



VT Senior Centers Launch Statewide Association

By David Reville of AARP-VT

Vermont senior centers serving thousands of older residents daily, have had little or no voice at the state or regional level. That all changed when directors of several leading senior centers across the state agreed to form an association to better represent the interests of these vital community resources and their members. It is called The Vermont Association of Senior Centers.

The mission of the association is to advocate for senior centers on a statewide level, promote the growth and quality of Vermont senior centers, and strengthen the professional skills of senior center staff. The goal is to build an association that represents a dynamic network of senior centers and professionals committed to excellence and responsive to the needs of the state's growing older population.

"For too many years we have operated without a strong voice at a state level," said Gail Moreau, director of the Heineberg Senior Center in Burlington's North End. "Now, as an association, we will be able to benefit from the support, ideas and collective strength that comes from being organized. This is an important step forward for all of our centers and for the people we serve every day with meals, activities and important social interaction."

A group of senior center directors from Vermont met April 22nd in Rut-

land to form the association and elect a 5 member steering committee. They are: Roland Dion, Winooski Senior Center; Lori Hickey, Godnick Adult Center in Rutland; Lucinda McCloud, Montpelier Senior Activity Center; Gail Moreau, Heineberg Senior and Community Center in Burlington; and Jo Ann Riley, Castleton Community Seniors.

AARP Vermont played a key role in convening the group and in moving the discussion forward along with support from Senator Bernie Sanders office. "Senior center directors have been meeting for several months to discuss ways to raise the profile of senior centers, which are an integral part of the aging network in Vermont," said Jennifer Wallace-Brodeur of AARP Vermont. "Centers are a critical focal point for services and activities for older residents in their community, and in many cases they are the only place where programming is offered for this population."

Citing a recent survey of Vermont senior centers, Wallace-Brodeur estimated that some 25,000 older residents visit these centers every year and in 2008 more than 300,000 meals were served across the state. Funding resources and transportation were cited as the most pressing issues facing most centers.

