



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Leadership Institute for Active Aging -- A Volunteer Success Story

West Palm Beach, FL. -- Elizabeth Johnson arrived in Tallahassee one Thanksgiving Day to visit her mother who had suffered a series of debilitating strokes. Elizabeth had been driving back and forth from Palm Beach County to cook and provide support for her mother. Expecting to cook the Thanksgiving meal, she was surprised to discover the table and fridge overflowing with food. Her mother explained the bounty of food by saying “You don’t have to bring food for me. I have many friends. You need to help someone who is closer to where you are.” Elizabeth took her mother’s words to heart and has spent a lifetime helping and advocating for others.

Elizabeth taught reading skills to students for 28 years in Palm Beach County. It was there she began her journey of volunteer advocacy for those who were vulnerable and most needed her voice. During her time as a teacher, Elizabeth became politically active and lobbied for school reform, on the State and National level, with the Political Action Committee.

Upon retirement from the school system, Elizabeth started a second career. She began to volunteer eight hours

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a day, five days a week, helping the Sickle Cell Foundation and soon became volunteer President and CEO of the organization. Her forte was establishing community connections. She actively sought out funding opportunities and received and managed grants in support of her work. During this time she also became involved as a member of the founding Board of Directors for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Coordinating Committee. She spent nine years, in this position, soliciting funds, recruiting participants, organizing and carrying out the annual MLK Awards Breakfast.

In 1996 Elizabeth became a Palm Beach County Ombudsman and received the “Shalloway & Shalloway Elder Advocate Award”, winning one of the categories within the Agency on Aging’s annual Prime Time Awards event for her outstanding volunteer service. Ten years later Elizabeth still serves as an Ombudsman, protecting the rights of seniors in nursing homes and other facilities.

Through contacts made during her time as an Ombudsman volunteer, Elizabeth discovered the Silver-Haired Legislature (SHL). She was invited to join the program and it took very little time for her to become involved. Elizabeth has served locally as the Treasurer of the Silver-Haired Legislature and was also the Membership Committee Chair. She serves at the State level of the SHL as Second Vice-Chair and is a member of the Board of Directors. Now in her 10th year as a representative, Elizabeth currently serves as President of the Nation Council of Silver-Haired Legislators.

In 2004, Elizabeth saw a brochure about the Leadership Institute for Active Aging (LIAA), a program of the Agency on Aging of Palm Beach/Treasure Coast, Inc. that is funded locally through a \$120,000 grant from the Quantum Foundation. Although she thought she knew what was happening in Palm Beach County as far as seniors were concerned, she felt there was always something more to learn. Through the Leadership Institute’s eight-week program, Elizabeth discovered that there was much to learn about the aging network, aging resources and that, although many needs of seniors are met through senior service programs in the county, many needs go unmet. Elizabeth discovered many ways she could provide further help. An already extremely busy Elizabeth has now started a volunteer position with the Just Checking Program and visits “two lovely women” clients that require support to remain independent in their own homes.

While attending the LIAA classes Elizabeth heard about the 2005 White House Conference on Aging Solutions Forum that was to be held in Palm Beach County. She attended the Solutions Forum and became determined to attend the National White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) in Washington, DC, in December, 2005. She

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learned that she could attend as a volunteer, applied for, and was accepted to attend the conference in a volunteer capacity. At a recent LIAA Alumni event Elizabeth gave a detailed report about the WHCoA resolutions and interesting information on the process of how delegates reach the goal to achieve the final 10 resolutions.

Elizabeth has been, and continues to be, a strong, determined, caring advocate for all seniors. She is determined to achieve her goals and whether interacting with politicians, CEO's, her network of friends, fellow volunteers, or others, she adheres to the belief that "If you want to, you can". She has done more in one lifetime than most would achieve in two. She has volunteered countless hours of time to mentor children, advocated for seniors, lobbied for positive changes in society and been tireless in pursuit of resources necessary to support her causes. Her mother's words "help someone where you are" must forever echo in her ear as she is always available to help where the need is greatest.

The Leadership Institute for Active Aging (LIAA) is a senior volunteer program of the Area Agency on Aging of Palm Beach/Treasure Coast, Inc., that is funded through grants from the Quantum Foundation, the Picower Foundation, University of Maryland, and the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties. For more information about the Leadership Institute for Active Aging call Nancy Fornatora the Area Agency on Aging at (561) 684-5885.

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MISSION STATEMENT

To advocate, plan and promote the independence, dignity, health and well-being of all elders and their caregivers in a way that embraces diversity and reflects the community's values.

