



Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly  
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Guidance. Support. Advocacy.



December 2012 | Volume 1, Issue 4

# The Beacon News from New Jersey's Long-Term Care Advocate

## Seasons Greetings

Dear Colleagues:

I hope that you are all enjoying a happy and healthy holiday season. This year, in the aftermath of the one of the greatest natural disasters in our state's history, I know that many of us are very thankful for our state's excellent response to Hurricane Sandy and all the devastation that the storm left in its wake.

Unfortunately, studies show that vulnerable elderly citizens suffer inordinately in natural disasters and that mortality rates in long term care tend to increase following widespread evacuations. While the long-term effect of Hurricane Sandy on the state's senior population cannot be known at this time, government agencies in New Jersey in partnership with the senior-serving provider community were incredibly well prepared for this devastating event.

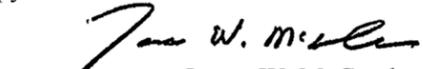
In the days and weeks following the disaster, OOIE staff and volunteers checked on conditions in facilities that had lost power or that had been forced to evacuate residents. Our staff found that long-term care facilities did everything they could to ensure quality care and continuity of services during those critical days and nights after the storm hit.

Now we must be vigilant about another unfortunate Sandy after-effect: the prevalence of disaster-related scams. According to the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs, it is not uncommon for unscrupulous home improvement contractors to try to take advantage of people seeking home repairs following a disaster. In addition, fraudulent charities sometimes pop up seeking donations, never to be seen or heard from again.

Vulnerable senior citizens are very often easy targets for these scammers. They don't have to be: information about how to avoid disaster scams is available at the New Jersey Consumer Affairs Division website at [www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov](http://www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov) or can be obtained by calling the Division at 800-242-5846.

This issue of **The Beacon** includes information about how to contribute to the Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund, spearheaded by First Lady Mary Pat Christie. Also in this issue is helpful information on gift ideas for residents of long-term care facilities. Finally, please take a few moments to read a thoughtful article written by one of our stellar volunteers, Bonnie Camp, about how each of us can help make the holidays brighter for residents of long-term care facilities.

Warm wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year.

  
James W. McCracken

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The Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly (O.O.I.E) works to preserve the health, safety and welfare and to protect the rights of New Jersey residents age 60 and older who live in long-term health care facilities. The program seeks to ensure that residents receive quality care as they age. The Office is in, but is independent of, the NJ Department of the Treasury.

### Connect with Us

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Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.  
-- Hamilton Wright Mabie



*Hurricane Sandy has brought unthinkable devastation to parts of our Garden State, destroying homes, businesses and some of New Jersey's most identifiable icons. The Governor and I have organized this relief fund to aid, comfort, and rebuild New Jersey. The images and stories of the damage are heartbreaking.*

*In the aftermath, I urge you to support our friends, neighbors and communities impacted by the storm. They need our help and need it quickly. Thank you for your generosity. We are strong and resilient. We are proud New Jerseyans.*

—First Lady Mary Pat Christie

New Jerseyans can visit [www.SandyNJReliefFund.org](http://www.SandyNJReliefFund.org) to make donations online. Donations to the fund can also be sent via traditional mail to the address below:

Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund  
PO Box 95  
Mendham NJ 07945-0095  
Email: [info@sandynjrelieffund.org](mailto:info@sandynjrelieffund.org)

To many people holidays are not voyages of discovery, but a ritual of reassurance.  
-- Philip Andrew Adams

## Year In Review



1. OOIE staff Nikiah Nixon at the OOIE booth at the AARP Consumer Expo in Mercer County in August.
2. OOIE staff promote Ombudsman services at the New Jersey State Fair, in Augusta, in August.
3. Ombudsman McCracken speaks to residents during an October Residents' Rights Month event at Hamilton Continuing Care in Hamilton.
4. Ombudsman McCracken presents outstanding leadership award to Jane Knapp on behalf of the Tri-County Regional Ethics Committee.
5. Assemblywoman Donna Simon greets residents during an October Residents' Rights Bingo event at Acorn Glen in Princeton.



May your walls know joy, may every room hold laughter, and every window open to great possibility

-- Mary Anne Radmacher

## OOIE 2012



1. OOIE Policy Director Elizabeth Speidel with Mary Luby of Monmouth County Office on Aging, Disabilities and Veterans' Services, attend event at Luftman Towers in Lincroft.
2. Clinical Ethicist Helen Blank speaks at OOIE Ethics Training in March 2012.
3. OOIE Attorney Amy Brown speaks with a resident at House of the Good Shepherd in Hackettstown during an April "National Health-care Decisions Day" event.



4. Volunteers from the southern region of the state participate in volunteer training in Trenton.
5. Ombudsman McCracken greets a resident during a June "Elder Abuse Awareness Day" event at Bristol Glen Retirement Community in Newton.



This is my wish for you: peace of mind, prosperity through the year, happiness that multiplies, health for you and yours, fun around every corner, energy to chase your dreams, joy to fill your holidays!

-- D.M. Dellinger

## Tips and Gift Ideas for Long-Term Care Residents

It is the time of year to start thinking about what to buy for the person on your list who lives in a nursing home, assisted living, or residential care facility. Most items appropriate for retirement community residents are inexpensive gifts, and they're easy to select if you know a little about the recipient's hobbies and preferences. Consider some of these practical and appropriate gifts for a nursing home resident:

- Warm bathrobe
- Soft nightgown or pajama set
- Cozy enclosed slippers or firm shoes with rubber soles
- Clothing items that are easy to wear, such as jogging suits and cardigan sweaters with large buttons
- Hand lotion and facial tissues
- Comb or brush
- Large print edition books, magazines, or puzzles
- A deck of playing cards or board game
- A soft pillow and pillowcase
- A quilt, blanket or comforter for the bed
- A CD player and some CDs
- Photographs or photo collages
- Stationery, note cards, greeting cards, pens, and stamps
- Calendar for 2013 with dates marked on it for upcoming birthdays, anniversaries, etc. For birthdays, mark down how old the person will be on that day; for anniversaries, the number of years together
- Address book with addresses written in for family and friends

Be aware that there are many gifts that

are not appropriate for nursing home residents, like huge televisions and fancy clothes. Also, due to possible swallowing difficulties and restrictive diets, sending food items such as candy, cookies and fruit is not advised. If a nursing home resident has Alzheimer's or a related dementia, do not send liquid items such as perfume, cologne, after shave or lotion, as these may end up being swallowed. Gifts like scented candles are dangerous, since many residents require oxygen as part of their care regimen.

Here are few tips to remember when choosing a holiday gift:



- Do**
- Remember that residents in nursing homes have limited space for personal belongings
  - Check with the administration about their policy on items families and friends can bring to residents
  - Permanently label any gift with resident's name
  - If you're giving clothing, make sure it's wash-and-wear, unless you'll be responsible for the dry cleaning
  - Understand that off-site laundry is the rule in many nursing homes. Clothing can easily be lost during this process.
  - Know that, even if someone is in a "private" room, it's still accessible to

- staff and other residents
- Keep safety in mind at all times: glass or ceramic items are breakable and can cause injury
- Find out about the administration's policies on pointed or sharp objects such as scissors, pins or needles – including plastic flatware and knitting needles

### Don't

- Give the resident money directly, unless it's pocket change for phone calls. Deposit money in the resident's "patient personal account"
- Bring food or candy if the resident is on a special diet, UNLESS you check with the nursing staff and have their OK
- Bring visiting pets the nursing home administration hasn't cleared. That can be traumatic for both the animal and the resident

The holidays can be a very lonely time for nursing home residents. Remember that your time is best gift you can give. Nothing can take the place of visiting your friend or family member in the nursing home. This is a very enriching and appropriate gift for nursing home residents. Spending half an hour, or even just a few moments, can be a great experience for all. Offer to read a holiday story, talk to your loved ones about their favorite holidays, or ask them to tell you about a gift they received and treasured as a child. Find out their favorite holiday song and sing it to them, or find a recording of it and play it for them. Senior citizens are valuable members of society and spending time in their company is beneficial to all, so bring the kids. Younger grandchildren will have a better understanding of the stages of life when they experience visits to the nursing home, and their youthful presence will delight many.

# Residential Long Term Care – Your Options: Nursing Home Residents Should Enjoy the Holidays Too! - By Bonnie Camp, BSW

## Introduction

When the hustle and bustle of the holidays is fast approaching, it is important to remember our loved ones who are in area nursing homes. This can be a depressing time for them. They are separated from the normal routine and for many of them this may be their first time away from home during the holidays. Family members should realize the importance of reaching out to their family and friends living in nursing homes and try to make their loved ones holidays as “merry and bright” as possible.

Too often residents feel forgotten and unimportant during this time of the year. While everyone is out shopping and making cookies and wrapping presents, our older adults may be sitting and waiting for a friendly visit and/or to be included in the holiday festivities in some way. Investing in your loved one can be key to a happier holiday for both you and your loved one.

## Visiting Often

One of the ways you can keep your loved ones involved in the holiday spirit is to visit them often. Visits from family and friends are always welcome and especially dear around the holidays when they may be feeling a little neglected. The time you spend with your loved one can be a positive experience for both of you. It can help their day go a little faster and, of course, seem a little more special because of a visit from a family member or friend.



Taking a loved one home, if it is at all possible while you are preparing for the holiday festivities, will make them feel they are still a part of the celebration. If your loved one is physically able to leave the facility to share in your holiday experience, it can make the holiday all the more special for them and for you. Residents are very grateful to have the opportunity to be with loved ones during the holidays and they are appreciative of the time you are willing to spend with them. Another plus is that once you have them home their enthusiasm is contagious!

And while we are on the subject of visits, visits are GREAT! Nursing home residents love visits. Many treasure visits with children and grandchildren the most. Children, adequately chaperoned, can be a real source of enjoyment and pleasure for an older adult. And don't rule out visits from pets as well. Many of our nursing home residents love to have visits from pets. Check with your nursing home to see if there is anyone available for pet therapy. Quite a few nursing homes have people who are willing to bring in their pets who have been certified to do friendly pet visits. If this is the case in your loved one's nursing home, see if there is a list that your loved one can put their name on requesting a friendly visit from the visiting pet the next time they come into the facility.

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart. Wishing you happiness.

-- Helen Keller

## Spirituality and the Holidays

Getting your loved one in touch with their spirituality during the holidays can be especially helpful as well. The holidays are a time when many older adults reminisce of days gone by. While this is usually a pleasant experience, it can be a little sad because of the many losses we experience by the time we are older adults. A resident's spirituality can be a comfort and a source of strength for them during the holiday season. Getting your loved one in touch with a counselor or person from the clergy can be helpful in addressing the loneliness and spiritual concerns that they may have in their lives. Most nursing homes are good at having an area priest or pastor available to visit with residents. Speaking with the nursing home social worker or administrator and setting up a visit for your loved one can be a source of personal strength and encouragement for them during the holidays.

## The Importance of Involvement

If at all possible, try to get your loved one involved in a project that allows them to reach out to someone else. Most residents love to be productive and involved in other people's lives. You never lose the urge to make



done at a resident's leisure, when they are feeling up to it. Depending on how involved the resident wants to be, they can either make cards for their friends and family or they can make cards for other people in the community who could use a friendly reminder that they are being thought of.

Another project that is special to my heart is the “Holiday Diary.” This can be done with the assistance of a family member or friend if need be, but the idea is to get the resident to document a holiday remembrance so that it can be saved as a keepsake for the family record. It can be called the “Twelve Days of Christmas.” For this project, the loved one recalls a special holiday moment, a story, a gift received and/or given or special holiday song that meant so much to them and maybe still does for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas. This is a great way to find out about holiday traditions and special times that happened long ago. Keeping a written journal of these special moments can be a treasure in years to come.

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*Bonnie Camp, a certified volunteer advocate with the Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly and a hospice volunteer, received her MSW and Gerontology Certificate in 2011 from Rutgers University School of Social Work. She graduated from Stockton State College with a Bachelor's degree in social work and minors in gerontology and writing. She is currently employed as a nephrology social worker with South Jersey Healthcare at dialysis units in Bridgeton and Millville.*



a difference to someone less fortunate than yourself. There are all types of projects that older adults can get involved in. Making holiday cards is one activity that does not require a lot of energy and can be