

THE

SPAN CENTER

Info, Events, and Articles on Aging, Wellness, and Community

FEATURING

Community Events

Empathetic Community:
The Strength of the
Aging Network

The Gift of Service

And More!



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FINDING WARMTH IN OUR SHARED COMMUNITY

As the days shorten and the winter season arrives, there is a natural invitation to pause, reflect, and appreciate the light we share. This time of year brings a profound reminder of the deep human need for connection, comfort, and knowing that we are not navigating life’s challenges alone.

For neighbors, this season can present unique challenges, from isolation to increased needs for care. Our commitment is to ensure that empathy and resilience guide our vision and response to the needs around us.

We are deeply grateful for the collective community support—from partners, to caregivers, to generous donors—who allow us to ensure that resources reach those in need. Together, we are building a true community where every person is valued and cared for.

May this season be filled with peace, moments of quiet joy, and the comforting knowledge that we are all part of an enduring, caring community. With heartfelt gratitude,



Amy Strite
President/CEO

Amy Strite

ABOUT US

The Span Center is the state designated Area Agency on Aging for Planning District 15 which covers the City of Richmond and the counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, and Powhatan. We provide services, information, advocacy, and referrals for older adults, persons with disabilities, and caregivers. Most of our services are able to be provided at no cost (or little cost) to recipients thanks to Federal, State, and Local funding along with donations received from individuals, businesses, and community organizations.



HOW CAN I HELP?

The Span Center delivers essential services like providing nutritious food, caregiver support, in-home assistance, transportation, and activities that combat social isolation. These vital programs are costly to provide. Your generous support allows us to offer them at no or little cost to qualifying individuals. Your contributions and advocacy make a profound difference. Help us continue this crucial work by donating today or by amplifying our mission on social media and spreading the word.

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SPANCENTER.ORG

804.343.3000



No Wrong Door is a national initiative providing **easy access** to services and supports for older adults, individuals with disabilities, veterans, caregivers, and their families.

Virginia Easy Access

EasyAccess.Virginia.Gov

Virginia Easy Access No Wrong Door Virginia's online resource to find information for older adults, individuals with disabilities, veterans, caregivers, and their families.



Navigate Community Resources

Aging Services

Assistive Technology

Brain Injury

Caregiver Support

Disability Employment

Independent Living



Connect to Services with Ease

Safety Connector

Social Health Connector

Brain Injury Screener

Direct Connect

Talk to a live professional via chat or phone 24/7 x365

My Profile



Support Your Life

Social

Education

Finance

Health

Environment

Love

Food

*In Development





Events

CHARLES CITY	CHESTERFIELD	GOOCHLAND	HANOVER
Chickahominy Area Triad	Mental Health First Aid Class	Singo at Industrial Taphouse West	New Year's Eve at Hanover Tavern!
The Triad is a program focused primarily on reducing crimes against older adults through crime prevention education. The organization's crime prevention awareness efforts and programs also benefits the overall population.	You can learn to help someone experiencing a mental illness or crisis. This free, virtual class teaches a five-step action plan to offer initial help to adults with the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or in crisis, and connect them with the appropriate professional, peer, social or self help care.	Join us every Tuesday night at 6:30PM for SINGO with Ball of Fire Entertainment! Traditional bingo but with a twist - Singo is played with song titles instead of numbers! Whether it's your first time playing or you're a pro, it's bound to be a fun evening.	On the eve of the new year, we'll be serving a delicious selection of appetizers, entrees and desserts and including a pre-midnight Champagne toast to round out the festivities! Reservations required. Call 804-537-5050
1/07/26 Charles City Social Center 8320 Ruthville Rd. 23140	1/13/26 9am-3:30 Register online by 1/2/26 at chesterfield.gov/prevention	Tuesdays at 6:30pm 12912 Plaza Drive	12/31/25 seatings 4-8pm Hanover Tavern \$65 per person or \$115 per couple
HENRICO	NEW KENT	POWHATAN	RICHMOND
A Magical Holiday Evening	New Kent Quilters	Pines & Pints - Wreath Decorating at Crazy Rooster Brewing Co.	Crafternoons with SMIVA!
Get into the holiday spirit by enjoying a magical evening riding the RVA Express train through the holiday lights. Jonathan Austin will capture the magical moment with magic and juggling tricks. Savor hot cocoa in a winter wonderland scene. For info contact cun04@henrico.gov	The New Kent Quilters meet on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8:30 a.m. at the Quinton Community Center. There is no fee or experience required. All levels of sewing are welcome. They help provide charity quilting for their county and others. For information contact: Phone: 932-3331 traceysbydesign@aol.com	Unwind with friends and get into the festive spirit by crafting your very own holiday wreath. Tickets: \$55 each Each ticket includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A complimentary pint of your favorite brew • A fresh, handcrafted fir wreath from FirEver Pines • A hand-tied bow in the color of your choice • All the decorative materials you'll need. 	Join us on Sunday afternoons in RVA for crafternoons! Bring a project or come and make at our classroom table! We will have various art supplies available for you to come and craft in our space! Crafternoons is FREE!
12/19/25 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm Dorey Park 2999 Darbytown Road	Quinton Community Center 3041 New Kent Highway	12/16/25 6:30pm - 8:30pm 1560 Oakbridge Dr, Powhatan, VA	Sundays 11-1pm 3348 Moore Street Richmond, VA 23230

EMPATHETIC COMMUNITY: THE STRENGTH OF THE AGING NETWORK

F. Ellen Netting



I was surprised and honored to be invited to speak about empathy and connection at The Span Center’s Empty Plate Luncheon. On the news the night I was asked, it was reported that a public figure had declared: “The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy” because empathy makes us vulnerable to manipulation. In the last few months, empathy has become a subject of public debate. Recently the Richmond Times-Dispatch ran an article entitled: Empathy: Virtue or Vice? As I thought about what I might say, I could hear my grandmother whisper: “sometimes you have to rise to the occasion. You have an opportunity to offer an alternative narrative – that there is strength in empathy, that empathy makes us human!”

In the 1960s I was going through my grandmother’s roll-top trunk where I found the lined pages of her yellowed composition book from 1898. At age 14, she wrote: “When I am gone, three things I would like for people to remember are **1) Be truthful, 2) Be kind, and 3) Respect all of humanity.**” “Be empathetic” was not in her list because the word didn’t appear in the English language until a decade later, but her guidance embodied the spirit of empathy. Grandma Quillin often reminded me, “you don’t know what that person has been through until you walk in their shoes.” One of the hardest things I had to do as a teenager was to tell Grandma that her child, my mother, had died from COPD at age 49. At that time Grandma was not well, and tears ran down her cheeks. There were no words, but I could feel her sadness and grief radiate throughout her body and into mine as I held her hand and together we felt the experience of one another. She died three days later. Mama and Grandma were gone in that summer of 1966, but I began to understand how people lived on, not in the platitudes of looking down on us or being guardian angels . . . but in being so fused into our definition of who we are that they never leave us.

“you don’t know what that person has been through until you walk in their shoes.”

The behavior we model in how we treat people has an incredible influence. Grandma epitomized empathy before there was a word that named it. Mama was a “homeroom mother.” She brought food into my elementary school which was flanked by two public housing developments. When my classmates grabbed more food than I had been taught was polite to take, she not only didn’t pull the tray back but encouraged them to take more. They were hungry. Mama put empathy into action when she engaged with my classmates, volunteered at the hospital, fed the strangers who knocked on our door asking for food, and became a caregiver for Grandma.

Words! Isn't it interesting how we don't always recognize a feeling, an emotion, or what is happening until we have a name for it? Conversely, when words are banned or their meanings are hijacked we cannot allow humanity to be bled from our vocabularies. And when words like empathy are seen as a sign of weakness we must not allow ourselves to be speechless. How powerful words are for they allow us to communicate, to understand what is happening, they connect us to one another, they help us articulate how we're feeling or what we value, and they join us in community.

Empathy was derived from the German term used to describe the emotional connection people felt with works of art or nature. We experience this connection when are moved to tears, listen to music, hear lyrics of favorite songs, appreciate the beauty of nature, photograph a flower, walk through a gallery, read a poem, hear a story, smile at a stranger, watch a movie, see images on the news or see a living creature in pain. Getting in touch with our emotions and feelings is a strength that can spur self-awareness, creativity, imagination, and curiosity and put us in touch with our humanity. Thus, the term empathy was adopted by German and American psychologists to mean "feeling one's way into the experience of another."

Recently I read *The AI Mirror* by Shannon Vallor. She wrote that AI gives us the values of those humans who have historically had the power to shape the dominant patterns now engraved in our recorded data. To suggest that AI systems reflect humanity is to write the lived experience of most people out of the human story.

"Imagine a world transformed by a pandemic of empathy."

Vallor's words stopped me in my tracks. In this very room there are thousands of stories of empathy and compassion that make us human and that have not been recorded. How much of our lived experience, of our interactions, relationships, and interpersonal encounters

from which we learn about one another remain unshared, unspoken or unwritten? Yet they define who we are! Imagine a world transformed by a pandemic of empathy. It has been a popular topic from psychology to education, from neuroscience to philosophy, from literature to advertising. From the days when we put Vaseline on our glasses to simulate blurred vision to today's wearing age suits; there are empathy boxes and empathy maps one can order online.

As I flip through my rolodex of memories I marvel at how easy it is to project our own feelings and assumptions onto others and how much we can learn about ourselves in the process. My father was a mechanical engineer and not one to talk about feelings. He was a planner and everything in the house was in place. After he retired he engineered cakes and used his ruler to measure cutting brownies in exactly two inch squares because the recipe said "cut brownies in two inch squares."

When a beloved neighbor died and we went to the funeral home I saw my father standing in front of Mrs. Campbell's closed casket, arms clasped behind his back, staring ahead. I thought to myself, he's 90 years old and he has got to be thinking that this will soon be him. My heart ached as I approached him, put my arm around him, and softly said, "Daddy, what are you thinking?" And he replied, "That's a mighty nice container!" And that's why empathy must be paired with connection because the emotions we feel may not always align with how other persons are actually feeling or thinking. This is what it means to be part of an empathetic community, one in which members actively foster understanding and connection through emotional awareness, listening and being committed to learning from one another. One writer puts it this way "humans are inherently relational and responsive beings, both with a voice and with the desire to engage responsibly with others. It no longer makes sense to ask how we gain our humanity. Instead the question becomes: How do we keep from losing it?"

In building an empathetic community the organizational culture and community practice literature helps us understand the

"that's why empathy must be paired with connection"

artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions in those groups, organizations, and communities in which our daily professional and personal lives are incubated.

Artifacts can be tangible – such as the beautiful photographs of centenarians, caregivers, and CNAs on the wall of The Span Center, or a home delivered meal. But the primary artifacts of our organizations and communities are our human relationships – the way in which we relate to one another, our behaviors, our interactions, even our body language and nonverbal cues. Our interactions aren't just passing artifacts, they are remembered by others, we leave footprints along the way. We have incredible power in what we pay attention to and just as importantly in what we do not pay attention to. We know that every choice, every change, every decision, every action is riddled with values and has implications for people's lives.

The birth of the Aging Network aligned with a long tradition in American democracy, described in 1835 by Alexis de Tocqueville as "habits of the heart" in which we yearn for the common good and use empathy to foster more inclusive and compassionate communities. On July 14th we celebrated the 60th birthday of the Older Americans Act. In 1965 The Older Americans Act passed with overwhelming bipartisan support: the House voted 395 to 1 in favor, and the Senate unanimously passed it. This legislation established a national network of interconnected structures known as the "Aging Network." In 1973 the Older American Act was reauthorized, and Area Agencies on Aging were established as "on the ground" organizations charged with helping older adults live with independence and dignity in their homes.

I tell you this because the overwhelming support for the Older Americans Act is an example of a policy decision based on empathy, the recognition that the people of a nation have a moral responsibility to stand by and serve the needs of its citizens.

I was in my M.S.W. program at the University of Tennessee when the East Tennessee AAA was established, and I had the opportunity to be their first student intern.

After I graduated, I became a rural county's Office on Aging Director and I cut my teeth on information and referral, outreach, advocacy, and senior nutrition initiatives. We mobilized a network of volunteers, trained postal workers to call for wellness checks, reached out to local beauty parlors and barber shops, worked with senior citizens groups in faith communities, invited the Social Security agent to hold appointments at the senior citizens center, delivered mobile meals, provided transportation to senior nutrition sites, advocated for pets to be allowed in public housing, and we listened and listened . . . and we learned about the lived experiences of incredibly resourceful and often vulnerable people.

"where do I start to find services that my mother, my father, my sister, my brother, my friend, my partner desperately need?"

I grew up professionally in the Aging Network. Over the years I lived in North Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois, Arizona, and Virginia. Countless people asked me (and I'm sure they have asked you) where do I start to find services that my mother, my father, my sister, my brother, my friend, my partner desperately need? Who can I

call? What can I do? And no matter the state in which they were living, we could refer them to a place where they could start – a place where an empathic human contact could hear the desperation in another's voice and connect them through the Aging Network, a community built on empathy.

So much has changed in the 60 years since the Older Americans Act was originally enacted. And it is somewhat hard to believe that any policy could be approved unanimously, save one vote, by The Congress of the United States. But the Aging Network was established in an outbreak of empathy for older Americans. So now is a moment in time to celebrate the Aging Network in which staff and volunteers across governmental and nonprofit organizations, and local communities come together. If we see strength in empathy, we cannot be naïve that this makes us vulnerable to being overwhelmed by the scope of what needs to be done. We cannot always fix a situation or solve a problem, but we can stand with one another, listen to one another, and replenish ourselves so that we can continue the grand tradition of engaging in "habits of the heart."

We live in a world in which every human triumph and tragedy can be instantaneously broadcast. Many voices are raised, but we can choose to embrace empathy and connection as a strength, that reaches out to persons who are not visible, that seeks to raise voices that others do not always want to hear – but from whom we need to hear. As part of The Aging Network, it is our commitment to be there when someone doesn't know where to start or whom to call. For to be human is to have the capacity to be empathic and to imagine possibility and strength in our connections to one another (Berardi et al, 2020). Being human allows us to really see one another, to reach out, to advocate with, and to honor one another's humanity. When someone believes in us, we will rise to the occasion because empathy and connection matter. Thank you for your empathy.



Winter Ready:

A Guide to Emergency Preparedness

As winter approaches, The Span Center encourages everyone to embrace emergency preparation. Severe weather events can bring challenges, but taking a few simple steps can help ensure a warm, secure, and connected season. Planning ahead makes all the difference!

Prepare for a possible emergency in 3 easy steps!



STEP 1 | KNOW THE RISKS

The first step to being prepared is to know the potential risks. Each season and various scenarios can come with their own challenges and needs. Knowing what you are likely to encounter can help you make an informed plan.

Common Emergencies

Extreme Heat
Extreme Cold
Severe Storms
Winter Storms
Flooding
Power Outages
Public Health Emergency
Other (there may be other emergency situations based on your area)

Potential Concerns

Emergencies can cover a range of hazards. High heat can bring a risk of heatstroke or dehydration. Extreme cold brings the risk of hypothermia. Severe storms can bring lightning, wind, tornadoes, flooding, and falling trees/limbs.

Power outages whether on their own or accompanying an extreme weather event can critically affect essential medical equipment, communication, and climate control. Furthermore, extreme weather can block roads, cutting off access to supplies, essential services, caregivers, and loved ones.

Preparation should also include planning for public health crises, such as disease outbreaks or water quality issues.

Stay Informed!

Monitor Weather Reports: Stay tuned to local news and weather for watches, warnings, and advisories.

Your Support Network: Have conversations with your trusted friends, family, and neighbors to share information about potential coming emergencies.

STEP 2 | MAKE A PLAN

The next step is to make a support plan and build an Emergency Kit with all the items you need to be safe and self-sufficient for at least three to seven days. Keeping these items in one easy-to-access location or designated container can make things easier to find.

Items to Consider

Food and Water: Water (one gallon per person, per day), Non-perishable food and a can opener, Pet food.

Health & Medical: A written, up-to-date list of all your medications, dosages, and medical conditions, at least a seven-day supply of all prescription medicines, First-aid kit, Extra eyeglasses/hearing aid batteries, Diabetic supplies (if applicable).

Assistive Devices: Backup batteries for wheelchairs, scooters, or other electric mobility devices, a spare cane or walker, an extra oxygen tank (if needed).

Power & Communication: Extra power bank/charger for your phone, A flashlight and extra batteries, Battery-powered or hand-crank radio, A list of emergency contacts.

Comfort & Safety: Blankets, sleeping bags, or extra warm clothing, Hand-held fan or battery-operated A/C unit.

Vital Documents: Copies of insurance cards, Photo ID, Medical records, and other important papers kept in a waterproof, fire-safe container.



STEP 3 | ENGAGE YOUR NETWORK

Step 3 is vital. Engage your support network. Your support network is made of people who you trust to check in on you and who can offer help in case of an emergency. It can be family, friends, neighbors, or anyone you trust. None of us should face an emergency by ourselves. Make sure to select at least one person who can access your home and offer physical support if needed. Your extended support network can also include community resources such as your Area Agency on Aging (The Span Center), food banks, emergency services (if needed), and others.

Make a list of your network as well as their contact info. Reach out to individuals in your personal network and make a plan to communicate in an emergency.

Personal Network:

Friends, Family, Neighbors

Community Resource Network:

Agency on Aging, Emergency Services, Others



The Gift of Service

WHY VOLUNTEERING DURING THE HOLIDAYS MATTERS — AND BEYOND



As the holiday season approaches, many of us look forward to festive gatherings, warm meals, and time with loved ones. But for many individuals and families, this time of year can be marked by loneliness, financial stress, and unmet needs. Volunteering during the holidays is one of the most powerful ways to bring light into someone’s life and your own.

Community organizations, shelters, food banks, and senior centers often experience a surge in demand during the holidays. Families may struggle to afford gifts or meals, and older adults may face the season alone. Volunteers play a vital role in helping these organizations meet the increased need and spread holiday cheer. Volunteering is more than just lending a hand, it’s a way to connect, uplift, and make a meaningful impact. Whether you’re serving meals, delivering care packages, or simply offering companionship, your time and presence can make the holidays brighter for someone in need.



Many volunteers also find that giving back enhances their own holiday experience. It fosters gratitude, builds community, and reminds us of the deeper meaning of the season.

There are countless ways to volunteer, depending on your interests and availability. At The Span Center, there are several ways to volunteer depending on your interests.

While the holidays inspire many to give back, it's important to remember that the need doesn't end in January. Social isolation and other challenges persist throughout the year.

By committing to volunteer beyond the holiday season – even just once a month – you can help build stronger, more resilient communities. Your time and talents are valuable every day of the year.

Volunteering during the holidays is a chance to turn compassion into action. Whether you have an hour or a day, your time can bring warmth, joy, and hope to someone who needs it. And by continuing to serve throughout the year, you help ensure that kindness and community support never go out of season.



Inspired to make a difference?

If you're interested in finding out more about our volunteer opportunities, whether during the holiday season or all year long, contact us:

Email: volunteer@spancenter.org

Phone: 804-343-3024

Our website also lists ways you can get more involved

spancenter.org/get-involved



Turkey Cutlets and Gravy

Creamy country gravy tops lightly breaded turkey cutlets in this mouthwatering entrée.

Prep Time	Cook Time	Yields	Serving Size
10 minutes	15 minutes	4 servings	3 oz turkey & 2 Tbsp gravy

INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour and 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour, divided use
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt-free all-purpose seasoning blend
- 2 large egg whites
- 1/4 cup fat-free milk
- 1/2 cup plain dry bread crumbs (lowest sodium available)
- 4 turkey breast cutlets (about 4 ounces each), all visible fat discarded
- OR
- 1 pound boneless, skinless turkey breast, cut crosswise into 4 slices, cutlets, or slices flattened to 1/2-inch thickness
- Cooking spray
- 1 tablespoon canola or corn oil
- 1/4 cup fat-free half-and-half
- 1/3 cup fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Stir together 1/4 cup flour and seasoning blend. In a separate dish, whisk egg whites until foamy. Whisk in milk. Put bread crumbs in a third dish.
- 2 Dip turkey in flour mixture, then in egg white mixture, and finally in bread crumbs. Lightly spray both sides with cooking spray.
- 3 In a skillet, heat oil on medium-high heat. Cook for 4 minutes on each side. Remove turkey, leave pan drippings in the skillet. Reduce the heat to medium.
- 4 In a small bowl, whisk together the half & half and the remaining 2 teaspoons flour. Whisk in broth & pepper. Whisk in the pan drippings. Cook for 1 minute, whisking constantly. Spoon gravy over turkey.

NUTRITION INFO

Calories	268
Total fat	5 g
Saturated fat	.5 g
Cholesterol	71 mg
Sodium	209 mg
Total fiber	1 g
Protein	34 g
Carbohydrates	20 g





Your Support

The Span Center depends on the generosity of individuals, corporations, and organizations who support our efforts to enhance the quality of life for older adults and support caregivers.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Make a financial gift. Donations are tax-deductible. You can donate using the QR code below or visit spancenter.org/give for more options.
- Volunteer your time. Volunteers help provide much needed information and services to the community.
- Spread the word! Tell people about The Span Center. Like and share our social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube.
- Ask your employer if they make matching gifts.



We couldn't do what we do without your generous support.



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THE
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