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8 Trends that will define active aging in 2008

ICAA foresees that the Baby Boomers, as always, lead the way in redefining the world's concept of aging

(Vancouver, January 8, 2008) As the world waits for the Baby Boomers to define the culture and priorities around the world, the question always arises: what's next? By now, every retailer, service company and government agency has sought to predict the actions of the Baby Boomers, the name assigned to people born between 1946 and 1964, the first of whom are turning 62 years old in 2008.

“The Baby Boomers have the potential to epitomize the concepts of active aging,” points out Colin Milner, CEO of International Council on Active Aging (ICAA), the association that supports professionals who develop wellness programs. “Active aging means staying involved in life, and the Boomers are planning to do that. This age group is ready to take action to stay healthy and actively engaged with their friends, families and communities.”

Watching the trends in active aging is important because the next wave of older adults represents a huge number of people. For example, in the US, there were an estimated 78.2 million Boomers in 2005; by 2030 there will be approximately 82 million people ages 45 to 64 (US Census Bureau, 2006). Canada claims 8.9 million residents ages 45 to 64 right now. (Statistics Canada, 2007). The populations of aging adults are increasing throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and Central and Latin America. Their tastes, interests and spending patterns will influence communities and organizations for many years. What are they looking for?

ICAA has identified the following 8 trends gathered by Milner from research studies, polls, and many hours on the road spent speaking with older adults and the professionals who support them.

1. The Internet is becoming the new link to health, social networking and travel.

Looking for a golfing partner or the place to visit in Italy? Virtually all new homes in age-qualified retirement communities are hardwired for computers and broadband Internet access, points out information from the National Association of Home Builders. Multiple websites for over-50 adults have already sprung up providing news stories, discussion boards, travel and housing information (32% visit online communities, found the JWT BoomerEyes survey). And the parents of the young also are moving towards social-networking sites (eons.com has 600,000 people registered on its website for people 50+). Maintaining health is important as people age, and over 89% of Boomers seek health information online (based on 1,300 people ages 40 years and older reported by JWT BOOM), a figure consistent with earlier polls.

2. Retirement communities are reinventing themselves. Golf is quietly giving way to proximity to theaters and gyms, hiking clubs and wine tastings. There is a decided growth in interest in purchasing age-qualified housing targeted to people 50 years and older, says the National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing & Care Industry (2007), citing their recent study showing that 37% of households preferred or were willing to consider age-qualified housing. That's an increase from 18% in 1998. These communities feature plenty of activities and people with similar attitudes and interests—and minimal yard work. Newer projects are placed in urban areas for easy access to a city's cultural amenities, and a growing trend spotlights multigenerational developments where young families live in one section and older adults in another. The Boomers are not moving to the warmer southern states like their parents did, since they want to stay closer to friends and family.

3. Maintaining intellectual skills and brain health is top of mind. Along with the stream of research being conducted on diseases such as dementia—the most well-known

of which is Alzheimer's disease—are studies on cognition and intellectual processing. There is no shortage of research participants. Baby Boomers are keen on maintaining their mental and intellectual health. Losing their mental abilities is one of their top fears, say 69% of older adults (USAToday/ABC News, 2005). During ICAA's recent Active Aging Week, the lectures on brain health, word games and memory trivia were the most popular, joined by information on depression and Alzheimer's disease.

4. Technology is inspiring activity. Of course, there is the pedometer, a simple-to-complex instrument that measures the number of steps a person takes. People who wear pedometers walk more steps (JAMA, November 12, 2007), even if previously sedentary. But the newest technology inspiring older adults is found in console games, a recent addition to that genre being the Nintendo Wii, where people play imaginary sports games such as tennis and bowling using a hand-held controller. Other games are available, and these activities inspire fun as well as movement. The bonus? Grandparents can play with the grandkids on the same field. Other technology-based equipment includes dance-step based mats (Dancetown) and a virtual reality machine like the CYBEX Trazer that both leads movement and gives sensory feedback—which earned the piece an ICAA Innovative Equipment Award.

5. Retirement means Boomers will continue to work—but on their own terms. Flexible hours, interesting work or being their own bosses are the new parameters for working adults. While forward-thinking companies are looking for ways to loosen their rules to retain the knowledge and experience of “retiring” workers, the workers are looking for ways to stay intellectually active and stimulated while allowing for a month-long vacation. An AARP survey found that 70% of working people ages 40+ plan to work full-time or part-time during retirement. Not all Boomers will keep working into their seventies because they want to; some have to work for income. But those who have the ability to choose work are planning to—and not necessarily in a current career. “Good work” in retirement (work or volunteering that makes a difference to the community) seems particularly desired by Boomers.

6. Lifelong learning opportunities and interests keep growing. Go back to college and get that master's degree at age 60? Sure. Whether formal academic programs resulting in a certificate or degree, informal auditing of college classes or a museum series on art history, continuing education for adults over 50 is on the rise. Retirement communities are being based on college campuses to provide education and cultural opportunities, community colleges are adopting some classes to those over 50, community centers are offering classes in digital photography and nutrition. Some retirement communities have started lifelong learning institutes on their campuses. This is another area in which the Internet is also a factor, with online learning opportunities.

7. Age-friendly fitness opportunities are essential. What is a greater fear that losing mental skills? Losing their health (USAToday/ABC News, 2005). People who are physically active reduce their risk of chronic diseases and of losing their ability to maintain daily activities. Baby Boomers understand this. Among those who had turned 60 years old, 87% of Baby Boomers surveyed by AARP want to take better care of their physical health. The owners of the new wave of gyms, exercise routines and wellness centers aimed at people over 50 years are riding the trend. Whether a chain like Nifty After 50 or a single club like WellBound Wellness Center, innovative businesses have their hands around the statistic that the most important demographic shift in health clubs is the increase in older adults, with 25% of health club members now over age 55 (IHRSA).

8. Health plans will pay for prevention. Most medical systems kick in once a person is ill and needs treatment. However, the fear of rising costs has forced health insurance companies to investigate the dollar value of exercise for prevention. Many eyes opened when HealthPartners Research Foundation announced their study that showed 50-plus adults who start exercising just 90 minutes a week save on average \$2,200 per year in medical costs. Just released is a new survey that followed Medicare recipients who participated in the SilverSneakers health club exercise program. After 2 years, SilverSneakers participants had significantly lower healthcare costs overall, and people who visited the health club at least twice a week had \$1,252 less in healthcare costs than

those who visited less than once a week (Preventing Chronic Disease, January 2008). Combine those cost savings with the Boomers' knowledge of the benefit of activity, and health insurers take notice.

"ICAA sees an aging population that is dedicated to staying engaged in life," according to Milner. "That's why groups as diverse as government-funded social services and major real estate developers are repositioning themselves to appeal to a group of 'new' older adults who are not satisfied with sitting around. The research shows it, and experience confirms it."

Boomers embrace the concept that age in years doesn't necessarily correlate with physiological age. They don't want to relive their youth, but they do want to stay youthful. People who were age 61 last year believe that they'll be "old" at age 78 (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2007). Since the average projected life expectancy for adults in the US is 77.8 years (US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention), that means that Boomers won't ever feel old.

"The ability to function and engage in life is what is important, not chronological age," says Milner. "At ICAA, we support the organizations that are helping to Change the Way We Age."

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About the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

Website: www.icaa.cc

ICAA is the world's largest membership association dedicated to changing the way we age by uniting and working with professionals in the retirement, assisted living, recreation, fitness, rehabilitation and wellness fields. We connect a community of like-minded professionals who share the goals of changing society's perceptions of aging and

improving the quality of life for Baby Boomers and older adults within the six dimensions of wellness (emotional, vocational, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social).