



By TRAIL Executive Director Christine Scheetz

Health series returns in October



TRAIL created our fall community education series, ***Closing the Gap: Healthspan vs. Lifespan***,

to spotlight the difference between **life expectancy** (total years lived) and **health-adjusted life expectancy** (years lived in good health). The larger the gap the more years spent in poor health despite longer overall survival.

Researchers have reported that strong social connections and a sense of purpose powerfully influence healthspan. Connection and purpose form a **social foundation for healthy aging**. Relationships provide support, accountability, and belonging, while purpose gives meaning and energy to daily actions.

We want to consider the questions, How can we help each other add life to our years? What can we do—individually and collectively—to keep participating in the things and relationships that give our lives meaning? How can we prepare for the transitions and challenges that come with getting older? At a time when we may be experiencing chronic health conditions, pain, reduced mobility, losses, and loneliness, how do we optimize our health span—physically, intellectually, socially, and with a renewed sense of purpose?

I am delighted that this year's *Closing the Gap* series will kick off with a keynote talk by one of my mentors and heroes, Connie Benton Wolfe. Connie has spent her career as an advocate for older adults and as a leader and innovator in the field of aging. Her talk, "Elderescence: The Art of Resilience, Relationships, and Reinvention," will help us reflect on growing older as an art form, using what we've learned to create what comes next.

We hope to create a conversation that is both hopeful and practical—one that helps us think differently about aging and, perhaps, see older adulthood as a stage of life filled with possibility, growth, connection, and purpose. Each topic and each speaker will contribute to our understanding of how we can increase our healthspans. (See details below.)

Key findings from a 2024 study about the gap between lifespan and healthspan:

- **The global mean gap: 9.6 years** — meaning, on average, people live 9.6 years longer than they are healthy
- **The United States:** had the **largest gap of 12.4 years**
- **Women** had a **mean gap 2.4 years larger** than men

Oct. 1

Kickoff session with lunch

Connie Benton Wolfe, Chief Visionary Officer, Aging and In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana; founder, GroundGame Health

Oct. 8

"Start Where You Are: Strength, Balance, and Mobility at Any Age"

Expert panel

Oct. 15

Bone Health

David DeMik, MD, PharmD, Steindler Orthopedic Clinic and Jim Norman, PT, Athletico

Oct. 22

Brain Health

Michelle Voss, PhD, University of Iowa Health, Brain, and Cognition Lab

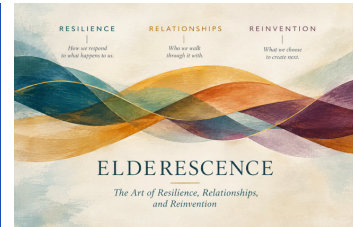
Oct. 29

Financial Health

Keyan McAreavy, JD, BrownWinick Law

Closing the Gap is **free and open to the public**. Sessions take place on Thursday afternoons, 1 to 2:30 PM, at the Kirkwood Regional Center in Coralville. To register, visit the [event page](#). **Cosponsored by Athletico, Silver Sponsor: Impact Real Estate Group.**

Meet our keynote
speaker for the
Closing the Gap
series.



Connie Benton Wolfe

a national expert in services for older adults—kicks off the 2026 Closing the Gap series

This year's Closing the Gap series opens with Connie Benton Wolfe, a national leader in community support for older adults. You may know Connie from her years as CEO of the

United Way of Johnson County and executive director of Elder Services in Iowa City. Connie has recently returned (and joined TRAIL) after retiring as president and CEO of Aging and In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana in Fort Wayne.

Connie's distinguished career includes terms as president and CEO for the National Meals on Wheels Foundation and the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Program. During her time at the U.S. Administration on Aging, she was a

delegate to two White House conferences on aging. She was also the Director of one of 13 National Eldercare Institutes on Aging and served on the Board of Directors for the American Society on Aging. Connie has been a speaker or consultant in over 30 states, as well as in Japan, Canada, and Denmark.

One of Connie's many talents is connecting academic researchers with human service practitioners. She has worked with the University of Iowa and other universities to encourage partnerships that enrich research and improve care in the community.

Join us in welcoming Connie back to Iowa City when she discusses "Elderscience: The Art of Resilience, Relationships, and Reinvention" in the first session of Closing the Gap.

NURSING RESEARCH STUDY LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS

IOWA

UI College of Nursing researchers are seeking participants for a research study about improving hospital-to-home transitions for adults aged 65 and older and caregivers.

They hope to involve:

- Adults aged 65 and older hospitalized in the last 6 months, living at home, and a care partner/caregiver
- Healthcare professionals, administrators, and community-based service professionals involved in their services and/or care

Participation involves one 60-minute interview, two 30-minute surveys, and the possibility of taking part on a program design team. Compensation is available.

If you are interested, contact Daniel Liebzeit, PhD, RN, Assistant Professor, The University of Iowa College of Nursing, at 319-467-3082 or daniel-liebzeit@uiowa.edu.

Late life lights up current TV series

A 2025 AARP survey found that 93% of adults want to see actors over 50 in leading TV and movie roles and that younger viewers value intergenerational casts. Over 50% of respondents protest the lack of late life romances.

Older actors we do see tend to fall into what sociologists call the “young-old” age group of 60-74 and to be white, straight, middle-class, male, and glamorous. Stereotypes abound. Think nosy neighbors, tech-clueless relatives, saintly or demanding grandparents. But things are changing. Recent TV series feature over 60 leads in genres from romance to detection and horror to science fiction. Retirement communities have become a hot location. Here are just a few recent and upcoming series for adventurous viewers:

Detectives:

Only Murders in the Building (2021-) Steve Martin, Martin Short, and Selena Gomez are comic podcasting amateur detectives.

Dark Winds (2022-) As a Navajo Tribal Police detective, Zahn McClarnon wrestles criminals, Native traditions, and retirement on a Four Corners reservation.

Slow Horses (2022-) Gary Oldman is the unnerving director of misfit British secret agents.

A Man on the Inside (2024-) Newly retired and widowed, Ted Danson finds purpose as an amateur investigator.

Drama/Comedy:

Hacks (2021-2026) Jean Smart defies stereotypes as a late life comedian.

The Gilded Age (2022-) Christine Baranski is an old money diva in this historical drama.

Riot Women (2025-) A stunning menopausal hard rock band defies categorization.

Newlyweds (2026) Married actors Téa Leoni and Tim Daly play an odd couple who marry after a first date—with Jamie Lee Curtis.

Science Fiction:

The Boroughs (2026) This science fiction/horror series in a retirement community features Alfred Molina, Geena Davis, and Alfred Woodard.

Blade Runner 2099 (2026) Michelle Yeoh chases rogue humanoids 50 years after they're created in Ridley Scott's 1982 SF film.





Meet TRAIL's **POWER COUPLE**

We all need a “lift” now and then. The recent achievements of TRAIL members Melanie McNeil and Jim Ruebush give the term a whole new meaning. Both earned first-place medals in the Powerlifting competition at the 2026 Iowa Games in Des Moines on July 18.



The Iowa Games, hosted by the Iowa Sports Foundation, allow weekend athletes, schoolchildren, and senior citizens to experience the thrill and satisfaction of doing their best in a statewide Olympic-style competition. That may sound intimidating to some; for Melanie, it was an enticing challenge.

“I started lifting heavy—that is, barbell work, as opposed to light dumbbells—in 2022 after returning to the gym post-Covid,” Melanie says. **“I didn’t think about lifting as a sport until speaking with a friend who did a competition in St. Louis.”** Melanie entered a USA Powerlifting federation state meet in February 2026, where she won her category. Jim quickly followed suit.



“I was going to the gym regularly and saw how much Melanie enjoyed working with weights,” Jim says. **“I started training in February 2026 and competed in my first meet in May. Melanie and I cheered each other on at the Games in July.”**

Melanie and Jim are in the Masters-level categories for their ages, where there are fewer competitors. Still, those first-place finishes were meaningful accomplishments.

“I turn 80 in February, which puts me into the next higher category with even fewer people participating,” Jim says. **“The sport makes me feel strong and I hope it will postpone the inevitable aging issues we all face. Maybe I will inspire someone else to take part.”**

“Powerlifting is not for everyone, but almost everyone will benefit by weights work,” says Melanie. **“Even people with joint replacements, arthritis, and other issues can get involved, with guidance from a physical therapist or qualified trainer to get started.”**



Community **Day of Service**

The power of neighbors helping neighbors was demonstrated on **9/11 Day of Service**. TRAIL paired community volunteers with TRAIL members who needed help with yard and garden clean-up projects.

September 11 has become a National Day of Service and Remembrance, encouraging Americans to honor those lost by serving their communities.

Photos of some TRAIL members and community volunteers can be found on **page 7**.

Monthly giving makes it **easy**

Jo Lavera Jones can't remember when she first learned about making monthly gifts to charity, but she does remember thinking it sounded like a smart idea.

"Like a lot of people, my husband and I used to write donation checks at the end of the year," she says. "But then I heard about the concept of monthly giving from a local nonprofit leader, who explained that receiving donations throughout the year made it much easier for her organization to plan ahead. That made a lot of sense, and I realized that spreading out our charitable giving would make our budget planning easier, too."

Jo and her husband, Phillip—who have been loyal contributors since TRAIL's start-up fundraising campaign in 2016-17—now support TRAIL and several other charities through automatic monthly withdrawals from their bank account.

"Monthly giving is so simple, and the best thing is, I don't feel it," Jo says. "When a relatively small amount comes out of your bank account every month, **like what you might spend on a pizza**, you don't really miss it. On the other hand, sitting down in December and writing out a check feels like something I need to stop and think about."



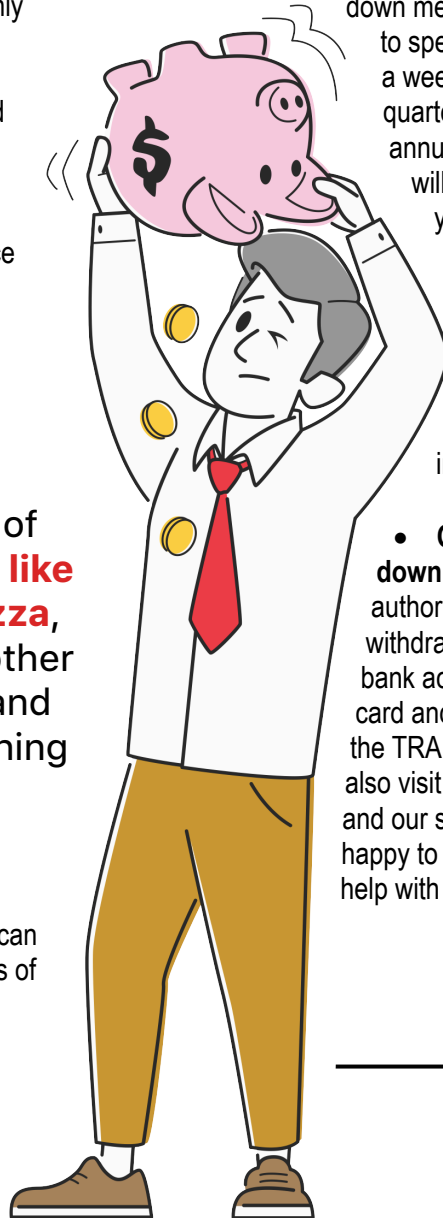
"Giving monthly also allows us to make larger gifts than we might otherwise be able to do," she continues. "It helps us manage our resources because contributions are spread out over time, and we can easily increase or decrease the donation size if needed. Regardless of the amount, we know monthly gifts add up quickly and make an important difference to the causes we support."

Here's how to become a TRAIL contributor on a recurring basis:

- Visit TRAIL's secure online giving site at <https://trailofjohnsoncounty.kindful.com/>. Select the amount you'd like to donate and click "Recurring" in the Frequency box. The drop-

down menu will allow you to specify gifts made on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, biannual, or annual basis. The site will ask you whether you wish to make gift withdrawals from your credit card or bank account and then will ask for the pertinent account information.

- Or [click here](#) to download a form authorizing automatic withdrawals from your bank account or credit card and return the form to the TRAIL office. You may also visit the TRAIL office and our staff would be happy to print the form and help with filling it out.





MEET THE CRITTERS

TRAIL volunteer Lesanne Fliehler and her husband, Jack, have two furry friends in their home: Harley and Pepper.

Harley is one of the 12 “bridge puppies,” so named because they were tossed off a bridge in a bag near DeSoto, Iowa, in 2019. Two men checked the bag and found 12 newborn puppies, some with their umbilical cords still



attached. Lesanne saw a story about the puppies on the news and eventually adopted Harley from AHeinz57 Pet Rescue and Transport in Adel. For several years, the owners and their dogs would get together in the Des Moines/Adel area to let the pups play together. Harley is shown here with some of her favorite toys won from the claw machine at Joe’s Place in Iowa City.

The kitty Pepper is a “foster fail.” While Lesanne’s daughter, Katie, was in high school, the Fliehlers were foster parents to kittens, giving Katie credit toward the Silver Cord for volunteerism at graduation. Pepper had been with another foster family and then went to live happily with the Fliehlers. Pepper has pseudomonas aeruginosa (a bacteria), which makes her sneezy and snotty and causes hair loss. Lesanne says that Pepper is “just about the most loving cat around.”



Ready to show off your pets? Just email denice@trailofjohnsoncounty.org and share their stories and your favorite photos of them.

THANKS to CarePro and Briarwood Health Care Center for sponsoring this month’s newsletter.

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2026 Day of Service



Volunteers taking a break from their work at the home of TRAIL member Susan Spaziani (second from right), with TRAIL member Phyllis Black in the the middle.



Above left: TRAIL member Phyllis Black.

Above right: Volunteers at work at Susan Spaziani's.

Right: Volunteers at the home of Beth Mentzer (far left.)



"Hot" lunch



Six TRAIL members enjoyed conversation and companionship, excellent food, and excellent service at Barrett's All Day in Coralville on September 3. It was a 90° day and unfortunately the air conditioner was not able to keep up with the heat. We all enjoyed our meal but were quick to find air conditioning. Pictured on the left side of the table: LaVerne Dvorsky and Alfrieta Monagan; right side of the table: Kathy Dvorsky, Kay Prediger, and Jane Gibson. (Not pictured: Phyllis Black)



In Memoriam

Arthur C. Fleck

Member Arthur Fleck passed away on Saturday, August 22, 2026. He had been a TRAIL member since January 2023.

See Arthur's obituary [here](#).



NOTE: Some events are virtual, while others are in person. Full details for each event can be found on [TRAIL's online calendar](#).

New events are frequently added, so check TRAIL's weekly calendar preview emailed on Fridays or the [online calendar](#) to stay up-to-date.

Calendar key: **BLUE** events are for TRAIL members. **GREEN** (virtual) and **YELLOW** (in-person) events are hosted by other groups but may be of interest to TRAIL members.

Members pay their own fees if there is a cost associated with an event (\$). Want to attend an event, but need a ride? Full members can call Jessica at 319-800-9003 or email her at membersupport@trailofjohnson-county.org.

If you have questions or suggestions about the newsletter, email info@trailofjohnsoncountyorg.

OUR MISSION:
TRAIL is powered by volunteers to help older adults live and age with support, safety, and connection in the places they call home by providing tools and resources for active independent living.

Upcoming TRAIL Events Calendar

[Pup-A-Rama Playhouse](#)

Wednesday, September 16, 2 to 3:30 PM

4852 Sand Road SE, Iowa City

[Tasting Lunch at Keystone Place at Forevergreen](#) \$

Friday, September 18, 11:30 AM to 1 PM

1275 West Forevergreen Road, North Liberty

[Book Club: Land by Maggie O'Farrell](#) (via Zoom)

Monday, September 21, 1 to 2 PM

[Tour of Iowa City Bike Library](#)

Wednesday, September 23, 2:30 to 3:30 PM

122 South Gilbert Court, Iowa City

[Coffee and Conversation](#)

Friday, September 25, 9 to 10:30 AM

Barb's Condo, Iowa City

[Closing the Gap: Healthspan vs. Lifespan](#) (Kickoff session, lunch included, registration required) "Elderescence: The Art of Resilience, Relationships, and Reinvention"

Thursday, October 1, 1 to 2:30 PM

Kirkwood Regional Center, 2301 Oakdale Blvd, Coralville

[Member Happy Hour](#) \$

Tuesday, October 6, 4:30 to 6:30 PM

Monica's, 303 2nd Street, Coralville

[New Member Orientation](#) \$

Wednesday, October 7, 1:30 to 2:30 PM

Java House, 1575 South 1st Avenue, Iowa City

[Closing the Gap: Healthspan vs. Lifespan](#)

"Start Where You Are: Strength, Balance, and Mobility at Any Age"

Thursday, October 8, 1 to 2:30 PM

Kirkwood Regional Center, 2301 Oakdale Blvd, Coralville

[Kalona Day Trip](#) (lunch and a little poking around) \$

Friday, October 9, 10:30 AM to 2 PM

Kalona, Iowa

[Closing the Gap: Healthspan vs. Lifespan](#) (Bone Health)

Thursday, October 15, 1 to 2:30 PM

Kirkwood Regional Center, 2301 Oakdale Blvd, Coralville

[Book Club: Whistler by Ann Pratchett](#) (via Zoom)

Monday, October 19, 1 to 2 PM