

The IONA Story

*After 22 Years,
A New Beginning*



BY DAVID B. RICHARDSON



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wenty two years ago a clapboard house on Butterworth Place took on new life as the home of a program created to provide social services to people in surrounding neighborhoods of Northwest Washington.

This is the story of how IONA Senior Services came into being in that house, then emerged as a force in the community that has benefited thousands of older persons.

The birth of IONA in 1975 answered an expressed need. More and more people had been asking neighborhood churches for guidance on medical care, public services and other social assistance. To improve their ability to handle such requests, three churches—St. Columba's Episcopal, St. Ann's Roman Catholic and Eldbrooke United Methodist—joined to establish a community service center. St. Columba's made available for this purpose the house on Butterworth Place, its former rectory. Plans called for the initial funding to come from a combination of dues from these

member parishes, fixed at \$500 a year, and income from anticipated counseling services.

IONA's first executive director, Pearlbea LaBier, arrived with a master's degree in social work in answer to an advertisement to start on an unpaid basis for three hours daily. She began initiating and managing programs while furnishing the vacant house on Butterworth Place with hand-me-downs. A good omen to Ms. LaBier, she recalls, is that she started with a host of enthusiastic and hard-working volunteers, drawn mostly from the three churches. Representatives from each of the churches made up the center's board of directors. The center began offering information and referral services to all comers, old and young, as well as a few recreational classes.

Imbued with an ecumenical spirit, the founders named the fledgling agency Iona House, taking the name from that of a tiny Scottish island in the Western Hebrides to which the missionary priest Columba fled from Ireland in the 6th Century. The island later developed into a site of retreat and refuge for several Christian faiths known as The Iona Community. Islanders have for centuries been dedicated to fellowship and service in this faith community. As for Iona House, for reasons to be

explained later, its name eventually was changed to IONA Senior Services (hereinafter in this history, the name is shortened to IONA).

A Fateful Early Decision

With the official opening of IONA on September 24, 1975, came immediate problems of funding. The founders offset part of the operating costs by sub-letting space in the basement to an outside recreation program supported by the DC Office on Aging, and the former rectory's master bedroom and bath to an American University student. Some financial help came from elsewhere in the community, including the Friendship Lions Club. But an initial plan calling for achievement of self-sufficiency through fees from counseling services failed to pan out.

In less than a year, IONA reached its first major turning point. A log of the many calls for information and referral indicated that the community group with by far the most needs was that of older persons. At that time, the number of people over 60 in the area was one quarter of the population. So IONA's board voted to shift its role to focus primarily on serving the aging—this regardless of income. Its founders recognized the fact that the needs of seniors transcend their economic status.

In keeping with the change in mission, Ms. LaBier began developing new programs for older people, including "Joys and Problems of Growing Old," "Communications Skills for Older Couples," and "Practical Aspects of Dying." A food cooperative was opened for seniors. Meanwhile a foundation grant permitted paying a small salary to Ms. LaBier as executive director and doubling her work-

week to 30 hours.

One of the first volunteer-based programs launched by



IONA was the Widowed Persons Outreach Service. Its announced purpose: "to help people over the catastrophic experience of a loved one's death." Widows and widowers responded to a call to train as the first group of volunteers to become peer counselors. This support group engaged in one-on-one counseling to those newly widowed and upon monthly social and educational get togethers. The Widowed Persons Outreach Service continued at IONA until the late 1980's. It re-emerged in 1993 under sponsorship of a seniors group at Sibley Hospital, with IONA as co-sponsor.

Another innovation introduced by IONA in 1976 focused on intergenerational communication and support, climaxing with a get-together called the Generation Gap Rap. A core group of older people and students from local schools met for months beforehand to develop the agenda and practice roles as joint discussion leaders. More than 100 people attended, and newspaper and TV coverage boosted IONA's name recognition. The success of Gap Rap caused it to be repeated two years later. Ever since then, intergenerational activities have played an integral part in IONA's work. These now involve 23 local schools.

Housing Helpers, Friendly Visitors, Resource Guides

One community development that lent further impetus to the efforts of IONA's staff and volunteers was the sale in 1976 of McLean Gardens, a rental property that had housed many low-income seniors. A number of these, priced out of buying in the Gardens, found help from IONA in getting resettled elsewhere.

By then, IONA had attracted the notice of the Junior League of Washington, which came through with a large grant and its own corps of active volunteers. With these newcomers, a Friendly Visiting program was established to make personal calls on the sick and homebound elderly. To prepare volunteers, the Junior League developed an orientation/training program, thereby establishing volunteer training as a hallmark of future IONA programs. Further funds

came from the Public Welfare and Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundations.

To spread the word of its services, IONA embarked on two publishing ventures in 1977. As the first of these, the agency started printing a regular newsletter, mimeographed in the basement—although hard put to find the necessary 200 names for its first mailing list to qualify for a bulk mailing permit.

Even more important in terms of long-range impact was the publication of a Senior Discount Directory offering discounts from local merchants to senior citizens. Financed by a grant from the DC Office on Aging, the directory turned out to be the forerunner of the *IONA Resource Guide* first published in 1982. The Guide changed the content of the slim directory to eventually include 23 different categories of organizations and services for the aging, and thereby proved so valuable to older persons that new editions continue to appear at regular intervals with ever-widening circulation. The 1997-1998 *IONA Resource Guide*, includes nearly 400 listings on 110 pages as a means of effectively addressing the needs of older persons.



Even an apparent setback in the course of its development turned into a plus for IONA. When the outside agency running a recreation program in the basement ended its lease, IONA found enough funding to hire a staffer to run its own recreation program. This proved useful in attracting more older people to IONA—some to join other programs, some to become volunteers.

By the end of 1977, the list of churches sponsoring IONA was growing along with its expanding services and participants. Newcomers to the board, bringing the number of institutional members to seven, included

National Presbyterian, Metropolitan United Methodist, and All Saints and All Souls Episcopal Churches. Throughout IONA's 22-year history, such religious institutional members, which include twenty-six churches and four synagogues, have continued to provide the central core of IONA's community support.

New Opportunities For Volunteers

The number of volunteers available to IONA mounted along with the growing number of institutional sponsors, helping to launch a variety of new programs. One such service, begun in 1977, was Telefriend, under which volunteers started to keep in regular telephone contact with older persons who were home-bound. Telefriend remains an essential element of IONA services, now reaching the home-bound through 36 volunteers.

As the list of IONA programs continued to expand, both in number and diversity, an interesting change took place in the leadership of some of these. While the agency had always concentrated its resources on programs relevant to aging issues and concerns, older people themselves now stepped up as volunteers to lead a number of new ones. These seniors wanted in this way to make use of their special expertise.

One unusual offering was a Russian conversation class, taught by a retiree from the University of Chicago faculty. Other volunteer led classes included Spanish, French, philosophy, history and literature, as well as "You and Your Aging Parents." Among the new classes for seniors, a crafts group proved to be one of the most popular and enduring; for years its products enjoyed a brisk sale (about which, more later). Just as popular and long-lived was a poetry class, in which senior-citizen bards developed to the point of holding well attended poetry readings and producing three booklets of their work.

When such classes needed more space than was available in Butterworth Place, IONA happily found it free of charge across the street in Friendship Terrace, the residence for older persons, where classes continue to this day.

In 1978, IONA underwent a change in leadership reflecting the increasing workload on its staffers and

volunteers. When the first director, Ms. LaBier, returned from a maternity leave, the board promoted Sally McCarthy, a volunteer advocate who had served as acting director, to be co-director.

Once past its first years, IONA again ran into a funding pinch as seed money from foundations ran out and new funding sources became scarce. So in 1978 the agency embarked upon concerted efforts at fund-raising by staging a bazaar at Butterworth Place featuring IONA-made crafts. This did so well as to become an annual event for over a decade. IONA also launched a direct mail campaign and set up a thrift shop in upstairs rooms.

At the same time, the agency took a new direction in fund-raising by starting annual benefit parties, the earliest being square dances with box lunches at Mazza Gallerie. One of the most popular evenings included a movie, *On Golden Pond*, and an embassy reception afterward—made memorable by a fire alarm in the middle of the show and a heavy snow.

In later years, IONA benefit parties acquired the name "An Evening to Remember" and turned correspondingly elegant with fine food and wine at leading embassies and other prominent locations. These affairs, featuring such celebrities as Barbara Bush and Rosalynn Carter, attracted scores of wealthy and influential donors—and tens of thousands of dollars.

The Year IONA Came of Age

The year 1980 shaped up as the most pivotal in IONA history, leading to major changes in its mission, structure, programs and funding. The Cafritz Foundation led off with a grant substantial enough to keep agency programs running for the rest of the year. But an even bigger development was in the works. Serious conversations had been under way for about two years regarding how IONA might expand its services with funds then becoming available from the DC Office on Aging (DCOA), established under the 1975 DC Act on Aging as the conduit for federal funds authorized under the Older Americans Act enacted in 1965.

For some time, DCOA funds had gone to a nutrition program for seniors, as a part of the Act. In Northwest

Washington, that program had operated under the auspices of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. It covered luncheon sites at several churches, a synagogue and a residential facility for older people.

The big change came when the director of the DC Office on Aging was obligated by the Act to expand



from nutrition sites to centers offering a full range of services health, education and social—for senior persons. The federal and local mandates required that such centers operate under the oversight of community-based "mini-commissions on aging."

In Northwest Washington, the Episcopal Diocese which had overseen the luncheon program found itself unable to undergo a major expansion of its activities in the aging field. As for IONA, it was at first deemed too small to become a regional center, as well as lacking the requisite broad community backing. Things moved toward a solution when a group of community leaders in Northwest Washington formed the Citizens Advisory Council of IONA. The CAC was designed "to insure neighborhood input into program planning and evaluation and thereby to assure community understanding and support"—thus meeting the legal mandate for a mini-commission on aging to provide the oversight.

The creation of the CAC was conceived by Ruth Haugen, a leading local activist for aging issues, and supported by Polly Shackleton, DC Council Member for Ward 3. Together with the IONA board and Sue Whitman, another expert in the aging field, they managed to win for IONA the official nod to become the lead agency for aging in the community. Ms. Haugen and Ms. Whitman then served through the 1980's as the first cochairmen of the CAC.

An Era of Expansion

By acquiring the designation of lead agency for Northwest Washington, with an annual grant amounting to \$180,000 the first year, IONA was able to start a considerable expansion of its programs for older people. To manage the changeover, the agency hired a new executive director, Mary Callahan, two social workers and supporting staff. IONA began by taking over operation of all senior luncheon sites in cooperation with their sponsors—churches, senior residence apartments and a synagogue—and began an expansion into other activities.

IONA's enhanced role in serving older persons served to attract new money from several different directions—foundations, corporations, community organizations and individuals. But for many years the annual grant from the DC Office on Aging continued to supply the bulk of IONA financing, increasing at periodic intervals. The annual payment then levelled off, but still makes up about half of the agency's annual income. The Citizens Advisory Council, for its part, went on to become a bulwark of support for IONA through such activities as public advocacy, open forums, networking with other organizations, planning and advice. Over the years, CAC members have taken volunteer roles at every level of IONA including positions on its board and long-range planning committees.

One of the first services added by IONA in expanding under its DCOA grant was that of Nursing Home Ombudsman. That role, as mandated by the Older Americans Act for each state, is defined as "an official appointed to receive and investigate complaints made by individuals against abuses" in nursing homes.

The Ombudsman program, under a fulltime project director, has in the years since IONA got it under

way made a noticeable impact in local nursing homes. It has done so by improving communications between residents and nursing assistants, monitoring methods of drug treatment and easing conditions in the institutions in other ways. Now involved in Ombudsman work are an advocate and 15 volunteers.

Bolstering Community Support

A change in leadership in IONA came in 1982 when Ms. Callahan resigned the directorship, having successfully established the Office on Aging program. An intensive search for a replacement took place, leading to the appointment of Elizabeth Fox as the new executive director. Ms. Fox, who held a master of social work degree with particular grounding in community organization, has in 12 years at the helm since then emphasized the development of community support for IONA's overall operation. This has included close coordination with the CAC, the luncheon sponsors and the member institutions.

By the end of 1982, the number of religious institutions sponsoring IONA climbed to 11 with the addition

of St. Alban's, St. Thomas Apostle, St. Patrick's and St. Margaret's churches and the Adas Israel synagogue. That number now stands at 30.

One of the first important services launched by Ms. Fox, in close cooperation with the CAC, was



the Home Care Support Program, a new concept under which trained volunteers working with a community health nurse provide temporary assistance in homemaking to older persons once they come home from a hospital or nursing home. In its first year of operation, the Home Care Support Service provided 1,000 hours of service to 45 clients.

Tying in closely with the beginning of the Home Care Support Program was an agreement calling for IONA to work mutually in case management with the

Community Outreach for the Elderly Program of George Washington University's geriatric service. The agreement called for staff personnel of GWU to assist in the supervision of IONA's social work staff, while IONA would provide space and ready access to volunteers and other support services. Although the IONA-GWU partnership started with nothing more than a one-page memo, Ms. Fox said of its first 12 years of operation that it "has worked fantastically well—for IONA, for George Washington University and for the community."

Another example of a successful partnership to benefit older persons created in those years was the BODYWISE swim and exercise program centered at the University of the District of Columbia and co-sponsored by IONA and several DC agencies.

New Homes, New Partners

In the mid-1980's, with the house on Butterworth Place a beehive of activity, and with an increase in funding from the DC Office on Aging, IONA extended its services for the elderly to two other locations. An Adult Day Health Center opened in 1986 at The Washington Home; it has operated more recently from St. Paul's Lutheran Church on Connecticut Avenue. The IONA location was one of 50 sites chosen to be part of a program sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. As such, it represented the agency's first exposure to a national foundation project.

IONA established the Adult Day Health Center to serve two purposes. It allows participants to live alone as long as possible with daily outside assistance, and it supports caretakers—such as relatives and friends who need a break.

Under the program, older persons for whom living alone is no longer safe without help can spend several hours every weekday at the Center engaging in various forms of recreation along with meals and close medical attention.

The other IONA activity to find a new home in 1986 was the agency's Social and Health Service Center. This was established at 4000 Albemarle Street, three blocks from Butterworth Place headquarters, under collaborative arrangements with George

Washington University, supported by the DC Office on Aging.

A variety of services were grouped in this new center—counseling, case management of "high-risk" older people in their own homes, home care support, information and referral, transportation, and paralegal assistance provided through the GWU Advocates for Older People. To handle all these, the Albemarle Street office housed a staff that included a registered nurse, social workers, interns and many volunteers.

By 1988, the workload for IONA had so increased as to result in the expansion of its paid staff to 30 persons, while the corps of volunteers had mounted to more than 500. And by then IONA had attracted new attention in the aging field as well, as evinced by its winning two coveted awards, along with substantial grants to further underpin its widening array of services.

One of these honors came from the accounting firm of Touche Ross and the Junior League, which jointly honored the agency as "a model of community-based planning and management at its best," with \$10,000 in cash. The other was the Community Achievement Award of the U.S. Administration on Aging, which recognized IONA as one of 13 local community organizations "with demonstrated excellence in building responsive community-based systems of care for older citizens." This included a \$30,000 grant that among other things enabled IONA to conduct a project called CONNECT, which reached 350 seniors in Northwest Washington to determine their needs and offer information on ways to meet these.

Coping With a Changing World

IONA's planning process in the early 1990's began to reflect changes in the outside world to a much greater degree. The 1990 census revealed in terms of concrete data a dramatic growth in the older population—data which IONA used extensively for community education and fund-raising. At the same time, IONA began to face its first competition as hospitals, other agencies and businesses moved aggressively into the senior market for services. The health care industry and Medicare and Medicaid policies began to undergo rapid changes—changes which often short-

changed seniors of limited income. The need for advocacy with government agencies, regulators and major institutions became even more apparent.

Meanwhile, with each passing year of expansion of IONA's services, staff and corps of volunteers, it became clearer that the agency was experiencing severe growing pains—these despite the dispersal of a number of programs to the Social Services and Health Center on Albemarle Street.

Space had become so short in the clapboard house on Butterworth Place that some key staff members had to work out of cramped cubicles in the basement—where sometimes there was flooding—and meetings routinely were shifted next door to St. Columba's Church. Storage space became scant even



in the attic, with some files stacked in a bathtub.

A five-year plan drawn up in 1989 called for establishment of a larger new home for IONA as "an imperative for

the future." In the words of that plan, "finding and funding permanent and adequate space in a new multi-service facility is essential for continued operation and growth....Broad community involvement with older persons can be realized as a central goal only with adequate space." The board concurred and started home-hunting.

Amid the search for a new headquarters, the board made another decision deemed important to IONA's expanding role: The name Iona House, used since its birth in 1975, was changed to IONA Senior Services. Many at the agency greeted the change as overdue because use of the word "House" had long caused some confusion; "Iona House" sounded like a home for the aging. Actually, IONA operated then as now away from base, throughout the community and in older people's homes through the widespread resources of member institutions, hospitals, schools,

and myriad other organizations, in addition to its hundreds of volunteers. In a new letterhead, the letters in the word IONA were spelled out in an acronym as standing for "Independence, Opportunities and a Network for Aging."

"A Catalyst for Change"

Months later, in 1991, came the biggest news in IONA's history since it became Northwest Washington's lead agency for older persons. IONA signed a renewable 50-year, \$1-a-year lease with the DC Government for a choice corner lot on which to build the agency's new center. The agreement had been negotiated with the administration of Mayor Marion Barry and signed by his successor Sharon Pratt Kelly. IONA's new location would be 4125 Albemarle Street, NW, just a block from Tenleytown Metro, replacing a building that had housed a police headquarters and then the U.S. Secret Service.

The new IONA building would be the first comprehensive service center for seniors in Washington, D.C. In the words of a strategic plan produced in 1994, the center will constitute "a catalyst for change. As a highly visible manifestation of IONA's presence, it will enhance the agency's image in the community. It will enable IONA to demonstrate its commitment to providing a true continuum of services to older persons. Its size should promote more efficient use of the agency's resources."

The projected center has ever since served as the focal point for IONA's planning and fund-raising. Committees were formed, architectural plans drawn, facilities mapped out, task forces set to figuring space priorities of various activities, bids let and a campaign begun for all the money it would take.

IONA named two co-chairs for the committee to make the new center a reality. One, Richard England, chairman emeritus of the Hechinger Company, was a leading supporter of IONA and a number of other non-profit social programs in the Greater Washington area, with wide-ranging contacts. The other chair, Mary Sherburne, was one of the Capital's top real estate executives, with special experience in develop-

ing creative programs for commercial facilities.

IONA announced a goal of \$8.3 million for the building drive, \$1 million of which would go into a fund for the center's future preservation. The target date for the money to be raised was set as the end of 1995. Midway in the campaign, Mrs. Jefferson Patterson, a prominent Washingtonian, gave the drive its first major impetus with a donation of \$2 million in honor of her mother, Isabella Goodrich Breckinridge. IONA's board, in response, named the building the "Isabella Breckinridge Center."

The Kresge Foundation followed up by pledging \$600,000, provided that IONA met the rest of its fund-raising goal on time. In the summer of 1995, Lois and Richard England and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation came through with offers of substantial matching-fund challenges. By September, 1995, with most of the fund goal met, work had begun in clearing the ground for the new center. Construction was expected to begin in early 1996 to reach completion by early 1997.



The 20th birthday year included a festive reception in St. Columba's Great Hall at which awards went to long-term volunteers. But there and elsewhere, in the Year of the Spade everybody showed more interest in looking ahead. Well under way by then was the countdown to C-Day—the day the Center would open—a period in which all hopes and dreams for the building would rest on stepped-up efforts on many fronts to make IONA's most ambitious project a working reality.

At the heart of this activity stood Ruth Miller, former assistant to the executive director, as the project manager. To assure the creation of a "comprehensive service center," she and the IONA facilities committee took a first rough design to staff members, community representatives and outside experts. As the months wore on, this required repeated makeovers to reflect changes in facilities and priorities. Ms. Miller oversaw work on the project right up until C-Day.

Meanwhile, the capital campaign for the Center shifted into high gear, led by the energetic and resourceful Richard England and his co-chair Mary Sherburne. Their team found itself racing the clock in the final months of 1995 to meet December 31 deadlines for the three challenge grants totalling \$1.2 million. IONA volunteers and staff kept phones ringing to potential donors all over Washington, and donors came through—765 by then, ranging from individuals sending small checks to a generous number who shelled out at a six-figure level, in an impressive display of deep community support.

The Final Push—Countdown To C-Day

IONA celebrated its 20th anniversary year in 1995 not with candles but a spade—the spade to symbolize the groundbreaking for the Isabella Breckinridge Center. The capital campaign to raise money for the building had reached the \$7 million mark, and IONA was entering a contract with a construction firm. So T-shirts issued at a rally kicking off the community segment of the campaign bore a drawing of a spade and the words: "Break Ground with IONA." The spade turned up again at IONA's annual benefit dinner, "An Evening To Remember," as a gold pin on the lapels of donors, volunteers, and other IONA supporters.

Amid these signs of change in the offing, IONA continued to forge ahead by enhancing existing programs and creating others to meet fresh needs. In 1995, IONA and its Citizens Advisory Council took the responsibility for launching a DC Coalition for Long-Term Care. Set up as a city-wide group, the Coalition quickly established itself as the premier advocate for improving long-term care in the capital.

By year's end, gifts and pledges topped the campaign goal by reaching \$8.5 million. Mr. England then expressed a hope that the total could grow to \$9 million to make possible an endowment to cover future capital needs and some additional operating costs. Again, the result would exceed the goal; by early 1997, the campaign's total rose to \$9.5 million, with the number of donors topping 1,000.

A timeline drawn up in 1995 gave an indication of how fast things were projected to move to bring the new building to completion: August, asbestos remediation; September, storage tank removal; December, demolition of building; February (1996), excavate foundation; April, first floor steel construction; May, heating and cooling installed; June, roof put on; July, exterior painting; August, interior painting, flooring, ceiling.

Soon the construction site became the biggest hole in that part of Northwest Washington. But not everything went according to plan. In the digging, a large area of the ground was found to be contaminated by gasoline leakage, posing an unwelcome delay and a threat to the construction budget. As former tenants, the District and federal governments bore the responsibility for soil removal. To recover the cost of this operation required IONA to enter into negotiations with officials of both. Finally, in October, 1996, the DC Government reimbursed \$237,000 to IONA to cover most of the cleanup work that had been carried out.



By early 1996, meanwhile, scaffolding rose above the corner site at Albemarle and 42nd, and months after that so did an invit-

ing new building with large and friendly windows on all sides. Inside, rooms and stairs began to take shape, and by late 1996 IONA could organize hard-hat groups of donors and volunteers to tour the premises.

Visitors entered to find that a spacious self-contained part of the first floor would be the new day

care center for frail elderly, replacing a day care center that had for years been located in a community church. Across from it was an equally large activity area for other older persons, off a center rotunda containing a reception desk and fronting a gathering place for volunteers. Upstairs were offices, including those for the social services center which was to move in from a building on Albemarle Street, and meeting rooms. A large garage dominated the basement; a vast storage area for records, the attic. There were stairs in front, but easier and direct access to the building was provided off a circular driveway and parking area in the rear.

Healthy Aging and A "Multiplier"

Within IONA, the challenge of the new building fuelled a number of developments. High among these were plans for a "Healthy Aging Program," devised to fill a central role as a means of health promotion and disease prevention for older persons to meet objectives required by the DC Office on Aging.

This program, under a newly hired director, obtained start-up grants from private foundations, based on planning undertaken by task forces of IONA's Citizens Advisory Council. In early 1997, IONA's board convened a special retreat to explore ways the Healthy Aging Program could maximize its efforts.

At the same time, IONA was focusing attention on changes that would be needed to administer the Center and its expanded resources. The organization established the position of director of programs and operations, filling it with a veteran administrator from a similar post in Seattle. Soon he and the staff were heavily involved in planning new telephone and computer systems, improved data management and other facilities. A senior staff member took up a newly created job as director of information systems and resources.

As IONA made such preparations to move into the Center, it faced a formidable hurdle. With more and more older people expected to turn to the organization and the services it provided, its operational resources were stretched thin. Yet IONA's ability to

offer a continued high level of service in future was jeopardized by the prospect of additional budgetary cuts by the DC government, which still accounted for about half the organization's income. DC had reduced this support in both 1996 and 1997.

IONA's response to the financial pinch was to undertake a major re-engineering of its resources to meet the expected increase in demand for its services. In January 1997, IONA unveiled an ambitious new program known as the "Multiplier Project." As devised by Executive Director Elizabeth Fox, this called for training more of the staff to manage volunteers, and for increasing numbers of volunteers to move into leadership and specialized positions. The program counted upon substantial numbers of senior volunteers—right into their late 80's—to seize the opportunity to make use of special skills.

Immediate goal of the Multiplier Project was to recruit, train and integrate into its operations a minimum of 40 volunteers in jobs at the management level. There, at little extra expense, the plan envisaged them playing a major part in helping the existing staff provide high quality, personalized service.

In launching the Multiplier Project, Ms. Fox expressed the belief that "it may turn out to be the most significant change yet in our operations." It was



only made possible, she pointed out, by IONA's impending move from its cramped and overcrowded original home on Butterworth Place to the greater space, facilities and day-and-night availability of the new Center, where space was especially set aside for volunteers.

In another step to support IONA's future operations, the organization announced the formation of a presti-

gious new advisory group, "The IONA Associates," to be made up of senior Washington business executives and other civic leaders. Many such individuals had shown an increasing interest in the organization and its many services to older people upon contributing to its capital campaign. Bringing such leaders into an ongoing connection through the Associates was seen as a promising means of increasing IONA's visibility in the community and beyond, as well as providing more tangible support.

New Capability, New Challenge

As final touches were put to the Isabella Breckinridge Center for its scheduled opening in April, 1997, the basic mission of IONA remained the same as it was back in the days when a handful of volunteers joined an unpaid director in the old clapboard house on Butterworth Place. IONA's goal, now as then, was to seek out ways to meet the myriad needs of the large population of older people in its Northwest Washington community.

But over two decades, IONA has changed in two significant respects. First, the organization has acquired through its good and growing works a name that has brought it increasing support on the local scene and new recognition nationally for its innovative community programs. And second, the agency now leads from new strengths—an effective working alliance of 30 churches and synagogues, four community-wide advisory councils, a professional staff of 40, and 730 volunteers of all ages.

Building on these strengths, plus vigorous leadership, IONA's community-wide team today offers an array of services that includes adult day health care, adult education classes, care management, community outreach to older persons, fitness programs, friendly visiting, home care support, home-delivered meals, information and assistance, an information handbook, intergenerational services, luncheon programs, medical claims assistance, mental health counseling, nursing home ombudsmen, neighbor-to-neighbor coalitions to reach senior citizens, social work assistance, Telefriend and transportation.

With the opening of the Isabella Breckinridge



Center, IONA finds itself with both an enhanced capability and further heightened visibility and support. It can thus expect to draw a growing number of older people to its services, covering the entire range from robust new retirees to the frail elderly. At the same time, it can hope to attract more and even better-qualified volunteers to augment a strong professional staff, now that greater opportunities beckon for those with managerial and other skills.

In short, IONA Senior Services, now operating from its shining new base, has ample reason for looking ahead with confidence to meeting fresh challenges in its mission to serve the many vital needs of the substantial and important community of older persons.



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THE AUTHOR

David B. Richardson, a retired journalist with a career spanning 47 years, struck a blow for vital aging in 1996, when three weeks before turning 80, he became the oldest runner to carry the Olympic torch through Washington streets—up a hill, actually—on its way to the

Atlanta Games. He keeps in shape through a regime of regular power walking and other exercise. His Olympics selection was based upon such volunteer activities as serving on IONA's board of directors, 1993-96, co-authoring its Strategic Plan in 1994 and continuing in IONA's service as a member of its Citizens Advisory Council. He heads the senior group at St. Alban's Church and has long acted as communications adviser to Samaritan Ministry, which obtains jobs for homeless persons. He entered journalism as a sergeant in World War II, in which he covered ten battles on land, sea and in the air as a combat correspondent for *Yank*, *The Army Weekly*, and spent the rest of his career as an editor and foreign correspondent for *Time*, then for *U.S. News & World Report*, covering major news events on six continents.

IONA SENIOR SERVICES

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