

Dementia Live® Training Brings Insight to First Responders

What does it feel like to live with dementia? Thanks to a unique training offered by the Howard County Office on Aging and Independence (OAI), hundreds of local first responders now have a better understanding of just that.

Dementia Live® is an immersive simulation experience that replicates what someone with dementia might face day to day. During the training, participants are outfitted with tools that impair vision, hearing and dexterity, and are given everyday tasks to complete under time pressure. The exercise is followed by a guided debrief to encourage discussion and reflection and provide insight into how cognitive decline affects communication, behavior and daily functioning.

OAI has partnered with Howard County Fire & Rescue (HCFR) to deliver this experience to nearly 600 staff members. Fifty-nine in-person trainings were held between January and April 2025.

According to OAI’s Caregiver and Dementia Care Program Manager, Kathy Wehr, it’s essential to train first responders. “Fire and Rescue are our boots-on-the-ground professionals,” Kathy explained. “They’re often the first to encounter individuals experiencing confusion, disorientation or distress – symptoms that may stem from dementia, mental illness or other chronic conditions.” At a minimum, the training will make it easier to identify and communicate with those who have dementia; the broader effects can benefit the entire community.

The response from HCFR participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff reported feeling more empathetic, more effective as listeners, and better equipped to interact with individuals showing signs of cognitive decline. The training will not only impact their work, but also how they approach conversations in everyday life. For OAI and its facilitators, the impact is deeply meaningful.



From the desk of Calvin Ball, Howard County Executive



Affordable housing is a springboard to maximize individual potential, achieve economic self-sufficiency, and facilitate community integration for people of all ages, abilities and incomes. Currently under construction in Columbia’s Hickory Ridge Village, Patuxent Commons is a 76-unit apartment community designed to address housing instability among low-income adults with disabilities, older adults and younger adults/families in Howard County. The rental community will offer both affordable and market rate units when it opens this October.

Located at 6441 Freetown Road, the community is close to transit, shopping, recreation, and job opportunities, and will help connect residents with disabilities into the surrounding community and promote their ability to live as independently as possible. Older adults will have the opportunity to rent 40% of the units, 25% will be set aside for adults with disabilities, and the remainder will be for families and younger adults.

The community is being developed by Mission First Housing Group and is based on an intergenerational housing concept created by the Autism Society of Maryland. Howard County Government committed \$5.8 million in County funds to help deliver this community, and major state, federal, and private loans, grants, and equity are also part of the \$44 million project budget.

Our Office on Aging and Independence co-hosted an information session and Neighbor Recruitment Meeting in July for Patuxent Commons at the East Columbia 50+ Center. We also announced the housing lottery registration will be open August 1 - 10. If you are interested and want to learn more, I encourage you to visit www.patuxentcommons.com.

“Heightening awareness will help ensure cognitive decline doesn’t define or diminish the lives of those affected,” Kathy said. “When we know better, we do better.”

OAI’s Dementia Live® trainings align with its broader goal of making Howard County a more age-friendly community, where residents of all ages and abilities are supported in aging well.

OAI is working to expand its reach across other public safety agencies and community groups as well. To learn more, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/dementia

August Events at Howard County 50+ Centers

Summer Community Sale and Senior Olympics

Bain 50+ Center

August 1, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Call 410-313-7213 to register as a vendor or for the Senior Olympics.

Sell or shop for handmade goods and vintage finds at Bain's community sale, then stay for the Senior Olympics competition, express classes and games to stay active! Vendor spaces are \$25 if you bring your own table; \$45 if we provide one.

Tasty Tidbits



Watermelon Popsicles

Bain 50+ Center

August 12, 11 - 11:30 a.m. | A30100.402

Learn how to make watermelon popsicles, a refreshing and naturally sweet treat for hot summer days.

Strawberry Margarita Mocktail

North Laurel 50+ Center

August 13, 10 - 11 a.m. | A30100.407

These frozen, virgin strawberry margaritas are made with just five ingredients, including agave nectar to balance the zesty lime and sweet strawberry flavors.

DIY Dark Chocolate Peanut Butter Cups

Ellicott City 50+ Center

August 20, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | A30100.405

Learn how to make a healthier version of this classic sweet with only three ingredients. These chocolate bites are sure to satisfy any sweet tooth.

Red Cross Blood Drive

East Columbia 50+ Center

August 16, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Schedule online, or call 1-800-RED-CROSS

Give the gift of life – donate blood with the American Red Cross to help save lives and support patients in need. Appointments encouraged; walk-ins welcome if space allows.

Medically Curious: Opioids

Glenwood 50+ Center

August 19, 1 - 2 p.m. | A03637.401

ER doctor Larry Roman focuses this discussion on Opioids and the 80,000 drug overdose deaths linked to them each year. Learn more about these drugs that seem to work so well yet kill so many.

Investor Insights: Recognizing Crypto & Other Investment Scams

North Laurel 50+ Center

August 20, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | A06665.402

In 2024, investment and crypto scams accounted for \$5.7 billion in lost savings, more than any other category. Join the FINRA Investor Education Foundation to learn how to spot investment frauds, improve your defenses and safeguard your assets.

Colonial Lighthouses

Elkridge 50+ Center | August 20, 2 - 3 p.m. | A05613.400

America's lighthouses were essential to the growth of the American colonies, safely guiding ships carrying goods and settlers necessary to build the nation. Anne Puppa tells the story of 10 colonial lighthouses.

OAI Resource Fair for Faith Communities

East Columbia 50+ Center

August 20, 4 - 7 p.m. | A20680.400

Faith-based groups and individuals are encouraged to connect with OAI staff as they highlight services and initiatives that support the health, independence and well-being of older adults.

Financial Seminar: Creating Your Estate Plan

Ellicott City 50+ Center

August 22, 11 a.m. - noon | A02628.401

Explore estate planning basics and options that make sense for your specific situation. Learn what to consider when creating a will, the benefits of trusts, how to reduce estate taxes and how insurance can protect your family.

Pop-Up Group Fitness Class: Beginners Ballet

Ellicott City 50+ Fitness Center

August 26, 2 - 2:45 p.m. | A02401.401

Try your hand (or feet) at ballet in this beginner class, led by Dance Instructor, Lori Macia. Ballet shoes are suggested but socks are fine. Free; please register in advance.

A Moment to Honor

Bain 50+ Center | August 27, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. | A30100.400

In observance of Grief Awareness Day, join us for quiet reflection, music, individual sharing, and an activity to honor loved ones we have lost, including pets. Refreshments served.



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410-313-6410 (VOICE/RELAY) • www.howardcountymd.gov/aging

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**To register or find more events,
visit bit.ly/HoCoRegistration**