

## **Older Vermonters' Wisdom and Experience Critical to Our State's Hope for the Future**

Art Woolf's commentary [link below], "Vermont needs a fountain of youth, economically speaking," published on June 28th, may share accurate numbers around Vermont's demographic shift, but it only tells part of the story. What does it mean that Vermont has an older population? Certainly, we face challenges; we need more affordable housing, more transportation options, and a robust healthcare workforce and community services system to support us as we age. At the same time, as Vermonters live longer, healthier lives, we are building momentum towards strong and vibrant communities by contributing time, talents and accumulated wisdom with younger generations in so many ways - through work, artistic creation, civic engagement, and volunteering to name a few. Older Vermonters are not only our tax payers, but our citizen legislators, Meals on Wheels drivers, school mentors, and so much more. Truly, our state is enriched by the incredible value older people bring to every community.

Rather than feeling discouraged by the demographic shift, I have great hope for our future. I believe that Vermonters, young and old, are creative problem solvers and will embrace the positive attributes of Vermont's new demographics, while tackling any challenges this may bring with enthusiasm, skill and collaborative spirit. The real story, beyond the numbers of births, deaths and taxes, is about creating the kind of Vermont where we all, regardless of age, feel welcomed, valued, supported, and able to thrive. I have no doubt that Vermonters can build this kind of world, and I look forward to doing it together.

*Angela Smith-Dieng of Burlington is the Director of the State Unit on Aging at the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, whose mission is to make Vermont the best state in which to grow old or live with a disability, with dignity, respect and independence.*

The link to Art Woolf's commentary:

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/money/2017/06/29/vermont-population-aging-faster-than-nation/435238001/>