

Message from the Executive Director

by Jeanne Comeau

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Happy New Year, LOWLINC members, volunteers, and supporters!

This month we are welcoming winter. It may be cold and gray outside, but it's warm and sunny with LOWLINC friends. Even as the outdoor landscape appears dormant, plants and animals are using this time to rest and prepare for spring. So, too, LOWLINC is taking this time to get ready. We are busy planning for upcoming social events, updating our Service Provider list, growing our hardworking committees, training new volunteers, welcoming new board members, and generally planning for a wonderful year in 2024!



Looking back over 2023, it's heartwarming to reflect on the wonderful connections and good times we shared at the annual picnic and holiday party, on minibus trips, at weekly dinners, and on game days. At our Speaker Series meetings, we learned about Medicaid/Medicare, decluttering, prescription drugs, home safety, mental health and cognitive challenges, being a self-advocate, and making the most of the holidays. In the fall, we raised awareness about aging in our community through our Annual Walk and coordinated more than 100 vaccinations through our flu and COVID clinic. Members received a token holiday gift, and several enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner delivered to their doors.

LOWLINC's membership grew to 150 in 2023, and we continue to welcome more. Our volunteers provided more than 10,000 hours of service, ensuring our members had access to health care, grocery deliveries, handyman help, social connection through activities and friendly visits, mail and trash pick up, and tech assistance.

I welcome you to share your questions, suggestions, and feedback. Don't know whom to contact? For service requests, call 855-569-5462. For other questions, email info@lowlinc.org.

Wishing you a warm and joyful new year, full of hope and friendship.

Jeanne Comeau
Executive Director



Members Corner: Joe and Gail Sauro

by Mary-Jane Atwater, Communications Committee Member

Reflecting on his life, Joe Sauro says, "If you see a crack in the door, don't be afraid to open and enter." Seizing life's opportunities, as well as working hard, are two touchstones of Joe and Gail Sauro's careers. And add to that an exemplary dedication to service and family.

Joe was born in Ripabottoni, Italy, a small mountain town about 175 miles south of Rome. He says he had four career options: farmer, tailor, shoemaker, and barber. "I would always need clothes, so I chose to become a tailor and started learning from a local tailor when I was nine." With the nearest high school a donkey ride 40 miles away, further education was not practical. So, at age 14, Joe boarded a ship to the United States to live with his father's brother in Washington, D.C. Joe's immigration was facilitated by his mother's status as an American citizen. After attending high school for a year in D.C., Joe had to leave school to work. His first job at age 16 was in a drycleaning business for \$5 a week. One of the shop's customers, who learned of Joe's tailor training in Italy, introduced him to a tailor in downtown D.C. The tailor was reluctant to hire Joe, saying, "He's just a kid and still learning English," but he agreed to let Joe work for two weeks. When the tailor saw what Joe could do, he hired him for \$25 a week.



Joe and Gail Sauro

In 1960, in a "sweet" meeting, Joe was working a second job in a movie theater when he met Gail, who was working behind the candy counter. Gail was the oldest of 10, living in Silver Spring, Maryland. Joe and Gail married in 1963 and later welcomed four children: Tina, Stephen, Amy, and Marc.

In 1964, with \$250, a used sewing machine, a table he built, and an iron, Joe opened Sauro Custom Tailor at Connecticut Ave. and L Street NW in D.C. To market the business, Joe and Gail distributed flyers to offices on Capitol Hill. Business was slow at first, but about nine months after opening the shop, Senator Barry Goldwater became a customer, and, as word spread, more customers came from the Hill and elsewhere in D.C. Gail handwrote, typed, and distributed flyers on the Hill after the next election, which resulted in more business, including a call from the White House with a request for Joe to come to the family quarters to do alterations for President Richard Nixon. This began Joe's work, not only as the tailor for President Nixon, but also for Presidents Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush, as well as for Senator Barack Obama and other legislators. "We never discussed politics with any of our customers," Joe says with a smile.

The business continued to expand with the addition of formal wear rentals and, later, the Secret Service account, which Joe had for 33 years. While raising their four children in Silver Spring and tutoring at their school, Gail ran the shop and served as bookkeeper. "I can pin, mark, and measure, but Joe did all the sewing," Gail says. As the business grew, Joe and Gail employed eight tailors and seamstresses. As if running a thriving business wasn't enough, Joe was active in the Knights of Columbus and became Maryland State Deputy, 1982-84, a huge job overseeing the state's 68 chapters. While caring for their family, Gail

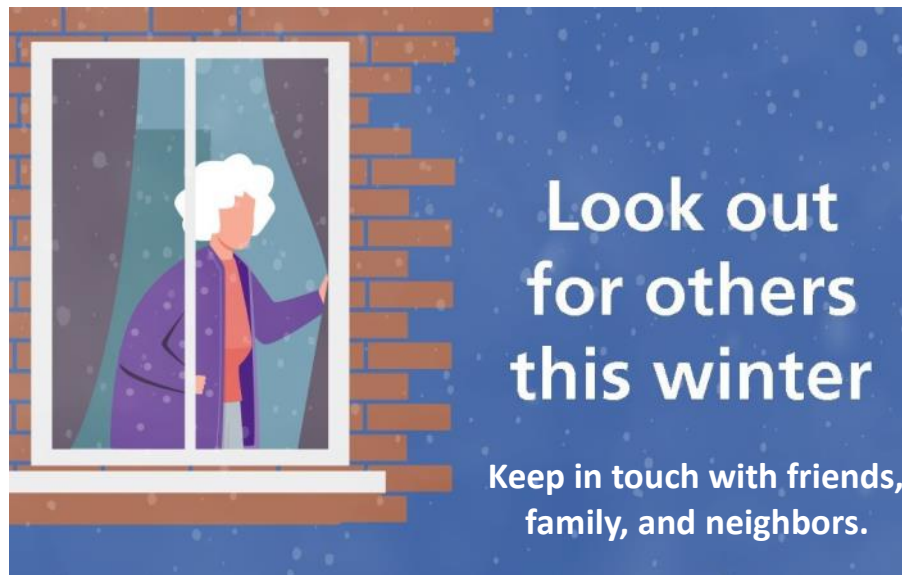
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was active in the Knights of Columbus Auxiliary in Takoma Park, serving as a volunteer to raise funds for the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, which supports people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

In 2014, after 50 years in business, Joe and Gail closed the shop and retired. "I took care of three generations of customers. It was a good life," Joe says. The Sauros had previously discovered LOW when they saw a Parade Magazine ad for the community, and they built their home in 2004 with the intention of retiring here. Since arriving, Joe and Gail have made their marks on this community. Gail gave up driving 12 years ago due to impaired vision. With encouragement from the Virginia Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired and with the sponsorship of the LOW Lions Club, she organized the LOW Vision Group in 2015 to support those in our community with impaired vision. The group meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 10 am in the Community Center. Gail, who received a LOWA Community Service Award for launching the support group, says, "This is the first big thing I've done," and she would like to do more to fight blindness. Joe has been a member of the LOW Lions Club for eight years, and Gail joined three years ago. Joe remains active in the Knights of Columbus, with 59 years of membership.

Joe and Gail were among LOWLINC's first members, joining in May 2016. Joe also serves as a LOWLINC volunteer and as a member of both the Social Activities Committee, where he organizes popular wine-tasting and dining out events, and the Member Outreach Committee, for which he served as co-chair for three years. According to Joe, "We recently have begun to use more LOWLINC services. LOWLINC is helping us live in our home; we appreciate it 100 times more these days!"



Volunteer Spotlight: Call Handlers

by Mary-Jane Atwater, Communications Committee Member

If you call the LOWLINC number, 855-569-5462, weekdays between 10 am and 3 pm, the friendly voice that answers will be that of a volunteer call handler. LOWLINC's 14 call handlers serve as the "front door" of our organization, setting up members' service requests as well as responding to anyone looking for LOWLINC information. We shine the spotlight this month on these volunteers, who keep LOWLINC operations running smoothly – and have fun doing it, too.

Today's call handlers receive specialized training in using an online service scheduling system, Run My Village, as well as the eVoice phone system that directs calls to the call handlers' personal smartphones. Member Services Coordinator Jane Capone also conducts monthly training meetings. Each call handler works a weekly two-and-a-half-hour shift, and substitute call handlers fill in when needed.

When a member calls to request a service, the call handler enters the information about the service into the online service scheduling system. LOWLINC uses a semi-automated process by which volunteers can select online the services that members request. If the service has not been filled and its date is fast approaching, Jane and the call handlers jump on the computer or phone to confirm a volunteer. To date, an estimated 99% of members' service requests have been filled.

According to Billie Cooke, "One of the best things about being a call handler is hearing how thankful members are for LOWLINC and the assistance we provide." Rosemary Butcher adds: "They often say, 'You all are the best!'" Joni McKinney says she enjoys getting to know the members, since when they call, they often like to spend a few minutes chatting. Gina Davies agrees: "I can tell when someone is lonely, so we talk for a few minutes. The call is like a friendly visit." Charlotte Fuqua, who has been a call handler since the program began in 2019, points to another benefit: "It's nice to be able to volunteer at home, in my bathrobe! I really like the flexibility." Joyce Warnacut emphasizes how call handlers help one another: "We have each other's backs and assist with any problem solving."

LOWLINC salutes its call handler team for all they do: Elaine Abraham, Mary-Jane Atwater, Rose Bilyeu, Rosemary Butcher, Jane Capone, Billie Cooke, Gina Davies, Vicky Fleming, Charlotte Fuqua, Joni McKinney, Christy Rappaport, Carolyn Rourke, Teri Vickery, and Joyce Warnacut.

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a call handler, contact Jane at memberservices@lowlinc.org.



Eight of LOWLINC's 14 call handlers after a monthly meeting. From left to right, Member Services Coordinator Jane Capone, Gina Davies, Charlotte Fuqua, Billie Cooke, Joni McKinney, Joyce Warnacut, Mary-Jane Atwater, and Rosemary Butcher.

Should I Join LOWLINC Now . . . or Wait?

by Jeanne Comeau, Executive Director

Eddie was running to get to pickleball. After putting away his groceries, he bent to grab his shoes and . . . his old back injury flared up! After a trip to urgent care, Eddie realized he was going to need someone to drive him to physical therapy for a few sessions. Always independent, he finds it hard to rely on someone else. But Eddie doesn't have family nearby and doesn't want to inconvenience friends.

Angela lives independently in her LOW home of 14 years. She drives during the day, is managing some health conditions, and enjoys socializing. Occasionally, she needs help with light home maintenance, including changing light bulbs. With some mild hearing loss, Angela finds it difficult to capture all the information she needs to take home with her from medical appointments.

Dale and Darlene have been married for 50 years and have lived in their three-story home at the lake for 29 years. Dale enjoys sharing lively stories about his work travels. He lives with a chronic health condition that keeps him home most of the time. Darlene enjoys puzzles, crafts, and having lunch with friends. They want to keep living at home but feel they need a helping hand to assist with grocery shopping and light home maintenance. Darlene wants to learn more about how they can best prepare for changes in their ability to live independently.

Which of these people would benefit from being a LOWLINC member today?

If you answered, "All of them," you are correct!

Eddie had signed up for LOWLINC only three weeks earlier. He called with requests for a prescription to be picked up, two home-cooked meals to be delivered, and two round-trip rides to physical therapy. Eddie also requested that his mail be picked up and trash put by the curb for the first week. By the end of the second week, Eddie was back to driving and cooking and looking forward to getting back into pickleball, but he was grateful for the support LOWLINC volunteers provided during his initial recovery. While he may not need assistance again anytime soon, he knows that he can count on LOWLINC's support now and well into the future.

Angela joined LOWLINC four months ago. She enjoys attending LOWLINC's monthly Speaker Series to learn more about things she can do to continue living independently. She looks forward to talking and laughing with LOWLINC friends while riding the minibus to theater outings each month. Instead of climbing onto her step stool, Angela has had volunteers change the light bulbs in her foyer and garage, as well as replace several smoke detector batteries at no cost to her. When she goes to doctor appointments, a volunteer note-taker accompanies her. She finds that, once she's back home, the medical notes are invaluable in supporting her ability to maintain her overall health.

Dale and Darlene joined LOWLINC four years ago. For the first few years, they enjoyed LOWLINC's Monday evening dinners and trips to local theaters on the minibus. Both also enjoyed serving as LOWLINC volunteers, with Dale helping other members with handyman tasks and Darlene serving on a LOWLINC committee. While they did not use a lot of services at first, they felt more connected with their



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lake community and appreciated that LOWLINC would be there for them when they needed a helping hand. In the past year, they have been grateful for friendly visitors for Dale while Darlene enjoys LOWLINC's game days at the community center. Rides for medical appointments, weekly food shopping trips, and errand services have made it possible for them to remain in their home.

You may wonder, is it too soon for me to join LOWLINC? The answer is: **It's never too soon for adults 55+ to become a part of the LOWLINC community!** By joining earlier, it's possible to more fully enjoy the wide array of benefits available to members — from a little extra help with maintaining our homes and enjoying social activities to knowing that LOWLINC is there “just in case.” Too often, people wait too long to join.

How cost-effective is LOWLINC membership? While there is an annual fee of \$400 for individuals and \$500 for a household, many members find that the fee is offset by savings realized through LOWLINC volunteer-provided services, including light household maintenance, free smoke detector battery replacement, and transportation for appointments and errands, to name only a few benefits.

In addition to social opportunities and helpful services provided by volunteers, LOWLINC provides a space for learning, sharing, and developing our “Plan B.” We can hope for the best, but learning together and sharing ideas to plan for our futures is empowering!

LOWLINC membership is available to adults 55+ who live in Lake of the Woods. Reduced fee memberships are available, based on income. For a membership application, call 855-569-5462 OR email us at info@lowlinc.org OR download an application from our Membership page at www.LOWLINC.org.



Do I Need a Plan B?

by Jeanne Comeau, Executive Director

First they call you “ma’am” or “sir,” then you find yourself keeping the medicine cabinet stocked with Bengay, and your AARP invitation arrives. What is happening?!

Okay, we may have crossed sky-diving off our bucket list, and climbing the stairs might take three times longer, yet we are still “ourselves”. How is it we’re finding that it’s true what they say: “Aging ain’t for sissies!” Nevertheless, we’ve made it this far – we are strong!

We may find ourselves wondering, however, how do we remain strong, connected, and independent? What will we do if we find we need more help than we expected?

We tend to go along, busy with our day-to-day activities, trusting that it will, somehow, all work out. Our Plan A may include saving and spending wisely, staying healthy, continuing to do the things we enjoy, and hoping we get to live the rest of our lives as independently as possible. While our Plan A may work, based on doing a few things and hoping for the best, we can be even more prepared to live life fully, on our terms, by considering our Plan B.

What is a Plan B? It’s a backup plan – just in case things don’t go as imagined. It may include:

- Expanding ways to maintain our health
- Learning about available resources before we need them
- Thinking about possible contingency plans should we need additional help or care

These things are not easy to do, especially by ourselves, which is why so often we don’t do them. But there is hope!

In the coming year, LOWLINC will offer Speaker Series presentations and other events and activities that will help each of us work through our own individual Plan B. From prevention and safety to medical and legal planning, we will become informed about options and discover tools and resources to help us.

Stay tuned for more information about how you can join LOWLINC members and volunteers to explore ways we can further empower ourselves for tomorrow!





New Study Shows Hearing Aids May Cut Risk of Cognitive Decline by Half

by Steve Hein, LOWLINC President

Research has long linked hearing loss with increased risk of dementia, and now a new study has found that using hearing aids can actually slow cognitive decline in older adults with hearing loss who are also at risk for memory and thinking problems. The study even quantifies the positive effect of hearing aid use. Previous research by Johns Hopkins University found that mild hearing loss doubled dementia risk. Moderate loss tripled risk, and people with a severe hearing impairment were five times more likely to develop dementia. This research revealed that hearing loss is also linked to balance and walking problems, including falls.

While this and other research has shown that hearing loss is a risk for developing dementia, the Aging and Cognitive Health Evaluation in Elders (ACHIEVE) study was the first randomized, controlled clinical trial to determine whether hearing aid intervention can affect the rate of cognitive decline. Results from the study were reported at the July 2023 Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and simultaneously published in *The Lancet*, a weekly, peer-reviewed general medical journal.

The ACHIEVE study was conducted at four U.S. sites among older adults aged 70 to 84 with untreated hearing loss who were free from any substantial cognitive impairment. Nearly 1,000 participants were recruited from two study populations: 238 adults participating in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study, a group known to be at risk of developing dementia, and 739 otherwise healthy volunteers. At the start of the trial, all study participants had mild to moderate hearing loss typical of older adults but no substantial cognitive impairment or dementia.

The study found that for the ARIC participants (again, older adults at risk of developing dementia), using hearing aids for three years cut their rates of cognitive decline nearly in half - 48%.

David Knopman, M.D., a Mayo Clinic neurologist and study co-investigator, quoted on the Mayo Clinic website, says the study shows positive benefits in delaying cognitive decline for people age 75 and older with hearing loss: "Older individuals who are at risk for cognitive decline but who are still (cognitively) normal are likely to achieve some benefit."

With almost two-thirds of adults over age 60 in the United States with some level of hearing loss, Dr. Knopman notes that hearing aids may improve the quality of life for people with hearing loss at any age. "Hearing loss is a disability that interferes with their quality of life, and they ought to think about getting a hearing aid if it would benefit them in their daily lives, regardless of whether it has this additional long-term benefit of delaying cognitive decline."

Watch this short YouTube video of Dr. Knopman and an ACHIEVE study co-investigator discussing hearing aids and cognition: <https://youtu.be/k1LHfMiEeRc>.

Can hearing aids prevent dementia?

Older adults who wore hearing aids and got regular help from an audiologist likely **reduced their risk of dementia in half** over a 3-year span, a 2023 study revealed.

This reduction in risk was specific to people who also had other dementia risk factors, (i.e., heart disease, social isolation and physical inactivity).

SOURCE: "Hearing intervention versus health education control to reduce cognitive decline in older adults with hearing loss in the USA (ACHIEVE): a multicentre, randomised controlled trial." Published in July issue of *The Lancet*.



Humor Corner

Why is Frosty never late? Time waits for snow man.

My butcher has a great sense of humor. Most of his jokes are about his work. He has some clever lines.

What did the police officer say when he saw the snowman stealing? "Freeze!"

What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire? Frostbite.

Why do birds fly south for the winter? Because it's too far to walk.

I warned him about starting his own ski resort. It's a slippery slope.



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LOWLINC (Lake of the Woods, Living Independently in Our Community) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer service organization whose mission is to enable LOW's older residents to remain safely and independently at home. Our operating model is based on the nationwide village model.

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