



Advocating for Older Adults of Today and Tomorrow

NEWS

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Earth's Elders Founder Earns 'Agewise Advocate Award' From Connecticut Commission on Aging

HARTFORD—The Connecticut Commission on Aging has awarded its 2007 Agewise Advocate Award to Jerry Friedman, founder and director of the Earth's Elders Foundation of Kent, Conn.

An independent advocacy agency of the Connecticut General Assembly, the commission presents the annual award to people who provide exemplary support of initiatives that support the older adults of today and tomorrow.

The commission and foundation are collaborating on a statewide project to bring students into face-to-face contact with older adults through a curriculum program that encourages intergenerational activities and promotes greater respect and understanding.

The curriculum was developed by Friedman and the Bank Street College of Education in New York and is offered to schools free of charge. It provides innovative ways for students to learn about history, geography, health and ethics by exploring original family documents and interviewing family and community elders to create oral histories.

The non-profit Earth's Elders Foundation was founded by Friedman, who has traveled the world photographing and interviewing "super centenarians"—people who are at least 110 years old.

A retired award-winning New York advertising photographer now living in New Milford, Friedman began his super centenarian quest after spending four days in his 90-year-old mother's Boston care facility "...to try to imagine my own elder years."

Portraits of 50 super centenarians and accompanying interviews appear in his book "Earth Elders: The Wisdom of the World's Oldest People."

In the book Friedman says, "From the first super centenarian I photographed to the last one I've just met, I have been remade, both figuratively and practically, each time."

To launch the Connecticut schools initiative, a month-long exhibit featuring Friedman's 3' x 4' photographic portraits was presented at the State Capitol during June 2007.

The exhibit brought to Connecticut the same program presented at the United Nations in 2006 and viewed by an estimated 50,000 people. Twenty-nine of the portraits were exhibited March 31-April 4 of this year in the rotunda of the historic Russell Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

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“In chronicling the lives of these amazing super centenarians—people whose stories would otherwise never have been shared with the world—Jerry Friedman has himself made history,” said Commission on Aging Executive Director Julia Evans Starr. “We are extraordinarily proud to be a partner with the Earth’s Elders Foundation in Connecticut and thrilled to present Jerry with the 2007 Agewise Advocate Award.”

Friedman said, “I am truly honored to receive the award and, even more, to continue such a rich and productive relationship with the Commission on Aging. We clearly share the same ultimate goal—to improve the quality of life for our nation’s older adults through a profound culture change.”

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