

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF MISSOULA AGING SERVICES

# 2024 CONNECTIONS

FALL

## A Lifetime of Service

### Dr. Dick Blank on the Power & Promise of Aging



If you have been a Missoula Aging Services volunteer, client, or caregiver in the past 20 years, chances are you know Dr. Richard “Dick” Blank. A devoted volunteer at MAS for nearly two decades, Dr. Blank has touched countless lives with his compassion, wisdom, and unwavering commitment to service, **exemplifying the profound value that older adults bring to our community.**

Born in central Wisconsin, Dr. Blank pursued a career in medicine, practicing as a radiologist in North Dakota and Minnesota. Dr. Blank met the love of his life, Pat, while in medical school. The two had four children and eight grandchildren. He recalls fondly their favorite activity: a spring canoe trip each year to catch the opening of walleye season in southwest Ontario. He loved being together in the wilderness for 16 days, with no other company but the animals.

Pat was diagnosed with dementia in 2003, and the couple moved to Missoula in 2005 to be closer to their children. Serving as Pat’s caregiver was a challenging job, and Dr. Blank realized he needed to find a volunteer opportunity beyond his home – something that would keep him active and positively engaged. He eventually found MAS, where he began conducting assessments for the Meals on Wheels program, checking in on clients every 90 days to ensure they were doing well, a job he continues to this day. Over the years, Dr. Blank has formed meaningful connections with many of these clients, some of whom he has been calling since he began almost 20 years ago. “I just like people,” he says.

Pat passed away in 2013. Caring for her was a transformative experience for Dr. Blank. **“I found during that journey, particularly early on, there was so much ignorance around the topic of dementia,”** he recalls. This deeply personal experience motivated him to become a passionate advocate for dementia caregiving, using both his medical background and his caregiving experience to support others in similar situations.

In addition to his work with Meals on Wheels, Dr. Blank volunteers as a co-facilitator for three caregiver support groups at MAS, where he helps caregivers navigate the immense challenges they face. **“The stress that comes with caregiving is off the charts,”** he says, emphasizing the importance of caregivers taking time for themselves. He also volunteers with Dementia Friendly Missoula, a group working to educate the community about dementia and reduce the stigma that caregivers and their loved ones often face.

*Continued on Page 3*

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## Transforming Aging Through Conversations



On rare occasions, we have the privilege of knowing in the moment that we are part of setting something important in motion. That's how I felt during our inaugural **Community Conversation on Aging** on June 5th at the Clark Fork Riverside Apartments. About 30 people—residents, guests, staff, and volunteer facilitators—came together to share personal stories, insights, and perspectives on aging.

The discussions were authentic, vulnerable, poignant, and inspiring. They revealed aging as a complex and diverse experience, shaped by societal norms and individual circumstances. Positives like the wisdom gained from many years, the joys of family time, and personal pursuits are balanced with challenges like decreases in abilities, loss of loved ones, and changes in identity post-retirement. Financial security, good health, and social connections can tip the scales. People want to, and do, contribute to their community in meaningful ways. They want to be seen, heard, and valued, but they sometimes feel invisible or dismissed. They are also eager to talk about their aging journey and express the full range of thoughts and emotions that come with it.

This Conversation was the result of a lot of planning and hard work by dedicated MAS volunteers who believe that by bringing diverse people together to connect around aging, we can increase respect and foster relationships, change our perceptions of older adults, and inspire age-friendly action. Because of the pilot's success, the group has committed to holding more Conversations over the coming year.

It feels like an auspicious beginning with the power to influence how we embrace and support our aging selves.

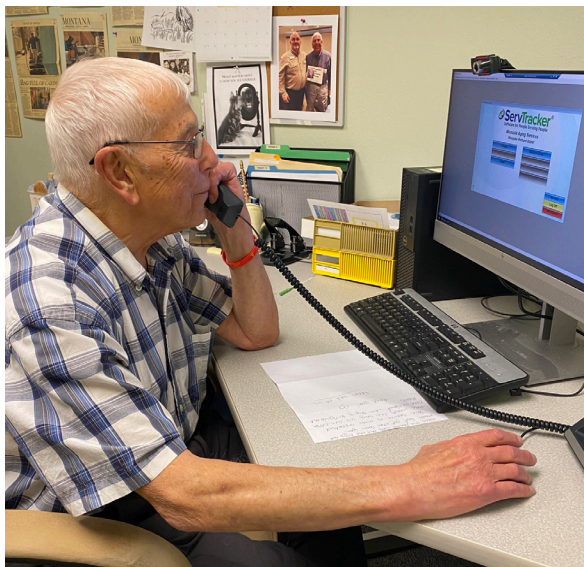
Change is in the air.

**Lisa Sheppard**

Chief Executive Officer







*(Continued from cover)*

Dr. Blank's dedication to service goes beyond his volunteer roles. He is a firm believer in the value that older adults bring to society. "I think people tend to think that as you age you become less valuable," he reflects. "I reject that concept completely because I've had life experiences that someone who is 20 hasn't had yet." Despite the physical challenges that come with aging, Dr. Blank continues to contribute meaningfully, driven by a lifetime of wisdom and a desire to stay engaged. "I walk with a cane now... but I still walk a couple of miles each morning. I accept the fact that I may be slow, but I can still do it."

He emphasizes that society is missing out on the significant contributions older adults can make. "It's a mistake that this society will try and push you into a corner," he says. Dr. Blank's life and work are a testament to the idea that older adults' involvement enriches the entire community.

**For Dr. Blank, volunteering is not about leaving a legacy but about living in the moment and continuing to learn from others.** At 86, he remains committed to contributing to his community for as long as possible. "I want to keep volunteering as long as I can. There is evidence that says it's healthy to keep challenging your mind. I like being put into a situation where there are questions that make me think. I like learning and learning from other people," he shares.

As he reflects on his life and his years of service, Dr. Blank offers a simple yet profound perspective: "I've loved life; I still love life. But at my age, I'm also prepared for the journey to end and have tried to prepare myself and the family for that. **Just because you prepare for the end of your life doesn't mean it's going to end; it just means you're better prepared.**"

Dr. Blank's humility, wisdom, and unwavering commitment to helping others make him a shining example of the incredible value that older adults bring to society. We are deeply grateful for his nearly 20 years of service at Missoula Aging Services and look forward to many more.



# Champions of Compassion

## Celebrating Our Outstanding Volunteers

At the heart of our mission to serve older adults is the unwavering dedication of our volunteers, whose commitment to giving back ensures that no one in our community is left behind. Thousands of Missoula County residents have come to us over the years with the desire to help others, and today, over 500 are actively doing just that. These remarkable individuals derive purpose through their generous donation of time, energy, skills, and compassion, making a profound difference in the lives of older adults in our community. We are honored to highlight seven extraordinary volunteers whose dedication has changed so many lives for the better. Their vital service not only uplifts those they assist, but also strengthens the bonds that keep our community connected.



Respite Volunteer **Lynde Howe** has volunteered more than 200 hours since she started in April 2023. She is incredibly dedicated to her client, taking him on weekly hikes all around Missoula and Western Montana. On days when the weather is less than ideal for hiking, they go to the gym. Lynde's service provides meaningful connection for her client and beneficial respite for his caregiver.

Cleanup Crew Volunteer **Joseph Gresham** has taken on clients from Clinton to Frenchtown and has worked to solve issues as they come up during his time volunteering. He has given out his phone number to clients so they have someone to call when needed and has even helped clients avoid eviction through his work mowing lawns.



Volunteer **Rick Hall** has shown amazing commitment to empowering older adults to stay connected and safe online. He is passionate about protecting older adults from scams. He volunteers at every Tech Café, takes MAS client tech phone calls and he served with the Lifelong Connections Program, training older adults to use tablets.

Volunteer **Joel Dalenberg** has helped several older adults navigate the local bus system through the Confident Rider Program. He tailors his help specifically to each person. Clients appreciate his kindness and patience. He researches programs and services on his own time to better help his clients. Joel changed an 80-year-old's life by giving her the ability to leave her apartment and get out into the community again.







**Patti Holkup**, a Dementia Friendly Missoula volunteer, embodies the spirit of commitment. Every week, she hosts a support group called Memory Loss Conversations for individuals living with dementia. What sets Patty apart is her unwavering dedication. After the wind storm in July, despite having no power or internet at home and being unable to get her car out of the garage, she biked to the office with her laptop in tow, determined not to cancel the meeting.

**Peggy Seidel** lights up every volunteer shift with her joyful presence, as a volunteer co-coach for the Matter of Balance Falls Prevention class. Extra friendly and outgoing, she shares her radiant smile and gentle approach with each Matter of Balance participant, making them feel truly special. Peggy's dependability and commitment to her volunteer role are exceptional. She's contributed over 70 hours to helping Missoula residents prevent falls!



**Sandi Fisher** serves as a Caring Companion volunteer. She has all the necessary qualities to be an effective helper, friend and advocate for older adults. With her personable, non-judgmental and humorous style, she helps companion clients feel comfortable. They know they can trust and confide in her. Sandi is celebrating 10 years with the Caring Companion program. Her dedication and experience make her a success.

## Thank you to all our MAS volunteers!

Caring Companions  
Respite Caring Companions  
Tech Trainers  
Dementia Friendly Garden  
Meals on Wheels  
Volunteer Drivers

Bus Mentors  
Clean Up Crew  
Jewelry Sale Volunteers  
Education Volunteers  
Community Volunteers

# CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

## Time for Medicare Open Enrollment

As fall arrives, MAS enters one of our busiest seasons at the Resource Center—Medicare Open Enrollment! From **October 15th to December 7th**, you have the annual opportunity to review and optimize your Medicare coverage. This is the perfect time to make changes to your prescription drug plan (Part D) or Medicare Advantage plan.

Whether you're looking to explore new plan options or ensure that your current plan remains the best fit for you, MAS is here to assist you. We encourage you to take advantage of our Open Enrollment consultations. These personalized appointments are designed to help you review your choices and secure the most suitable and cost-effective plan for the upcoming year.

Many people don't realize that Medicare plans can change from year to year. Even if you're satisfied with your current plan, it might not be the best option for next year. That's why it's crucial to check your Medicare plan to ensure your medications and providers are covered. Our Resource Specialists are here to help you compare options, ensuring that your Medicare plan aligns with your evolving needs and financial goals.

We also understand that finances can be a concern. MAS can guide you in exploring discounts on Medicare prescription plans through programs such as Big Sky Rx and Extra Help. You can count on MAS to provide the facts for informed decisions.

With MAS by your side, you can navigate Open Enrollment with confidence. We're excited to help you find a healthcare plan that meets both your needs and your budget. Schedule an appointment with MAS today, and let's tackle Open Enrollment together!

## Creating Empowerment through the Power of Listening

As MAS celebrates national "Residents' Rights Month" throughout October, we recognize the need to empower individuals in long-term care to speak up for their rights, personal wishes, and dignity, without fear of judgment or dismissal. These values are embodied in this year's theme, "The Power of My Voice."

Reflecting on this theme, how can we best empower and amplify residents' voices in our daily work? One obvious answer is by assuring residents they can express their concerns and experiences safely and confidentially to their local long-term care ombudsman, who will advocate for their rights and safety.

However, encouraging residents to speak out is only half of the equation—we must also remember the importance of listening. It is easy to assume we know what an aging person wants or needs, especially when there are challenges with communication or memory loss. Residents can speak up, but if we just rush to define their "problem" and find a solution, we risk missing subtle nuances or red flags that require reading between the lines.

In addition to listening carefully to comprehend the situation, it is equally important to practice "compassionate listening" simply for the sake of acknowledging and honoring the resident's unique personal experience.

As we observe Residents' Rights Month, we can help long-term care residents achieve the full power of their voice by practicing listening that is both careful and compassionate. In turn, this allows us to be the most effective advocates possible and accomplish our goal of empowering the residents we serve.

- Jessie Lundberg & Mary Dalton, MAS Ombudsmen

## After the Storm:

Thanks to our donors and volunteers, MAS was able to quickly respond to client needs after the July 24 storm. Over 300 clients were served the day after the storm, with Meals on Wheels Drivers providing food and water and MAS staff checking in on all clients.



Meals on Wheels clients were some of the most vulnerable as many are over 80 and home-bound. Checking on their well-being was critical and time sensitive.



Roughly one quarter of MAS clients rely on oxygen tanks and were our top priority. We ensured they were connecting with their oxygen providers, who were able to come out the next



Many were without water or electricity, our drivers delivered extra water and MAS worked to connect clients to additional resources.

## A Heart for Helping Sharon's Commitment to Community



Sharon Scott has been an MAS volunteer since she retired in 2013, initially lending a helping hand in the office, managing tasks like filing and database updates. "I loved everyone that I connected with, and I just felt like I fit," she recalls.

Sharon describes herself as a "people person" who enjoys connecting with others over the phone and offering help. **This quality became especially valuable during the severe wind storm that hit Missoula on July 24, leaving many without power.** Although Sharon's home was spared from fallen trees, she vividly remembers the storm as "one for the history books." A few days later, she volunteered in the call center, as most of the calls were from people anxious about their downed trees. Sharon's role became one of reassurance. "I was trying to calm people down and let them know we were there for them," she says.

Beyond practical concerns, Sharon found that some callers were simply lonely and needed someone to talk to. "Sometimes you don't have an answer for people, but you can be there to listen and be a friendly voice to sympathize with them," she explains. In many cases, Sharon's own experience brought comfort. "I could say, 'Well, my power is out too, we're in the same boat,'" she says, noting that people were often surprised and pleased to speak to a real person right here in Missoula.

For Sharon, volunteering is more than just a way to pass the time; it's a meaningful way to stay active and engaged in her community. "I volunteer partly because I'm retired, and I like to have something to do with my time," she shares. "It's a way of feeling useful and being active. I really enjoy it. It gives me a sense of purpose in my community."

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# JEWELRY SALE 2024

We are thrilled to announce that our 2024 Jewelry Sale was a record-breaking success, thanks to YOU—our amazing supporters!

Together, we raised an incredible \$45,000 to help older adults in our community. Your generosity helps us continue to provide essential services and support. Thank you for making this event shine! We hope to see you again next year.



**Save the Date:**  
**Saturday, May 17, 2025**  
Missoula County Fairgrounds  
Home Arts Building

# Aging in Place

## Support from MAS In-Home Services

MAS is committed to helping older adults age comfortably and safely in their own homes through a variety of in-home programs. Our **Care Management** program provides person-centered care for individuals with memory loss, ensuring they receive the specialized attention and support they need to live with dignity. This program helps families navigate the complexities of memory loss while focusing on the unique needs of each person.

For those who care for loved ones, our **Family Caregiver Support** program offers invaluable resources, guidance, and emotional support, including both virtual and in-person monthly support groups to help caregivers manage the physical and emotional challenges of their roles.

Additionally, our **Home Modifications** program plays a crucial role in maintaining independence by offering essential home improvements, modifications, and repairs. These modifications, such as grab bars, ramps, and other safety enhancements, are designed to prevent accidents and promote independence.

Together, these programs empower older adults to age in place with dignity, security, and confidence. These programs can help you today—please call or visit our website for more information.

## Get Involved!

### Make Your Voice Heard in the Community

Mountain Line and the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) are updating their respective long-range planning documents and invite your input!

The **Transit Strategic Plan and Long-Range Transportation Plan** serve as the framework for future transportation improvements in the Missoula region. Your feedback will be used to help prioritize improvements over the next five to ten years. **A survey is available for you to take at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/missoulatransportation>.**



Join the City of Missoula in September and October to learn about the Our Missoula Draft Land Use Plan! The City will share the results of the collaborative community process through a series of public events and on the Our Missoula website. **This is the last opportunity to learn about and comment on the Draft Land Use Plan before it goes to City Council for adoption in October.** There are multiple ways to learn and participate:

- Community presentations
- Drop-in review and discussions with City Staff
- Online at <https://www.engagemissoula.com/our-missoula>
- By calling Community Engagement Specialist Ashley Brittner Wells at 406-552-6221 or emailing [brittnerwellsa@ci.missoula.mt.us](mailto:brittnerwellsa@ci.missoula.mt.us).

Scan the QR code or visit <https://www.engagemissoula.com/our-missoula> for event details and project information.



# MAS Staff News

Our team at Missoula Aging Services continues to grow to provide the best service possible to our community. This summer we welcomed three new staff members, celebrated one Service Milestone, and several promotions and position changes internally.

**JESSIE LUNDBERG** joined the Agency’s Ombudsman team in August. Jessie brings a unique blend of skills and experiences from her work in local nonprofits such as HomeWord and Montana Legal Services. Jessie is a graduate of the University of Montana, holding degrees in both Social Work and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Montana Law School. Jessie is passionate about working with older adults and people with disabilities in the capacity of protecting their rights in long term care.

**NOAH PAULSON** joined the Resource Center team as a Resource Specialist at the end of May following graduation from the University of Montana with a BA in Psychology and a minor in Human and Family Development. Noah brings experience working with older adults at a senior living facility and has been a wonderful addition to the team.

**ALEXANDRA STROUD** joined MAS as a Resource Specialist in July. Alexandra is a graduate from the University of Montana with a BA in Anthropology and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and is passionate about helping people connect with resources in our community.

## Celebrating Years of Service

At Missoula Aging Services, we appreciate the incredible work our staff does every day. We simply couldn’t do it without them! This summer, we proudly celebrated the following Years of Service Milestone. Congratulations!

<b>Ginny Holland</b>	Chief Financial Officer	5 Years
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## PROMOTIONS & POSITION CHANGES

**COREY BRESSLER** was promoted from Education Program Supervisor to Community Services Supervisor in April.

**JAMES GLEIXNER** transferred from Care Manager to Nutrition Program Specialist in August.

**CHRIS HIGHTOWER** was promoted from Resource Specialist to Resource Specialist Team Lead in May.

**RIA OVERHOLT** was promoted from Nutrition Services Program Manager to Community Services Director in July.

**DEAN THOMPSON** was promoted from Nutrition Program Coordinator to Nutrition Program Manager in July.



EST. 1982

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MAS Events

**VIRTUAL NEW TO MEDICARE WORKSHOP**

Wednesday, September 11 from 6-7:30 pm  
Wednesday, October 9 from 6-7:30 pm  
Register online: [virtualnewtomedicaremas.eventbrite.com](https://virtualnewtomedicaremas.eventbrite.com)

**IN-PERSON NEW TO MEDICARE WORKSHOP**

Wednesday, November 13 from 12-1:30 pm  
Missoula Aging Services Offices  
337 Stephens Ave, Missoula, MT 59801  
Register online: <https://medicaremas.eventbrite.com>

**IN-PERSON MATTER OF BALANCE**

Mondays at 1 pm, September 30 - November 18  
Greater Good Health  
2230 N. Reserve St, Ste 110, Missoula, MT 59808  
Register online: [MatterofBalance-MAS-2024.eventbrite.com](https://MatterofBalance-MAS-2024.eventbrite.com)

**VIRTUAL MEMORY LOSS CONVERSATIONS**

Thursdays from 10-11 am. New attendees welcome!  
Participate online using Zoom. No cost.  
Facilitated by Dementia Friendly Missoula.  
Register online: <https://bit.ly/3ITnAsY>

**VIRTUAL CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS**

Participate online using Zoom. No cost.  
Second Monday of each month from 4-5 pm  
Third Tuesday of each month from 1-2 pm  
Register online: <https://bit.ly/2YkyVPU>

**IN-PERSON CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS**

Participate in person at Missoula Aging Services. No cost.  
Fourth Wednesday of each month from 2-3 pm  
Check-in at the front desk when you arrive.

**VIRTUAL POWERFUL TOOLS FOR CAREGIVERS**

Tuesdays from 10:30 am-12 pm, October 1 - November 5  
Participate online using Zoom. No cost.  
Register online: <https://powerfultools-masfall2024.eventbrite.com>

**IN-PERSON TECH CAFE**

Missoula Aging Services. No cost.  
First Monday of each month from 1-3 pm  
Check-in at the front desk when you arrive.

View a full list of events at  
[MISSOULAAGINGSERVICES.ORG](https://MISSOULAAGINGSERVICES.ORG)