

Her pep talk debunks myths about aging

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

At 57, Louise Churches decided to start a career. In her 70th year — despite a heart condition and arthritis — she's heading for Africa.

And she's also a services coordinator for the Area Agency on Aging 1B.

So the Birmingham grandmother seemed a perfect choice for keynote speaker at the second annual Oakland County Senior Power Day.

"I think the most important reason they asked me is because I'm an old woman," Churches told the 500 who attended the daylong event Friday in Southfield Civic Center. "I can share with you what it's like to be an old person in this society.

"It doesn't feel so pleasant because our society gets its knowledge of aging not from facts but from fiction."

In a pep talk based on her own experiences, Churches debunked myths that older people are absent minded, slow witted, non-productive in business and personal life and burdens to their families and society.

"We can't be foolhardy, but don't be afraid to take a risk," said Churches, who spent a month with the primitive Xhosa tribe in South Africa. This trip she'll visit the Zulus.

"I lived in and saw the third world in its great, great poverty. I saw a whole new dimension."

But the feisty mother of five stressed that seniors can be their own worst enemies. And she urged her audience to live to the fullest.

"Being active is here it's at. We old folks win some, lose some," she added.

"But if we're in there fighting we bring about change."

TAKING HER UP on the challenge, senior citizens from all over Oakland County gathered to talk about their concerns. Panel discussions dealt with four issues they worry about — health, housing, transportation and utilities.

"We asked what they wanted to pursue," said Marion Coker, senior citizen department head for the Oakland Living Human Service Agency (OLHSA). The agency co-sponsored the event with the Area Agency on Aging 1B.

"It really comes from them."

Waving banners like "Here's the beef — more senior housing," they were asked to offer suggestions that might improve their lives.

"For us to do the kind of job necessary in working with older Americans we need to hear from you," urged AAA 1B director Sandra K. Reminga. "We have come together for comradeship, but also to deal with the hard issues."

"We have expanded the service system for older adults and can do even more with your help."

For some, like Eve Newman of Oak Park, the event was a way to learn more about issues that affect her. "It's very informative, if only it would come true," she said.

"To me, it's promises, promises. But in unity there is strength. Maybe they can do something."

Others came out to talk about a single burning issue. For Sarah O'Bryan of the Birmingham Board of Health, that is low-cost housing. "I need a place to live and thought I could find out about it here," explained the Highland resident.

And several came just to talk about certain concerns.

APPEARING on the panels with those who provide direct services to seniors were several elected officials. Along with answering questions, they gave older residents some pointers on how to go about getting what they want.

"Getting around is a problem, and we need to talk about that," said Oakland County Commissioner James Doyon, a Democrat who served on a transportation panel.

"We who will be seniors some day need to think about our futures."

Former commissioner John Peterson, a senior himself, advised his peers that the majority of citizens are between 20 and 60. "That kind of lets you out, doesn't it? They pay the taxes, and they're the ones you have to lobby with to get the transportation system you want and need."

Although not on panels, several officials turned out to find out what their constituents' interests are.

Commissioner Ralph Nelson, who chairs the Community Development Advisory Board, wanted to find out what the housing concerns are.

"Seniors are a little reluctant to call you," said the Avon Township representative, who found many Oakland residents are upset about lack of low-cost housing and apartments being turned into condominiums.



Louise Churches (left) told her audience at the Oakland County Senior Power Day that society's information on the aging comes "from fiction," not fact. Robert Marks (at right, center) of Southfield was in the audience for the speech. The event was held in the Southfield Civic Center.




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U.S. auto fleet is getting older

Although new-car registrations are increasing, more Americans are holding onto their older models longer than at any time since 1950.

The median age of the U.S. automobile population hit 6.5 years in 1983, up from 6.2 years in the previous year and from 4.9 years in 1970.

Those are among the conclusions of R.L. Polk & Co., automotive industry statistician, based on registrations filed as of June 30 last year, the most recent available.

"**DESPITE THE** welcome turnaround in sales that caused an encouraging increase in new-car registrations, the aging process continued," said Joseph C. Cirincione, vice president and assistant general manager of Polk's Motor Statistical Division.

"The median age of the U.S. car population has been increasing steadily since 1976," Cirincione said. "And since 1975, the median age of the American truck fleet has increased from 5.8 to 7.2 years."

More than 8.33 million new cars were registered between July 1, 1982, and June 30, 1983 — an increase of 387,000 from the previous year. At the same time, the number of cars 15 or more years of age grew by 1.08 million to a record 7.9 million registered.

"New cars definitely are an attraction again, and we're expecting many older models will be replaced soon," Cirincione said. "Not only have economic conditions encouraged Americans to keep their cars longer, but the built-in quality and the price and availability of replacement parts have extended the lives of those cars."

- HIGHLIGHTS** of the Polk report:
- The registered passenger car population of the United States was 108.9 million on June 30, 1983, up 2.09 million from the previous year.
 - The total increase in the car population was 2 percent, the greatest growth since 1977-78, but still well behind the average rate of 3.2 percent annually in the decade that ended in 1976.
 - 6.2 million cars not re-registered are presumed to have been scrapped. This compares with 6.9 million autos scrapped in the previous year and with the all-time scrappage total of 9.3 million during 1978-79.

Madonna's open house March 25

Parents and prospective students are invited to attend an open house at 2 p.m. Sunday in Madonna College, Livonia.

An added attraction will be the Music Department Student Spring Recital at 4:30 p.m. in the new recital hall. Students will exhibit their talents with such instruments as the piano, guitar, flute and violin, as well as voice. The event will highlight academic programs leading to associate and bachelor's degrees. Included are: nursing, allied health, dietetics, child guidance and development, fashion merchandising and computers.

Faculty members will be present to answer questions. Also to be discussed are available scholarships and financial aid. For information regarding the open house, call 591-5052.

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