

## Education program demolishing aging myths

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by Eileen Beal

If I told you that an 80-year-old person has diabetes and hypertension, and has had a heart attack, could you tell whether the person would be more likely to be found sitting on a bench at the Supreme Court or in a rocking chair at a nursing home?

Not according to Robert Kahn, PhD and John Rowe, MD, authors of the book *Successful Aging* (from which we "borrowed" the title of this column).

Seniors are aging far healthier than their parents or grandparents and are an incredibly diverse group, Kahn and Rowe point out and, in their myth-busting book, they turn the whole idea that "it's all downhill after 65" on its head. Using 10 year's worth of research findings, they show that turning 65 doesn't mean you're about to become debilitated by chronic diseases; that you're too old to embark on a new career; that memory and cognitive ability are due to take a nose-dive; that interest in sex has dried up; that you can't tell a scam artist when you see one; that you'll soon become a menace on the highway; that...

Well, you get the picture.

### Myth Busters

Unfortunately, while the reality of aging in America has changed drastically, the myths, clichés, and stereotypes haven't. Which is why Benjamin Rose started the MythBusters Public Education Campaign in 1999.

The campaign's aim, explains Benjamin Rose's director of marketing Anne Schleicher, is to educate the public about aging successfully-using local role models. "Our MythBusters are real seniors-people in their 70s, 80s, even 90s-and many have chronic health problems," she says. "They are still leading active and productive lives and showing just how wrong aging stereotypes and myths are."

Past Myth Busters include:

- Eighty-three-year-old Evelyn Tucci, who did something Tiger Woods only dreams about: She made two holes in one during a round of golf. She has always been athletic she says, but getting physical is only part of her successful aging regimen. She eats healthy-"...lots of fresh

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vegetables," she says-and fine-tunes her mind with bridge and reading. Both she says, "keep the mind active."

- Eighty-nine-year-old Chester Gray, who worked for the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission until he "retired" in 1984. Today he's still actively advocating for economic and social change in Cleveland. "Doing things that give you a sense of being useful...keeps you going," says trim and dapper Gray.
- Eighty-three-year-old Maria Luz "Luchita" Galindo, who used business and cooking skills honed in Mexico City to found the first of her family's three Mexican restaurants-when she was 62. Today, says the diminutive Galindo, going to work each morning keeps her active and productive-"Work makes me happy," she says-but more importantly, it's a way to pass on knowledge and skills. "The best way to teach," she says, "is by example."
- Eighty-two-year-old Joe Pyles, who gave up his full-time social work practice in 1986. A year later he started work at CWRU's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS) counseling students doing their field work. For Pyles, aging successfully has meant "identifying or redefining things that I could do that give me pleasure." And he gets lots of "pleasure" working with "his" students. "It's a challenge to help [the students] see that they learn by their mistakes," he admits, "but seeing them change over the course of the two-year program, and watching them march down the aisle at graduation, is very satisfying."
- The 230-plus men, ages 60 to 84, who participate in the nationally-known Huff-n-Puffers softball league. Though the league has both junior (60-68) and senior (69 and up) players, for the Huff-n-Puffers, "age is just a number," says 75-year-old Gene Gizzi. "For us, it's camaraderie, attitude, conditioning, and positive thinking that count."

What's it take to be a Benjamin Rose MythBuster?

First and foremost, a positive attitude and the willingness to turn attitude into actions that make a difference in people's lives.

Next, they must meet certain criteria. MythBusters must be: 65 or over; involved in a family or community activity, function, or program, or have an attitude towards life that makes them an inspiring role model; and they must live in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Summit, Medina, or Geauga Counties.

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Finally, they must be nominated. To get a nominating form, call The Benjamin Rose Institute (216-621-0823, ext. 274) and request a form be sent to you. Or, on the Internet, go to [www.benrose.org](http://www.benrose.org); click MythBusters; then click the Click Here for More Details button, which gets you an e-mailable fill-in-the-blanks nomination form or a downloadable one, which should be printed and mailed to: MythBusters Contest, Benjamin Rose, 850 Euclid Avenue, Suite 1100, Cleveland, Ohio, 44114.