

BRANCHES



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ELDERHOSTEL PITTSBURGH:

CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTIONS

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation has always challenged the common assumption that most seniors are frail and poor, that their growing numbers represent a “drain” on the community. Demographic studies confirm that in Pittsburgh—a region that’s 20 years ahead of the rest of the country in its proportion of seniors—most elderly people are relatively healthy and financially secure.

Challenging the old assumption was the easy part. The hard part was taking our thinking about our elderly one step further. In doing so, we found that we had been viewing our demographics without sufficient inspiration. Our large, vibrant and growing population of seniors could represent a wonderful force for community building—but only if the community could learn how to engage them.

“We kept thinking something was missing,” recalls Karen Feinstein, President of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF). “We had all these programs to keep people alive, but what were we keeping them healthy for?”

Finding ways to engage our region’s large senior population became the challenge we set for ourselves in 1998. Doing it right would not only unleash seniors’ powerful civic, educational and economic force, but would also build supports for successful aging, helping to preserve and perpetuate our senior asset. A senior population so engaged could give back many times: as participants, consumers, volunteers and teachers.

In seeking the best model, we returned to the drawing board. One outstanding senior program, Carnegie Mellon University’s popular Academy for Lifelong Learning (ALL), was vastly oversubscribed, with a six-year waiting list. We evaluated the not-for-profit Elderhostel, headquartered in Boston. Elderhostel offers a veritable phone book full of short, inexpensive course offerings and unique travel and recreational and volunteer opportunities, both nationally and internationally. Since its founding in 1975, Elderhostel has grown to its present size, offering over 10,000 programs a year in more than 100

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Decades of research clearly debunk the myth that to be old in America is to be sick and frail... We are delighted to observe increasing momentum toward...a physically and cognitively fit, nondisabled, active elderly population. The combination of longer life and less illness is adding life to years as well as years to life.

SUCCESSFUL AGING
John W. Rowe, M.D.,
and Robert L. Kahn, PhD.

Pittsburgh’s aging population

Adults over 60:	
Allegheny County22.1%
Pennsylvania19.8%
Entire US16.3%

2000 Census

Older Adults in Southwestern PA

About 250,000 people fall into each of the following categories...

50 – 65 years old in Allegheny County

Over 65, without limitations to their mobility, in Allegheny County

Over 50, without mobility limitations, in Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland and Washington

Elderhostel Pittsburgh, 2000

THE MATURE MARKET

The 72 million Americans over 50 (25% of the population) represent...

\$7 trillion in wealth

\$500 billion in income

50% of all discretionary income

70% of financial assets

2.5 times the average per capita spending

85% of luxury travel

70% of all vacations

Elderhostel Pittsburgh 2000

It's forward looking, active engagement with life and with other human beings that is so critical to growing old well.

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ELDERHOSTEL PITTSBURGH: CHALLENGING THE ASSUMPTIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

countries and serving nearly 250,000 older adults each year.

Elderhostel's offerings all involved traveling away from home. But why should seniors have to travel to be engaged? Why not create something like Elderhostel that is year-round, focused in our home region? Why not use Pittsburgh's wealth of history, landmarks, and cultural activities to enlighten our seniors, create volunteer opportunities for them, and invest leisure dollars in their own community?

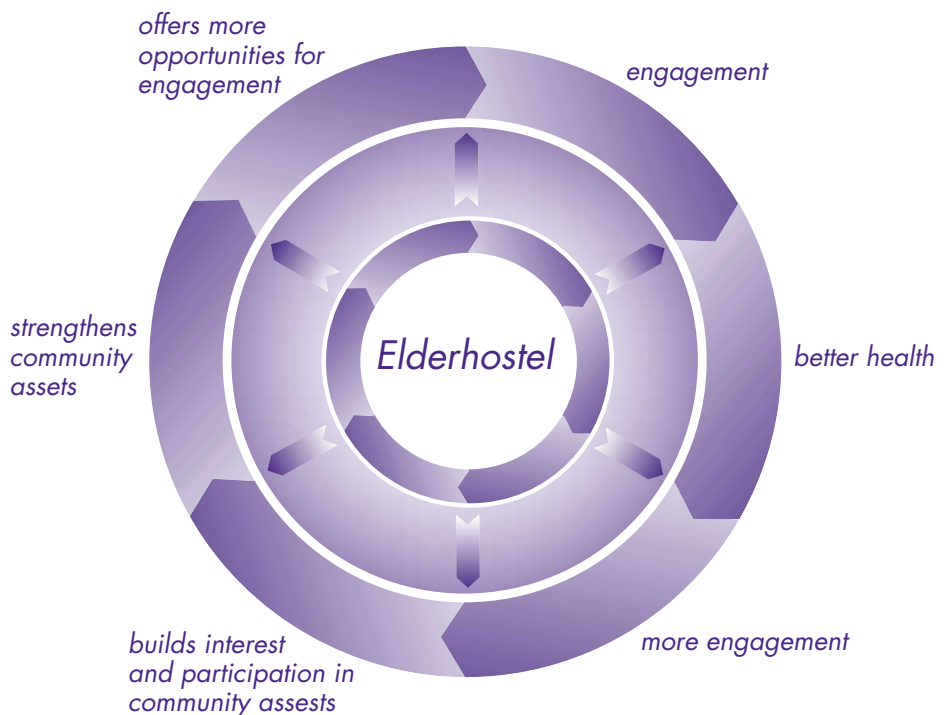
In 1998 we approached Elderhostel, Inc. to see if they would be interested in partnering with our region to develop an entirely new model—a regional Elderhostel.

We struck gold. The partnership blossomed and soon, other foundations joined in. JHF recommended, and

Elderhostel hired experienced, energetic staff: Director, Keith Kondrich, (now also acting as Associate Vice President of the national Elderhostel); Program Manager, Pam Vingle and Administrative Coordinator, Mary Brown. Elderhostel Pittsburgh offered its first catalogue in March 2000 with 480 people attending 16 programs.

Today—just over two years later—over 7000 people have participated in over 210 programs. This fall Elderhostel Pittsburgh launches traditional programs that provide participants with more in-depth study of topics ranging from astronomy to opera, local history to medical ethics. Other cities plan to replicate the model.

How do you trigger the cycle of public and community health?





ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND IN OUR BACK YARD:

ELDERHOSTEL MAKES ITS MARK

Elderhostel Pittsburgh's impressive success mirrors the success of Elderhostel, Inc., the national parent organization based in Boston, Massachusetts—with a couple of important distinctions.

First, while Elderhostel, Inc., the nation's first and largest educational and travel organization for older adults, offers longer trips around the country and abroad, Elderhostel Pittsburgh offers programming and day-trips to the region's most fascinating venues. Second, Elderhostel nationally reaches nearly 200,000 people every year and Elderhostel Pittsburgh reaches 20,000 right here in the tri-state region. The program has attracted adults who are inquisitive, active and engaged in learning and exploring life and the world around them.

"Elderhostel offers us the chance to change the way we see and experience the world—in a week or in a day," notes James Moses, President and CEO of Elderhostel, Inc. "It's education the way we wished it could have been when we were in school—no prerequisites, prior education, homework or tests are required."

The Pittsburgh community convinced Moses and his colleagues that a Pittsburgh initiative was a "win-win" idea. The region's incredible number of historic, cultural and education assets are "naturals" for development into successful Elderhostel programs. James Denova, Senior Program Officer with the Benedum Foundation, a co-founder and collaborative investor in Elderhostel Pittsburgh with the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, knew that the idea of developing day-long Elderhostel programs in Pittsburgh's tri-state area would be an easy sell to the national organization.

As predicted, Elderhostel Pittsburgh is beginning to play a key role in the region's economic development. "We serve West Virginia and Pennsylvania," notes Denova, "and the area's active senior population has the means and the opportunity to support local commerce and lifelong learning opportunities."

The national office has received overwhelming, positive feedback about Elderhostel Pittsburgh from participants and hosting organizations alike. Recently, Elderhostel Pittsburgh was included in a publication that recognizes promising practices in communities that help older adults maintain their independence and be active in their community. The publication is produced by Visiting Nurse Service of New York City with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Building on Pittsburgh's success, other communities are now replicating our model in their cities. Community leaders in Philadelphia have secured initial funding to begin developing community-based Elderhostel programs in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Foundations in Detroit, Cleveland and New Orleans have inquired with the national office in Boston about setting up their own local, one-day Elderhostel programs.

The key to replication, Moses offers, is to have the backing and support of the community. "It's really a grassroots initiative that has to percolate locally and then connect nationally." Add a strong funding base and active seniors—success is virtually guaranteed.

ELDERHOSTEL PITTSBURGH'S PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Allegheny County Jail & Coroner's Office

• Allegheny County Library Association

• Allegheny Trail Alliance • Altoona Railroaders

Memorial Museum • Antiochian Village Conference

& Retreat Center • Arthurdale Heritage, Inc.

• Carnegie Museum of Art • Elderhostel Pittsburgh

Regional Office • Frick Art & Historical Center

• George Westinghouse Museum • Golden Triangle

Bikes • Hartwood Acres • Heinz Memorial Chapel

• Historic Harmony, Inc. • Johnstown Area Heritage

Association • Mattress Factory • National Park

Service Fort Necessity • National Robotics

Engineering Consortium • Pennsylvania Trolley

Museum • Photo Antiquities Museum of

Photographic History • Pittsburgh History

& Landmarks Foundation • Pittsburgh Irish

& Classical Theater • Pittsburgh

Post-Gazette • Pittsburgh

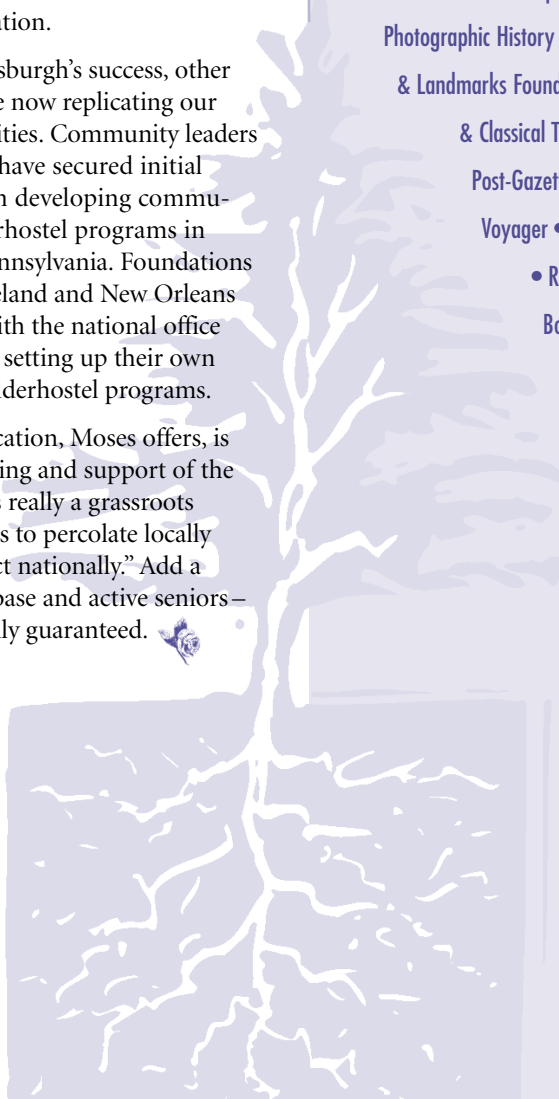
Voyager • River City Brass Band

• Rodef Shalom Biblical

Botanical Garden

• Sen. John Heinz

History Center





ELDERHOSTEL PROGRAM RENEWS THE ART OF CONVERSATION

Conversation Salons...

Here are some sample Conversation Salon topics:

Are honesty, integrity and loyalty old-fashioned values that have outlived their time?

Are people responsible for their own wellbeing, or is society responsible for the wellbeing of all its members?

What is the good life?

What are the most important social changes that have occurred in your lifetime?



What makes an Elderhostel experience truly terrific?

Norm Wien wanted to know. Norm, a retired Children’s Hospital Vice President, had found most Elderhostel Pittsburgh experiences fulfilling, providing a complete educational/travel package with transportation, meals and instructors. But he soon discovered that the difference among experiences hinged on the instructor – that person’s ability to impart knowledge with enthusiasm. “The programs are perfectly fine, but some leave you wanting more opportunities for dialogue,” says Norm Wien, now an Elderhostel Pittsburgh volunteer. “Elderhostel Pittsburgh provides lots of atypical experiences, a nice departure from the usual guided experience, a way to explore the boundaries of what we can learn.

One of the most fascinating was an astronomy program led by a professor. What intrigued me was the seemingly endless Q and A session. Hostellers wanted to know more and weren’t afraid to question. Their curiosity spurred the professor, and the session went long, with everyone on the edge of their seats.”

Wien thought that the Elderhostel experience could benefit from more opportunities for this kind of interaction. He approached the Pittsburgh office to discuss opportunities for offering open discussions. He was asked to explore Conversation Salons and did so through attending another organization’s group and researching the concept. He then volunteered to develop the idea and coordinate the effort. Convening a diverse group of well informed, spirited people to discuss compelling topics, Wien believed, would give people a way to develop their listening and conversation skills and connect with others in the community.

Conversation Salons are popular in Europe, where they originated during the Enlightenment. Each Salon is led by a trained facilitator, who introduces the topic and gently draws each person into the conversation. But the success of the group does not solely rest with the facilitator, but with the group itself.

Wien thinks that direct, face-to-face discussion of important topics is more appropriate now than ever.

“Today, TV and talk radio bring an endless parade of experts and opinions to us for us to passively absorb,” says Wien. “The art of direct conversation among people of diverse interests is becoming a lost art.”

In partnership with the Allegheny County Library Association, and without much marketing fanfare, Conversation Salons began in March 2002.

“Elderhostel Pittsburgh provides lots of atypical experiences, a nice departure from the usual guided experience, a way to explore the boundaries of what we can learn.”

Since then, they have taken root in libraries in Pleasant Hills, Squirrel Hill, Irwin, Gibsonia, and Oakland. They are held during the daytime, and participation is open to all age groups. Facilitators are drawn from the ranks of participants and trained.

The Elderhostel Conversation Salons provide one example of how a community can literally give voice to the rich, diverse life experiences of its older adults.



OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS: ELDERHOSTEL PUTS GENERATIONS TOGETHER

A teepee. A bonfire. Ancient lore shared by a wise and enthusiastic guide. These are just some of the highlights of a recent intergenerational Oglebay Institute program offered by Elderhostel Pittsburgh and staffed by participating volunteers, Tippi and Larry Comden.

On Groundhog Day of this year, a dozen grandparents or parents, each with a grandchild between the ages of 8 and 12, packed their sleeping bags and their senses of adventure for the trek to Oglebay Institute in Wheeling, West Virginia. Participants had the option to sleep on air mattresses indoors, but in this case, everybody chose to face the elements.

Their guide, Greg Park, took the group to an authentic teepee, where they shared an equally authentic Native American meal. As the group sat around a bonfire, Greg taught traditional Native American dances and games—which the children thoroughly enjoyed—and shared ancient lore and traditions. “We learned about a spirit bundle, special items that are wrapped in a special bark material or animal skin. Each item in it has spiritual significance to it, and the guide swore us to secrecy about the bundle’s contents,” reported Tippi.

The real beauty of intergenerational programming at Elderhostel Pittsburgh is that children and grandparents stay together throughout the event.

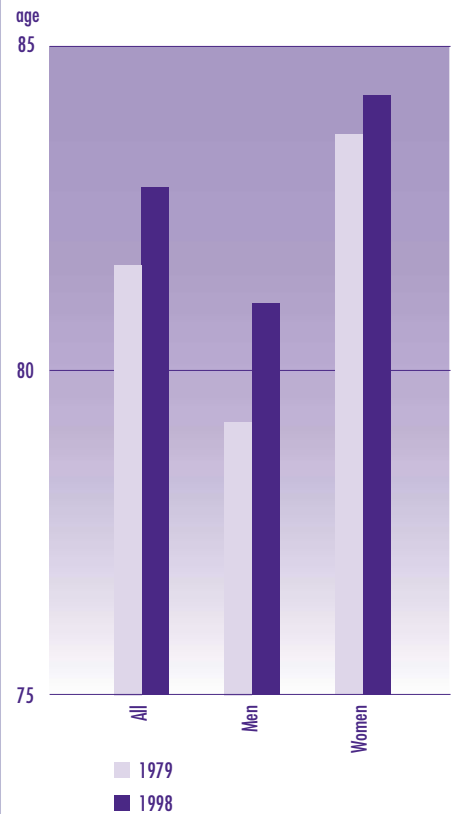
After a good night’s sleep, the troupe greeted the morning with a nature hike. “The guide gave us survival hints—such as how to build a shelter if we needed to, or how to build a fire... Well, we *tried* to build fires,” Tippi added, chuckling.

As volunteers who hosted the event by organizing all the other participants, and as participants themselves, Tippi and her husband wouldn’t have missed the intergenerational program for the world. “The kids enjoyed all the physical activity, the games, the dances... and I for one really appreciated the stories shared with us in the teepee. It was a well-rounded event—thanks especially to our guide, who was simply wonderful.”

The real beauty of intergenerational programming at Elderhostel Pittsburgh is that children and grandparents stay together throughout the event. “The programs are structured so that they function as a pair. Participants don’t segregate into a children’s group and an adults’ group,” explained Pam Vingle, Elderhostel Pittsburgh Program Manager.

And of course, sharing walks in the woods or stories around a campfire creates special memories for both grandparent and grandchild.

Seniors are living longer...
Life expectancy has increased
over the past two decades



AARP, 2002



LEARNING, HELPING AND ENJOYING: ELDERHOSTEL VOLUNTEERS GIVE AND RECEIVE

Elderhostel Funders

The Benedum Foundation

<http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/benedum>

The Birmingham Foundation

<http://www.birminghamfoundation.org>

The Forbes Fund, now The William J. Copeland Fund

<http://www.copelandfund.org>

The Heinz Endowments

<http://www.heinz.org>

The Hillman Foundation

<http://www.hillmanfoundation.org>

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation

<http://www.jhf.org>

The Pittsburgh Foundation

<http://www.pittsburghfoundation.org>

Dominion Gas Company

<http://www.dom.com>

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield

<http://www.highmark.com>

Mary Ann and Fred Wucher, lifetime Pittsburghers and Elderhostel volunteers, have the first crack at seeing and “learning about the gems in our own backyard.” They’re great marketers, too. Just last month, Mary Ann delivered several presentations about volunteering for Elderhostel Pittsburgh through an association with whom she works, the Philanthropic Educational Organization. “We recruited four Elderhostelers from that effort alone,” reported Mary Ann.

The Wuchers began their careers as Elderhostel volunteers after attending Elderhostel programs. “We could tell right away that the program was very worthwhile,” said Mary Ann, “so we started out by serving as Elderhostel hosts,” (which involves assistance with registration and coordinating other logistics).

“We could tell right away that the program was very worthwhile, so we started out by serving as Elderhostel hosts.”

Mary Ann went one step further and asked program manager Pam Vingle whether Elderhostel staff needed anybody to help them compile and present the information given by participants on program evaluation forms. “I just thought it made a lot of sense for a volunteer to do something like that, rather than pay a person to do it.” Elderhostel staff provided Mary Ann and her husband Fred with training and computer set-up assistance, and they were off! They now come into the Elderhostel once every two weeks to tabulate program evaluations.

But their first volunteering passion remains hosting Elderhostel programs. They try to host two every trimester. They’ve recently hosted a group trip to Laurel Caverns, as well as the “Seldom Seen Spaces in Pitt” program. This fall, Fred Wucher will host an Elderhostel series of four seminars—the first of its kind—entitled “Memories to Memoirs.”

“There’s just nothing like Elderhostel,” raves Mary Ann. “Where else can you go to get a tour of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, or learn first-hand about the FBI from an FBI agent—you can’t really do these things on your own.” Even more important, Mary Ann adds, is the opportunity to broaden her horizons, not only about Pittsburgh, but about other community members who share her interests. “I’ve met so many people whom I would have never met otherwise, thanks to Elderhostel.”



MOVERS AND SHAKERS:

SENIORS AS AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE

One-third of registered voters in the U.S. are over 55. Those between the ages of 65 and 74 register and vote at the highest rates of any age group. Yet all too often, seniors are the focus of information on only stereotypically age-related issues—prescription drugs, Medicare, Social Security and the like. And while these issues are important, civic leaders may be underestimating seniors’ overall interests in the workings of their community.

“People didn’t get it. They didn’t realize that our seniors are a resource.” says Nancy Zionts, JHF Senior Program Officer.

To address area seniors in a more complete way, Pittsburgh Elderhostel has created several opportunities for civic outreach. As Pittsburgh began its latest metamorphosis, with plans for developing two new stadiums, a new convention center, cultural amenities, airport improvements, trails and riverfront parks—it became important to assure that Pittsburgh seniors were invited into the conversation. As local government was restructured to a single County Executive from the board of commissioners, Elderhostel developed a series of programs to broaden access to civic leaders community plans.

“The civic Elderhostel programs—from visits to the Coroner’s Office to the County Jail to the Opera House—are always sold out,” says Elderhostel Pittsburgh Director Keith Kondrich.

One particularly successful program, *Metamorphosis: the Pittsburgh Region*, held in October 2000, was led by Allegheny County Executive Jim Roddey and Allegheny Conference on Community Development Vice President Harold Miller. The program focused on how our regional assets are contributing to a rebirth of pride and a renewed sense of optimism for the future of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

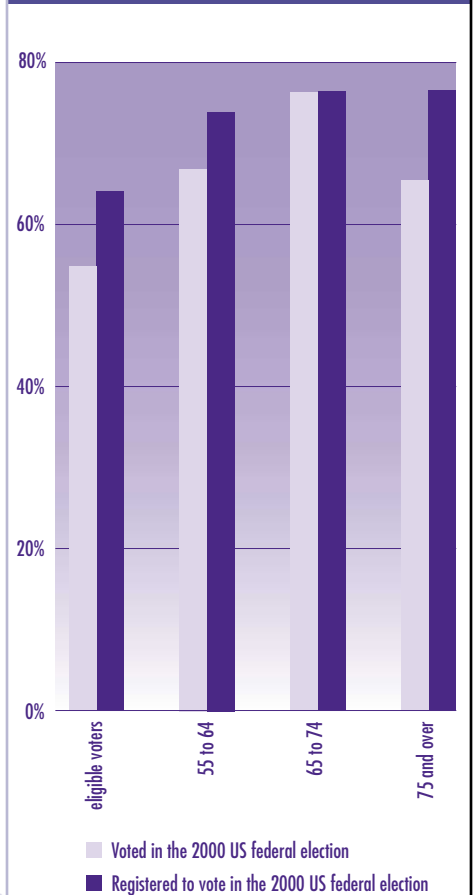
The catalogue description urged people to look anew at the Pittsburgh region’s assets before making their retirement home in Florida. Mr. Roddey commented on the fact that, in addition to instructing this Elderhostel program, he had attended a few as well, being a senior himself.

The result? Many members of the capacity crowd commented on the value of learning about the benefits of regional thinking. The big picture of our region’s assets gave them a new appreciation about the community in which they live. Participants also appreciated the ability to question and voice divergent views, and came away with a feeling of understanding and inclusion in the process of county government.

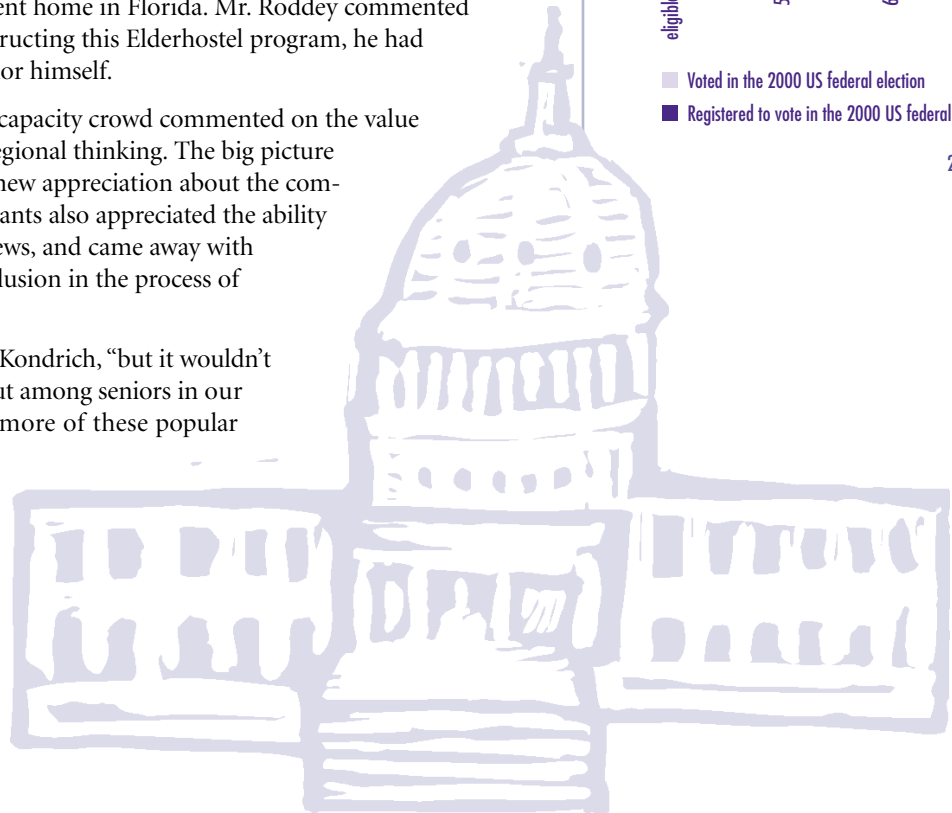
“The numbers are not yet in,” said Kondrich, “but it wouldn’t surprise anyone to see voter turnout among seniors in our region go even higher, as we add more of these popular civic programs.”



Percentage of people in the United States, by age, who were registered to vote or voted in the 2000 election

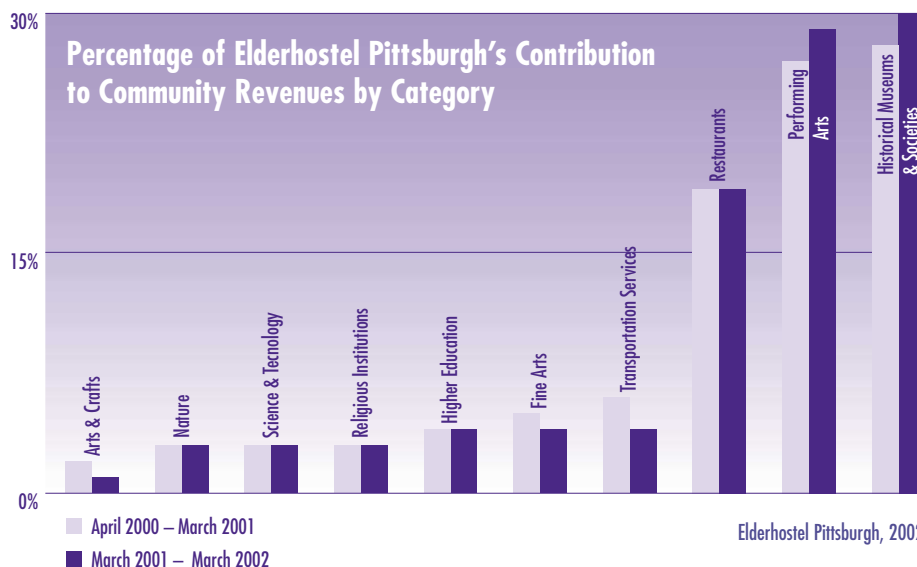
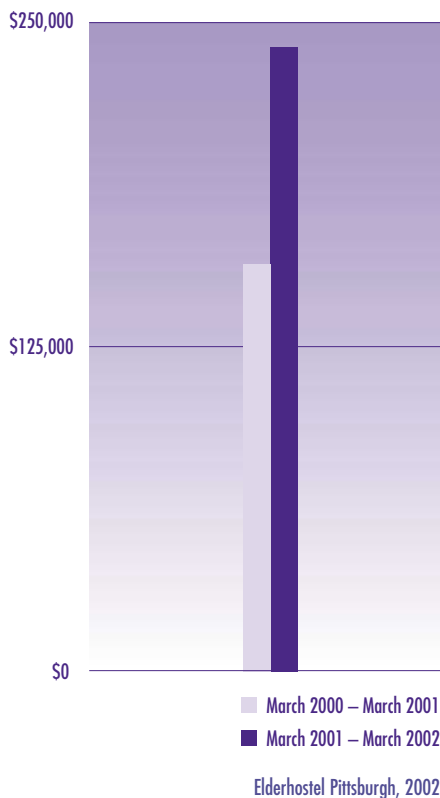


2000 Census



ELDERHOSTEL PITTSBURGH'S IMPACT ON OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

One of the original intents of the program and its funders was to capture the considerable spending power of seniors locally. Just two years after its launch, Elderhostel Pittsburgh has succeeded in this aspect of the venture.



Resources:

Successful Aging, John W. Rowe, MD, and Robert L. Kahn, PhD.
Random House 1999 ISBN 0-375-40045-1

Prime Time-How Baby Boomers Will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America, Marc Freedman
Public Affairs 1999 ISBN 1-891620-17-7

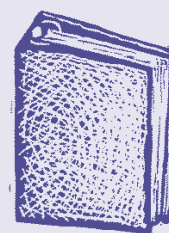
Elderhostel, Inc. www.elderhostel.org

Elderhostel Pittsburgh, site created and maintained by Elderhostel participant and volunteer Tippi Comden:
www.geocities.com/tcomden/pgh/elder.htm

Senior Service Corps www.cns.gov/senior

ElderWeb www.elderweb.com

For program information, contact Elderhostel Pittsburgh at 412-422-2060



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