

Notes From the Director—November 2007
“Elders at the Center”

I send you warm greetings from 7 Main Street in Shelburne Falls on this gorgeous October day. I've closed the office door to the bustle of our usual Monday morning comings and goings in order to put down a few thoughts.

From the moment I arrived here in September as the new director, I have felt welcomed and supported with great warmth and enthusiasm. The humor flows in abundance, and it is clear that the Center is alive with spirit. For this I am most grateful!

I want in a special way to acknowledge the remarkable work of our staff. Jackie and Cathy have carried the Center through some challenging times with skill and grace. And they are carrying me in these initial weeks as I become familiar with all the nooks and crannies of the Center's daily workings. They are a joy to work with and a gift to us all.

And in the same breath and with equal enthusiasm I hold up the contributions of our two wonderful receptionists, Audrey and Betsy, our drivers, Bob, Gene and Carl, and our meal site colleagues Phyllis and Bev. And, of course, the volunteers that serve in varied capacities without whom the Center simply would not be the vibrant place that it is.

I would also like to thank in equal measure members of the Board of Directors, especially Chris Myers and Pat Kerrins, and Terry Mosher in the town office for nurturing me along as I try to understand the structure and budgets and the rich history of the Center.

Finally, I send deepest gratitude to all of you in the wider community for so many warm thoughts and wishes. I believe that the Center is on the threshold of a very exciting new era. Our whole understanding of what it means to age is changing. A very rich conversation is already underway about the future direction we will take. I am aware that this conversation began long before my arrival. Our task now is to bring it into focus, to expand it, and to draw on it as we decide and act.

I believe that the question before us is twofold. First, we must ask what are the unmet needs of our elders, and how we might best respond to these needs? As many of the institutional and financial supports we have come to depend on diminish, we are being challenged to “reweave” the communal relationships of caring at the most basic level. This is both a great challenge and a great gift.

The second part of the question is how can we bring the energy and wisdom of our elders more fully to bear in the heart of our civic life? How can we make this great wellspring of skill, knowledge, and perspective more available to our children and youth? How can we bring this “skill of life” into the important conversations around education, economics, environmental health, and so forth?

It is clear that the Center cannot thrive in isolation. The conversation that is beginning will hopefully grow to include many people of all ages and backgrounds in our four towns and beyond.

I invite all of you to join us in this conversation. Please come and say hello. The door is (almost) always open and the tea (or coffee) brewing!

With gratitude and every blessing,

Jamie Godfrey