, 2011, 7 PM

In this new, highly anticipated update of her pioneering *Killing Us Softly* series, Jean Kilbourne takes a fresh look at how advertising traffics in distorted and destructive ideals of femininity. The film marshals a range of new print and television advertisements to bare a stunning pattern of damaging gender stereotypes. By bringing Kilbourne's groundbreaking analysis up to date, *Killing Us Softly 4* stands to challenge a new generation to take advertising seriously and to think critically about popular culture and its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, and gender violence. A discussion follows the film. The

showing is at the Merriam Park Branch Library, 1831 Marshall Ave., St. Paul. For more information, visit the [website](#) for the event.

DINNER WITH THE TSARS: RUSSIAN
IMPERIAL PORCELAIN

Museum of Russian Art

Running through August 7, 2011

Explore this exhibition that brings together approximately 140 superb examples of Russian porcelain that the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St. Petersburg produced during the rule of the Romanovs. The beautifully crafted, hand-painted objects present visitors with inspired decorative settings and tableware that the rulers of Russia used. The museum is open every day. The cost is \$7 for adults. For more information, visit www.tmora.org.

Tribute to Lisa Harmon

By Mary Kowalski, ALVA Facilitator

Lisa Harmon, VAN Leadership Group member and ALVA graduate, died January 8, 2011. She was 44 years old.

Lisa came into our lives and stayed with us in a constantly upbeat way. She was well educated, well traveled, and well versed in living life fully with a faith that was evident in her daily life.

Lisa spent 20 years as an engineer employed by 3M, where she held many diverse roles. From team leader as a process specialist to manager in multiple 3M business units, Lisa led with energy, creativity and care.

Lisa was an ALVA graduate in 2010. Her passion was providing home help to older adults who need assistance to continue to live in their



homes. She started and shaped the business while participating in the ALVA session.

Lisa was a member of the ALVA Leadership Group, serving on the Communications Committee at the time of her passing.

Her presence was always positive, her smile indelible, her words thoughtful. We, her friends at VAN, will miss her greatly.