



**HENRY STREET  
SETTLEMENT**

# SENIOR COMPANION COURIER

SPRING/SUMMER 2012

265 HENRY STREET, NEW YORK NY 10002 212.766.9200 WWW.HENRYSTREET.ORG

## director's corner

Every year, many seniors living at home have difficulty managing on their own. That's where the Senior Companion Program can help. Last year, we served more than 200 clients and our efforts enabled 97 percent of them to remain independent in their own homes.

As the new Director of the Senior Companion Program (SCP), I've been impressed by our volunteers and their supervisors. I've been equally pleased with the members of our Advisory Council, all of whom donate time, energy and ideas to the program. One valued member, Fernando Perez of ConEdison, has been a staunch champion of Senior Companions for years, advocating for the program in many venues, including facilitating ConEdison's support for our newsletter. Fernando is retiring this year; we want to wish him the best and thank him, from the bottom of our hearts, for all he's done for the SCP.

The SCP continues to make a difference. Evidence of this occurred just a few months ago when Ricardo, one of our volunteers, made sure that his client received the help he needed after the client had fallen in his apartment. That client now credits Ricardo's perseverance with saving his life. We are all so lucky to have volunteers like Ricardo who have a profound impact on their clients' lives.

We've started 2012 with a new group of trainees, and we are also conducting our first training class in Spanish. We are looking forward to bringing the SCP to more people in the year ahead.

—Debby Lowenstein, Senior Companion Program Director

## REAL LIFE STORIES: Virginia and Deborah

Virginia, 93, has spent most of her life as an avid reader, traveler, and above all, lover of the opera. However, shortly after her retirement from a career in the health care industry, the music stopped; Virginia had lost the ability to hear.



For Virginia, who always prided herself on her many talents and independence, losing her hearing didn't just mean she had to say goodbye to Mozart, Verdi and Beethoven; it also made certain day-to-day tasks extremely difficult. Imagine walking down the street to buy groceries in a suddenly silent world. Imagine going to the doctor for an important appointment and not being able to hear the information he provides.

So a little over two years ago, Virginia called upon the Senior Companions for assistance. Deborah Cochran, 65, then a new volunteer, was assigned to her care. Originally from Antigua, Deborah worked as a teacher's aide before retirement. She loves helping others and reading, so becoming a Senior Companion had been a no-brainer. She is friendly and down-to-earth, and if you ask her what services she provides for Virginia, Deborah's response is modest. "I might call her doctor, or help her carry a few of her groceries. Often we'll talk and joke around."

*Continued on back page*



## SENIOR COMPANIONS has moved!

**New mailing address:**  
265 Henry Street  
New York, NY 10002

**New street address:**  
351 Madison Street #1E  
New York, NY 10002

**New Phone:**  
212.477.0455

## Medical Minute: PREVENT A HEART ATTACK

Each year, over one million Americans suffer a heart attack. About half of those attacks are fatal, making heart attacks one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. Risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, lack of exercise, and age. These risk factors can be reversed by maintaining a healthy diet, exercising, having regular medical checkups, and not smoking.

To better understand the causes of a heart attack, it's important to know how the heart works.

The heart is a large muscle that pumps the blood to all parts of the body. The heart needs oxygen which is delivered via one of three blood vessels called coronary arteries. If one of these arteries is blocked — or partially blocked — by a clot, the muscle in that area of the heart can die. It takes only six to 12 hours for muscle death to occur, and survival often depends on how much heart muscle is damaged.

The main symptom of a heart attack is chest pain, which feels like a squeezing pain or pressure in the front of the chest. The pain may radiate to the neck, arm or back.

If it lasts for more than 15 minutes, call 911 or get to the hospital immediately. The sooner the treatment is started, the better chance for recovery.

There are short- and long-term treatments for heart attacks. Medication can sometimes dissolve the clot, or doctors can open the artery by doing a procedure called angioplasty. Angioplasty is usually successful but medications are often necessary to keep the artery open for a long period of time.

*To better understand the causes of a heart attack, it's important to know how the heart works.*

Bottom line is that it is your responsibility to take care of your heart. If you always watch your diet, keep active, see a doctor regularly, and avoid smoking, you will minimize your risk of a heart attack. Stick to that regimen — your heart will thank you for it!

—Jerry J. Lasser, M.D.



### Can YOU Become a SENIOR COMPANION?

Henry Street Settlement is seeking healthy, active adults age 55 or older to become Senior Companions. Senior Companions are volunteers who provide assistance, respite and company for frail, isolated or homebound older adults. Senior Companions volunteer between 15 and 40 hours per week and receive comprehensive pre-service training, monthly in-service training, and may qualify for a tax-free stipend as well. Volunteer positions are available in all five boroughs.

**Do you know a SENIOR who is HOMEBOUND or NEEDS A LITTLE EXTRA HELP with daily activities?**

If you do, then a Senior Companion might be a great fit. Companions can do everything from simply keeping a senior company to assisting them with trips to grocery stores, community centers and health clinics. Senior Companions do not perform any services that are normally done by a home health aide. However, they can be important people in the lives of their clients.

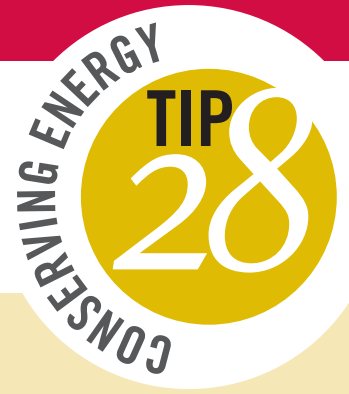


For more information, please call 212.477.0455, or e-mail [dlowenstein@henrystreet.org](mailto:dlowenstein@henrystreet.org)

Funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service

## WHEN IT'S TOO HOT!

Beating the heat is as much a part of summer as baseball and hot dogs. City residents are particularly vulnerable to hot weather hazards. Asphalt, concrete, and tall buildings trap heat and, when combined with stagnant air and pollutants, increase the risk of heat related illnesses or death, especially for people with respiratory problems.



### What is Hyperthermia?

Hyperthermia is the name used for a variety of heat-related illnesses. Our bodies stay cool by sweating. Extreme heat and humidity can slow down, or even prevent sweating, so our body doesn't release heat and our temperature rises rapidly.

### What to Look For, What to Do!

Heat exhaustion occurs from strenuously exercising or working in hot, humid conditions. Signs include heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness; headache, a fast and weak pulse, fast and shallow breathing, and nausea or vomiting. If left untreated, heat exhaustion may progress to the more dangerous heat stroke.

To treat heat exhaustion, move the person to a cool place, loosen clothing, apply cool, wet cloths to the neck, face, and arms, and give cool, nonalcoholic beverages. If symptoms worsen or last more than an hour, seek medical attention.

Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. In just 10 to 15 minutes, the body's temperature may rise to 106° F or higher. If not treated immediately, brain damage and death may follow. Symptoms include vomiting; confusion; unconsciousness; red, hot and dry skin; a body temperature of more than 103° F; nausea; and a throbbing headache. If someone shows signs of heat stroke, immediately call 911. Then begin cooling the person as quickly as possible — move them to a cool place; spray or sponge them with cool water; or give them a cool shower. Do not give them anything to drink. Watch for breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear.

Heat cramps are a painful tightening of stomach, arm, or leg muscles. Your body temperature and pulse usually stay normal, but your skin may feel moist and cool. Treat heat cramps by drinking fluids that don't contain alcohol or caffeine.

### Who is at High-Risk for Heat-Related Problems?

- People 65 years of age or older
- Infants and children up to age four
- People with pre-existing medical conditions

During a heat wave, check on family, friends, and neighbors who do not have air-conditioning or who spend much of their time alone.

### Tips to Help You Keep Cool

The following tips will help you prevent heat-related illnesses:

- Use the air conditioner if you have one. Set the thermostat no lower than 78 degrees.
- If you don't have an air conditioner, go to a store, mall, library, movie theater, or cooling center.
- Be sure window air conditioners fit snugly.
- Drink plenty of water even if you aren't thirsty. Avoid caffeinated, high-sugar, and alcoholic beverages.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Stay out of the sun. If you go out, wear sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or more.
- Avoid strenuous activity between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- If you work outdoors, take frequent breaks in a cool place.
- Never leave children or pets in a parked car.
- Eat smaller, lighter meals. Don't use your stove or oven.
- Ask your doctor if your medications increase the risk of hyperthermia.

Source: Con Edison





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However, having a Senior Companion as caring and dedicated as Deborah has been was a real life-changer for Virginia. “Deborah will call the doctors and schedule the appointments. She often escorts me there as well,” says Virginia. Deborah is instrumental in getting Virginia the best care and support available, and since nurses, doctors and other staff are often too busy to write out messages for Virginia to read, Deborah ensures that Virginia remains part of the conversation. “Deborah doesn’t just hear for me,” says Virginia. “She also makes it a priority to listen to me.”

So what’s the secret to Deborah’s success as a Senior Companion? A zeal for living, and for the new experiences that each day brings. She never stops challenging herself and even began learning Farsi recently when it caught her interest. “You just got to keep going,” she says, proudly. Deborah’s dedication to her clients and to the SCP will ensure that many others keep going with independent, happy lives as well.

— Marissa Lieberman, SCP Intern

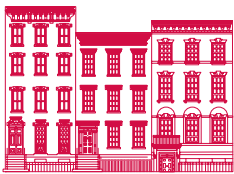
## What do SENIOR COMPANIONS like?

*“The best part for me is my clients,” says Deborah Cochran, a Senior Companion for two years. “They’re sweet, funny, independent, and keep you on your toes. I love the fact that I can help them.”*



Senior Companions are healthy older adults who help other older adults live independently by providing companionship and other services in all five boroughs of New York City. Senior Companions must be 55 years or older, in good health and be able to travel on mass transit. Volunteers devote between 15 and 40 hours weekly and may qualify for a tax-free stipend.

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