

Hand in Hand...  
Linking Lives



Mar/Apr 2026

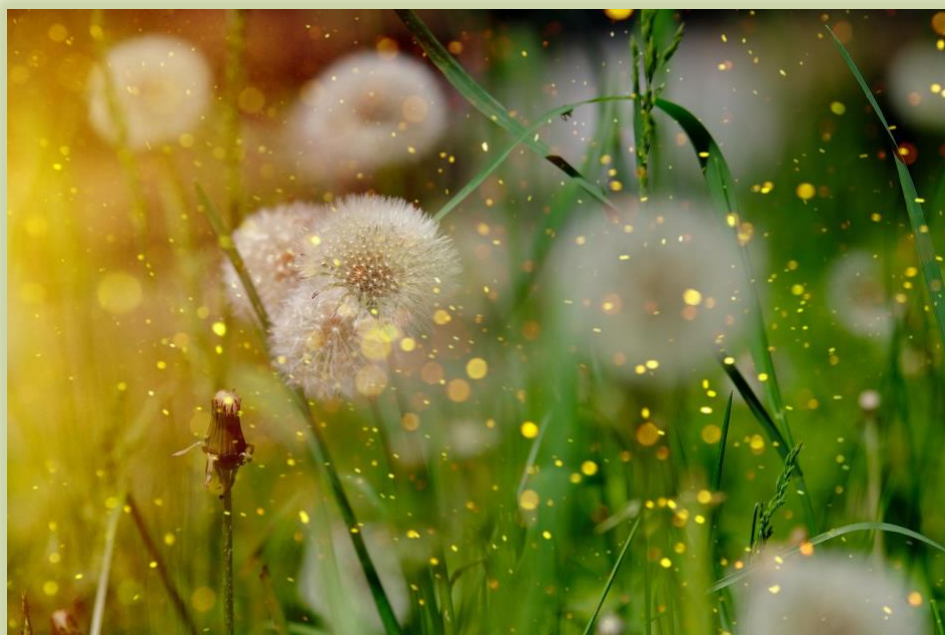
## GOT—GROWING OLDER TOGETHER

570-630-0509 830 Main St. #574 Honesdale, PA 18431 [www.growingoldertogether.org](http://www.growingoldertogether.org)

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*If you need  
something, just ask!*

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### ***How to Survive Allergy Season***

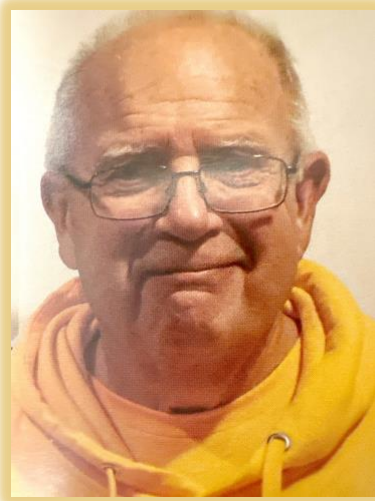
If you've been sneezing, itching and wiping watery eyes, you are not alone. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says about one in four American adults suffer from seasonal allergies. And allergy symptoms can worsen as you age.

If you're among the pollen-suffering population, you may feel worse this year than you did a decade ago. It's not all in your head: Allergy seasons are becoming longer and more intense in many areas of the country due to warming temperatures that cause plants to produce pollen earlier in the spring season and keep ragweed around longer in the fall, the Environmental Protection Agency explains.

Allergic reactions from environmental exposure of pollens, dust, mold, and other agents can cause a variety of symptoms depending on the time of the year, pollen count, and the age of the person and whether they have a history of asthma. Springtime symptoms are usually caused by pollen from flowering trees (especially birch, cedar, and pine), mold and dust and grass pollen. These symptoms can appear any time during a person's life and reappear annually at the same time each year.

An allergy is your immune system attempting to fight off environmental substances. In the spring there is the temptation to open the windows, allowing external allergens to enter your home environment. The same applies to pets that come in and out of the house potentially bringing in a wide variety of substances into your home.

As symptoms begin, start using a nasal spray right away: OTC intranasal sprays are good for allergy symptom relief (including eye symptoms). Start them early in the season and use them every day to prepare your body for the pollen invasion.



*James D. Lomax M.D.*

Take an allergy pill:

OTC oral medications take an hour to kick in and are less effective than spray. If you opt for an antihistamine pill, get a non-sedating one. Older adults should avoid medications that contain Benadryl, Dramamine, and NyQuil as they can cause drowsiness and confusion (making them dangerous for driving). A second generation of antihistamines were developed that have fewer side effects. They include Allegra (Fexafenadine); Clarenex (Desloratadine); Claritin (Lodratadine) and Zyrtec (Cetirizine).

Get allergy tested:

Despite one quarter of older adults enduring seasonal allergies, few see their physicians for a diagnosis. Your doctor can conduct an allergy test to pinpoint what is causing your symptoms and help you figure out the best way to treat them.

Consider allergy shots:

They take a commitment, but injections tailored to your specific allergies can get to the root of yours and lead to lasting immunity.

Pay attention to pollen counts:

Check pollen counts daily just like you check the weather and adjust your plans when necessary. According to the Mayo Clinic the best time to go outside is right after it rains; rainfall helps to clear the pollen from the air.

Rinse and repeat:

When you do spend time outside, be sure to rinse your eyes and face remove residual pollen from sensitive areas. Keep your windows closed and wash your hair in the evening to get the pollen out after a day outside.

Is it allergies? Or something else?

Common infections with runny nose and sneezing can linger and are still circulating after flu season. They may be to blame for springtime misery.

Over-the-counter tests can tell if influenza or coronavirus are to blame. Keeping a few of these on hand is important for older adults, who are more likely to experience serious illness with an infection. Knowing the cause of your symptoms leads to faster access to treatments that can keep you out of the hospital.

**Dr. James D. Lomax, who is also a GOT board member, and adapted from AARP Magazine**

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## ***Staying Young at 94***

At 94, Ruth Smith still has amazing energy. A lifelong pianist, she taught herself to play the organ 10 years ago, and still plays it weekly for her church, the Carley Brook Chapel built in 1886 with its stained glass windows on Carley Brook Road in Honesdale. And until recently, Ruth, a soprano, used to sing with the Wayne Choralaires, which was founded half a century ago to bring choral music to the region. “If you do not sing a lot you lose your voice range. It shrinks back,” she says. “Those who train diligently, can maintain excellent vocal abilities into their 60s, 70s, and beyond.”



*Ruth Smith*

As a nonagenarian, Ruth is also still driving and gardening: flowers and flowering shrubs. And she is a busy volunteer at the chapel’s weekly singalong and potluck supper. “We invite you to join us! Bring a dish, an instrument, a friend, or just yourself. All are welcome,” says Ruth.

The evening’s music includes folk and gospel songs, a ballad or two, perhaps some bluegrass tunes, and traditional hymns. Lyrics are provided for all the songs, so everyone can join in. “I keep the records of 500 gospel and folk songs and place the wordings of songs selected into 50-plus black binders for everyone. The songs differ every Saturday,” says Ruth. Chapel members playing instruments provide the music, with some melodiously talented women switching from flutes to guitars to piano in the course of the evening.

Ruth still bakes four delicious different types of cookies every week for the potluck. “Meringue cookies that go in the oven. You turn off the heat, and they cook all night long. Plus lime-flavored white cookies, and of course

chocolate chip cookies,” she says. “And two of my great-grandchildren, Miriam, aged 10 and eight-year-old Benny help me.”

Her vision is still acute enough for Ruth to continue to be a highly talented quilt maker. Her quilts have very ornate, complex patterns, see the photo. "I had four children, 17 grandchildren, and 32 great grandchildren. Some who are as young as the twin boys, Oliver & Thomas, who turned one in September. And seven siblings. "I have made quilts for every member of our family. Each one can take several months to design and sew."

Born in Buffalo, NY, Ruth attended Westminster College, New Wilmington, PA. Founded in 1852, it was one of the nation's first coeducational colleges, welcoming students regardless of color, caste, or sex from its inception. She graduated in science and math and met her late husband Bob there. Ruth became a science research librarian, and even today is a tireless reader. "I'm a bookworm. I can't be without books," she says, surrounded by many tomes, as she looks out onto an amazing countryside view from her living room, with bird feeders she has planted everywhere.



As a nonagenarian, there is one thing she no longer does because of her age. "Climb ladders!" she says. "A few months ago, I climbed on a chair to hang a picture. As I was reaching up, I lost my balance and the chair, with me on it, fell backwards. I broke my sacrum at the bottom of my spine. Boy, that was painful. So now I can't stand or walk for as long as I could before."

How does she stay so youthful? "Well, my parents were," she answers. "My mother died at 91, my father at 90. I've always eaten organically, no pork. A little ice cream and chocolate as a treat. I have a smart watch to call for help, a life alert. I still use my computer. I take a lot of photographs with my Canon digital camera. Many of them of the kids in my family. My tips for getting older? Stay interested and curious. Go to church and make contact with God."

**Jan Goodwin is an award-winning author and journalist and the editor of the GOT Newsletter**

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## ***Why We Call It Spring***

As seasons go, there is no more exuberant and joyful a subject for prose and poetry than the coming of springtime after the long, cold months of winter. In Spanish the word for spring is la primavera, the first green. In French it is le printemps, the first time. Our English word for the season of growth and renewal beautifully holds the verve and energy of the season in its ancient linguistic beginnings and the history of its development over time.

The history of the English word spring has its origins in the Proto-Indo European root: *spergh*: to move, to hasten, related to the Greek *sperkhesthai*: to hurry. In Old English, spring was used as a verb indicating the notion of water bursting forth from the ground. Later, by the 14th century, the meaning of spring had broadened to the more generalized meaning: to leap up, jump, burst forth, to fly up, to spread, to grow. Spring began to convey the sense of the “spring of the year,” when the first green shoots pushes up and out of the long-frozen earth and tightly wrapped over-wintering buds begin to swell with renewed promise.



Three Varieties of Spring Flowers

In Middle Ages, winter could be a tense and frightening time. If there were a poor harvest in the fall, starvation was a real possibility. Indoor heating was smoky, inconsistent, and often inadequate, requiring people to wear all the layers of clothing they had, including outer garments, to stay warm even when indoors. No wonder that the return of light and warmth and the promise of new growth and abundance was received with eager celebration: as the land, and the people, literally sprang to life again.

Today the modern person in our part of the world passes the winter in the relative comfort of well-constructed homes, clean running water year-round, and dependable heat during the cold months of the year. Our access to fresh and well-preserved foods is constant in all seasons, uninterrupted by the mute months of winter when nothing grows in the farmer’s field or the backyard garden. Still, each year we must surrender to Winter, with its austere monochromes, the dense silences of long nights, and its intimidating cold. Winter gives us pause between our seasons of abundance, a reminder that the gifts of the earth are not entirely ruled by our whim and command. For all Winter’s stern beauty, we still long to feel the lilting pulse of Spring in the land. What a lift to hear the rush of mountain creeks carrying the last of the melting snow to the river, to hear the return of the sweet trilling of the wood thrush and house wren threading through the newly greening trees and ramble.

We hold in the language inherited from northern Europe the evocation of a vibrant and uplifting return of light and life, renewal, and eagerness.

If we are going to do something to celebrate the end of Winter, it might as well be spring.

Here is a poem about the coming of Spring, by Mark Van Doren:

### Spring Thunder

Listen. The wind is still,  
And far away in the night—  
See! The uplands fill  
With a running light.  
Open the doors. It is warm;  
And where the sky was clear —

Look! The head of a storm  
That marches here!  
Come under the trembling hedge—  
Fast, although you fumble. . . .  
There! Did you hear the edge  
Of winter crumble?

**Liz Huntington is a poet and editor of Rising Lark Press, an independent publishing project situated in the foothills of the southern Catskills.**

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## ***Cruising to Alaska – A Journey with Parkinson’s***

I have an aversion to cruise vacations. In my book, the word “cruise” conjures up images of ostentatiousness and decadence: An ocean liner outfitted with gilded staterooms and mile-high decks, endless all-you-can-eat buffets, casinos, and 24-hour entertainment. But after spending seven days at sea with my husband Brian, I came to realize that our voyage was not simply about privilege or indulgence. It was about the actual experience.

Brian has Parkinson’s disease with dementia. Last spring, on my quest to find a get-away vacation suitable for someone with a neurodegenerative disease, I googled “Cruises for people with Parkinson’s and dementia.” “Elite Cruises & Vacations” appeared at the top of my computer screen. I called the toll-free number. Kathy Shoaf Speer, the owner of Elite Cruises & Vacations, responded and described a unique vacation option designed exclusively for caregivers and their loved ones.

On her curated vacations, people with mental, as well as physical, disabilities can travel to bucket-list destinations around the world, while receiving one-on-one staff-to-family assistance. Elite Cruises also provides time for caregivers to enjoy themselves, with--and apart from--their loved ones. In addition to participating in activities and excursions with their spouses, the caregivers meet as a group, getting expert advice on how to respond to challenging personal situations. Her onboard support staff includes nurses, social workers, activity therapists, and former caregivers.



*Glacier Bay, Alaska as seen from our ship*

Kathy is a registered nurse and an ATP (Assistive Technology Professional). Her next trip, to Alaska, would mark her 60th dementia-friendly caregiver retreat cruise.

Without a moment’s hesitation, I signed us up. Over the next few months, I received e-mails and text messages from Kathy that included recommendations such as air tags (in case your loved one gets lost on deck), magnetic doorbells (for nighttime wanderers), and warm clothes for layering, while in Alaska. She also sent links to optional on-shore excursions in Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan.

She booked us a room for two nights at a hotel close to the airport. An early arrival gave a little time to recover from jet-lag, meet the other people from our special group we would be spending the next week with, and go sightseeing around Seattle. In late August, I received a call from two of Elite Cruises' staff members who would be meeting us at the airport in Seattle. Bobbye Jean, a previous school administrator, wanted to know all about Brian, learn what his interests were, and about his former career as a master baker.

Our group was easily identifiable, as we all wore lanyards with prominently-displayed purple name badge holders. Kathy had commissioned hand-painted artistic signs bearing our names, which she had hung outside each of our staterooms—probably more for our benefit than for the staff.

Holland America Lines granted Kathy the use of two adjoining rooms on the ship for our group. The care receivers might spend two hours playing games with staff members in one room, while next door, their caregivers in need of respite could meet with specially trained staff of therapists, social workers, Reiki practitioners, and nurses.

We could choose from over 50 different activities, including spa treatments, tai chi, swimming, and board games. There were also shops selling high-end jewelry, paintings, European chocolates, and fashions. There was typical cruise entertainment: theater, live music, etc.



*Date night on the cruise, Brian & Lisa Woods*

During our week and a half together, Brian and I met some wonderful people from our special group. We visited Juneau, Alaska's Capital, Glacier Bay; Icy Strait Point; Sitka, the former capital of Russian North America, and Ketchikan, better known as "The Salmon Capital of the World." Our final port of call was Victoria, British Columbia. From start to finish, our ship travelled 2,200 nautical miles. Seven days at sea went by in a splash.

Spoiler alert: I just booked the same kind of cruise to the Panama Canal next November!

(Author's note: If you are interested in learning more about such special cruises, contact [Kathy.Shoaf@CruisePlanners.com](mailto:Kathy.Shoaf@CruisePlanners.com).)

**Lisa Rubin-Woods is co-founder and owner of Beach Lake Bakery**

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## ***Is It Fair to Adopt a Dog When I'm 74?***

I am a “plunger” in life. Where others, like my husband Charlie, research things obsessively before taking action, I, figuratively speaking, tend to jump into the deep end of the pool--forgetting that I don't know how to swim. We are well-paired, me and Charlie, in that yin-and-yang way.

We recently proved this. After losing two of our beloved family dogs to old age, my inclination was to hit the ground running toward the nearest “replacement” dog I could find. Charlie, as is his way, asked a valid, if uncomfortable question: “Should we even be considering getting a dog at our age?”

And, here are all the questions and answers that led to us adopting Arlo, a handsome four-year-old Labradoodle.

I am 74 and Charlie is 75. Neither of us had spent much time without a dog in our lives, nor were we enjoying the deafening quiet of a home without one. We agreed that dogs are good for us, including our health. They compel us to walk them--exercise for us--and are a gateway to meeting other dog-walking people and making new friends.

Also, isn't getting a dog the antidote to Empty Nest Syndrome, the loneliness many feel when their human children move out as mine have?

Pets decrease our high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and help manage loneliness and depression, studies show. Plus pet owners over the age of 65 make 30 percent fewer doctor visits.

So yes, pet ownership is good for us. But was it fair to the dog?

We tackled the “what-ifs.” What if, in the future, we wanted to downsize to a smaller house, maybe even one without a big yard that requires a lot of upkeep? What about our travel plans? We are retired, after all, and isn't traveling on every retiree's bucket list? How would we balance the dog's needs with our desire to spend time abroad?

Our final “what if?” question was the big one: What if we predeceased our dog, leaving him orphaned as a 10- or 12-year-old pet? Wouldn't that be tantamount to us sentencing him to a shelter death since virtually no one wants a senior dog?

Here's how we addressed all those concerns: We are both in good health and physically active. We do travel, but realize that our away-from-home limit is around 10 days per trip. And since we've always had dogs, we also have always had dog sitters to come and stay in our home with them.

We would not move somewhere where our dog was not welcome. And should we both die or become incapacitated, we have put in place a legal document to provide for our pet's care.

We created a Pet Trust to make sure that the needs of our furry family member would always be met. Pet trusts allow you to name a caretaker and give that person fiduciary duties to care for the animal in the manner you stipulate.



*A Labradoodle who isn't Arlo*

All that was left after that was to decide what kind of dog we wanted. Factoring in our age, we agreed that we did not want a puppy. We wanted an adult dog who was housebroken, knew some basic commands and was more of a cuddle-bunny than a watchdog.

We spent more than a month looking for the right dog to find us. And then we found Arlo, our new Labradoodle. His photo was posted on a neighborhood app on behalf of a young family who were expecting their fourth human child and just couldn't manage a dog his size. He's the consummate gentle giant, with no discernible bad habits save one: He is a blanket hog. But we're in love, so who cares if he's now our bedfellow?

**Adapted from Ethel.com and written by Ann Brenoff**

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## ***If You Are Not Planning to Live Forever***

It's safe to say we would all like to be remembered for our career achievements, social connections, holiday recipes, and sage advice, rather than for the mess we left behind for our heirs to untangle after we had passed on. A properly drawn up will is an obvious solution, but trusts are another option.



*Tim Barna, Esq.*

“A will, which specifies who gets which of your assets after your death, is generally best for straightforward estates and is essential for naming guardians for minors,” says certified elder law attorney Tim Barna. Wills can be simpler and less expensive to prepare. “A trust,” he continues, “which can operate during your lifetime as well as after you’ve gone, is often better for those seeking privacy by avoiding probate, the details of which become part of the public record, or managing complex assets like business ownership, or multiple properties.”

Wills provide a one-time distribution of money and property. With trusts, ongoing management of the estate is possible, and can provide greater control over how and when your assets are distributed, which can be particularly useful for minor children or beneficiaries who may not be financially responsible.

Trusts remain private, and this confidentiality can protect sensitive information about your estate and beneficiaries. Certain types of trusts can help minimize estate taxes by removing assets from your taxable estate. This is particularly beneficial for high-net-worth individuals. Trusts can offer protection from creditors and legal claims, ensuring that your assets are preserved for your beneficiaries.

Both wills and trusts can significantly reduce potential disputes among heirs. In fact, many estate planners recommend having both—a will for guardianship and backup instructions for minors or special needs, plus a trust for asset management and probate avoidance. Your best bet is to contact one of these professionals to assess your individual situation. “Twenty percent of people who are seniors now will require long-term nursing home care, for example,” says Barna.

Ask your planner about asset protection planning while you’re at it. Two experts to try: Tim Barna Esq., Pennsylvania Elder Law Firm, Honesdale, PA, at tel: 570-559-5658 or <https://www.barnalaw.com>, and Martin Hersh Esq., in Liberty, NY, Elder Law and Estate Planning at tel: 845-292-9345 or <https://martinhersh.com>

Attorney Barna gives us another important point to consider: “Retirement accounts—IRAs, 401(k)s—are not subject to probate, as long as you have properly designated a valid beneficiary. If you have, the account transfers by contract and the funds are immediately given to the beneficiary upon proof of death, before a will comes into play.”

While it may be uncomfortable to talk about death, it can be wise to share information about bequests while you’re still here to explain details and answer questions. You may wish to leave more of your estate to one child than to the others because that person acted as your main caregiver for years. Or, perhaps you paid for one child’s expensive education while another totally financed their own. One senior said that she affixed name labels to the backs or undersides of valuable pieces and antiques—and let all heirs know which objects she wished to leave to each person and why, giving them time (plenty, she hoped) to acclimate to her decisions rather than be surprised in the future.

The quirky but no-nonsense peace-of-mind planner, *I’m Dead, Now What?*, available on Amazon at \$13.94, is a valuable and practical gift for your family members and personal representatives.

The important point to remember is this: Everyone needs some form of estate plan, regardless of his or her financial situation. It’s your stuff—you worked hard for it, and your wishes should be known and carried out, with nothing left to chance.

**Dawn McIntyre, author of the book *The Paper Pirate*, available on Amazon.com**

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## ***GOT Celebrates our 10 Year Anniversary!***



**RIVER REPORTER.**com



We are thrilled to celebrate 2026 as our 10th year of service to the community. This milestone will be honored throughout the year with a series of special events and fundraisers, culminating in a gala this fall.

We are also delighted to share that Growing Older Together has been voted “**Best Civic Club / Organization**” by the readers of *The River Reporter*. This recognition is especially meaningful to us—it tells us that our neighbors not only know we’re here but value the work we do. Together, these accomplishments mark a powerful moment in our journey and an inspiring foundation as we look ahead to the next decade of community and care.

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## ***GOT’s Founding Member Carol Rocklin (1929 – 2026)***



*Carol Rocklin*

It is with a heavy heart that we share news of the passing of Carol Rocklin, one of the founding members of Growing Older Together, on January 26 at the age of 96.

Carol was a woman of generous spirit, deep love, and uncommon vision. Ten years ago, as a result of Carol's personal circumstances, she and several of her congregants in the Unitarian Fellowship recognized a simple but powerful truth: seniors thrive when they are supported, connected, and valued within their communities. From that insight--and through their tireless dedication--Growing Older Together was born.

What began as an idea rooted in compassion has grown into the vibrant organization GOT is today, serving older adults throughout the region and helping them live independently, with dignity and purpose. Carol's belief in community, service, and aging with grace continues to guide every aspect of this work.

While we mourn her passing, we are profoundly grateful for the legacy she leaves behind. Carol Rocklin's vision lives on through Growing Older Together and through the countless lives touched by her commitment to caring for seniors. Her impact will be felt for generations to come.

Please join us in offering condolences to Carol's family, and all those who are grieving her loss at this time. The local Unitarians will be holding a memorial service and lunch in Carol's honor on her birthday Sunday, March 15th at the conference room at the Narrowsburg Union at 10.15 a.m.

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Your **tax-deductible donation** will go a long way in sustaining GOT as we continue to fulfill our mission: to give residents aged 60 and older who live in Wayne County, PA, western Sullivan County, NY, northern Pike County, PA, and surrounding areas both the practical means and the social connections to live independently in their homes.

GOT is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Any amount, large or small, is welcome. Please visit our website and click the **Donate** button, or mail your check to GOT, 830 Main Street #574, Honesdale, PA 18431. Thank you in advance for your support.

Looking to plan your estate or make provisions in your will or beneficiary designations? Making bequests to non-profit organizations like GOT are a great way to ensure your legacy makes an impact in your community, benefitting future generations.

Please help spread the word about the benefits of becoming a member and/or volunteer for GOT. If you know a friend or neighbor who might want to offer a helping hand or might benefit from one, share our phone number, 570-630-0509, and/or our web address:

[www.growingoldertogether.org](http://www.growingoldertogether.org) Thank you!

Growing Older Together is supported in part by generous grants from the Honesdale National Bank Foundation, Moses Taylor Foundation, Robert H. Spitz Foundation, Sullivan County Legislature, Wayne Memorial Health Foundation, and Wayne County Community Foundation, as well as with support from the following corporate sponsors:

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Growing Older Together collaborates with and is supported by numerous organizations in the area to fulfill our mission, including:

**Delaware Valley Arts Alliance / Tusten Social / The River Reporter / WJFF Radio Catskills  
The Cooperage Project / Wayne County Area Agency on Aging / Sullivan County Office of Aging**

Diversity is a Source of Strength, Creativity, and Innovation. Growing Older Together is committed to fostering an environment that welcomes and values every person and respects all identities, cultures, heritages, and abilities.

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