



## Jan. 15 Chapter Meeting

### Are genetic technologies changing what it means to be human? *by Rebecca Hester*

Advances in genetic technologies, especially synthetic biology, promise such things as eternal life, “super-intelligence,” and designer babies, but can and do they deliver on their promises? More importantly, should they?

This talk will introduce some of the most cutting-edge genetic technologies being undertaken in the United States and will explore the ethics, politics, and economics of pursuing them.

The presentation will give participants a better sense of the ways in which “life itself” is being altered and for what/whose purposes. It will also provide information on ideas regarding what it means to be human and what is the purpose of healthcare are changing in the “biotech century.”



Rebecca Hester is Assistant Professor of Science, Technology, and Society at Virginia Tech.

## November Pet Food Drive Results

At our first pet food drive at our November meeting, we collected 60 bags of pet food, several bags of litter, and \$150 in cash. Drivers for Meals on Wheels will distribute the food. Shannon Hammond of the Agency on Aging told us that some homebound seniors are feeding their own meals to their pets because they cannot afford pet food. We can help solve the problem.

The picture at the top of this page shows members with the food they donated.

## President’s Column *by Jerry Niles*

### A thank-you note to AARP Blacksburg

Happy New year! I hope that this New Year will be filled with opportunities for you to continue to age successfully and that your local AARP Chapter can be an important resource for you in that process. One of the first tasks for my new year is to write my first president’s column for the Newsletter. Doing something for the first time always seems to be challenging. Thus, I thought I would start with something easy. I would like to frame this column as a thank-you note to the AARP Chapter of Blacksburg. I expressed some of my appreciation for the gifts that have come to me from my membership in the Chapter in my closing remarks at our Holiday Luncheon in December, and I would like to expand and specify those remarks more completely in this column.



As I moved from my work life into my retirement life, it became clear to me that I needed to find new sources of meaningfulness in my life. Replacing the meaningfulness that is represented in one’s life work is no small task. Some people plan well and have a sensible path laid out, others not so much. I was not sure what that path would be for me, but I was confident I would find it. I must confess though that I had underestimated how big the task would be to replace the meaningfulness that came from my work. I did have three principles that created a framework to guide my search. I had to be able to do what I wanted, when I wanted, and how much I wanted. Second, I wanted to be able to use my skill set but continue to learn new things. Third, I wanted to do things that would serve the needs of others when possible. Armed with these principles my retirement years so far have been a rich exploration of the unknown and brought me new experiences that I never could have anticipated. AARP Blacksburg has been a big part of that journey.

## Upcoming Events

- Jan. 8, LLI registration begins
- Feb. 2, Tax-Aide program begins
- Feb. 19, AARP program, Dancing bees bioindicate habitats’ ability to feed pollinators

## Bring your plastic bags to the Community Center for recycling

When you come to the AARP meeting Jan. 15, bring your plastic bags to deposit in the bin by the door. Plastic may include shopping and mailing bags, sleeves for magazines, food packaging (bread, carrots, deli items). The bags should be clean. Remove paper from them.

## Pay your dues online or on paper

If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2019, you can use the form on the last page of this newsletter and mail in a check.

OR, you can go online to [blacksburgaarp.org/](http://blacksburgaarp.org/)

There you can either download a form to mail in with your check or you can pay with a credit card.

Local dues are only \$15 for an individual or household. You need to be a member of the national organization to belong to the local chapter.

Go here to join national: [www.aarp.org/membership/](http://www.aarp.org/membership/)

## Holiday Luncheon and Awards 2018

Photos by Peter Magolda more at [adlogam.smugmug.com/Organizations/AARP/n-49pk5B/](http://adlogam.smugmug.com/Organizations/AARP/n-49pk5B/)

### Pat Hyer receives statewide Andrus Award for Community Service

The annual Andrus Award for Community Service is AARP's most prestigious and visible volunteer award. It recognizes individuals who are sharing their experience, talent, and skills to enrich their communities in ways that are consistent with AARP's mission, vision, and commitment to volunteer service, and that inspire others to volunteer. Only one Virginia volunteer can receive the Award. Pat Hyer of the Blacksburg chapter is this year's Andrus Award recipient.



Pat Hyer with Jerry Niles, who drafted the nomination

others creative and dynamic ways of working collaboratively to enact change. Pat Hyer is the quintessential engaged citizen and, for many, the mentor who showed them the way.



Pat Hyer (center) is the 5th member of the Blacksburg Chapter to receive the statewide Andrus Award. Other recipients (L-R) include Virgil Cook (2015), Ben Crawford (2007), and Don Creamer (2016). Carl McDaniels (not pictured) also won the award. Brian Jacks, Associate Director of AARP for SW Virginia, joins them (pictured on the right).



**Coreen Mett** receives the Community Spirit Award for serving as treasurer of the Radford Association of Retired Employees, maintaining the list of donors at the Christmas Store, helping refugee families with their tax returns in the Tax-Aide program, and serving as statewide counselor, instructor, and technology coordinator in the Tax-Aide program.



**Jennie Reilly** receives the Chapter Service Award for coordinating the 2018 Health and Wellness Fair, including working with more than 100 volunteers and community partners. They recruited 140 presenters, attracted 430 visitors, and managed logistics. Proceeds of \$6,739 will support charitable giving over the next two years.

## *President's Message, continued*

When I joined AARP Blacksburg five years ago, it was not because of some specific need I had to become part of an organization or that it was compatible with the guiding principles for my retirement. Rather it was in response to an invitation from a couple of members who were deeply involved in the leadership of the chapter and nurturing the development of the membership and the engagement of the chapter in issues that were relevant to the lives of seniors in the New River Valley. Concurrently, I happened to be working with a group of folks who were conceptualizing the formation of a lifelong learning institute in our community. Not surprisingly, we found many elements of mutual interest and benefit and were able to forge a partnership between the Blacksburg Chapter and the emerging Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech around the theme of living well, 50+. These two complementary adventures have enriched my retirement years in surprising ways. In fact, lately I have come to the conclusion that one of the most pleasant surprises of my retirement has been my participation in the AARP Blacksburg Chapter. As I have thought about why this has been such a pleasant surprise, I have become aware of just how much the chapter has given to me over these five years. My reflections on these gifts is what gives rise to my need to write this thank-you note.

One of the dimensions I underestimated from my work life to retirement life was how much different social contact would be. The broad social networks that are embedded in work life change drastically when one is retired. Often, you hear retirees report, "Well, I don't miss work as much as I miss the people." Thus, my first thank you to AARP Blacksburg is for providing the opportunity to be part of a community made up of so many wonderful people. Some of you I have known for years and haven't seen for a while. It is great to get to reconnect and think about good times gone by and to learn about the new and exciting things you are doing in your lives. Next, there are the new folks one gets to meet at each chapter meeting and the new friendships that are forged out of conversations at the meeting or collaboration on service projects. You learn interesting things about their lives and how they are finding meaning in their retirement years. You see numerous models of successful aging that you file away for future reflection and think, "Isn't it amazing what so and so is doing." It gives you inspiration when you see chapter members from up and down the age spectrum attend meetings, ask great questions, say hello or just share a comfortable smile. All of that human connection contributes to the meaningfulness in one's life on many levels.

As I reflect upon what happens in monthly meetings, I began to identify many "small things" that added up to bigger feelings of social connectedness that affected me in positive ways. Let me share a few of those that are most salient for me. (I would love to hear some that mean the most to you as well.)

- When I walk through the door of the Community Room, being greeted by Jim Whiteman's engaging smile and being handed my nametag for the day (which I never would remember if I had to bring it to each meeting).

- Being inspired by Sandy Birch's invocations that remind me in such a remarkable way of the meaningfulness of the human condition and my place in it.
- Being able to relish and consume one of Thais Beams' fresh Carol Lee Donuts without feelings of guilt.
- Watching someone win \$23 in a 50/50 drawing who has never won anything in a drawing in her or his life.
- Participating in one of Sally Anna Stapleton's creative food drives to support mothers or seniors with pets.
- Listening to programs that keep me informed on relevant issues in my life like staying safe online and how to age in place successfully.
- Viewing the incredible photos taken by Peter Magolda that capture the spirit of community and positive attitudes toward aging successfully that are reflected in the faces of chapter members during our meetings and events.

In addition to the good feelings about successful aging that come from the monthly meetings, I have appreciated the numerous opportunities in the Blacksburg Chapter service portfolio to work collaboratively with members on projects that are focused on supporting others in the community in their efforts to age successfully. It has been good fun trying to problem solve ways for our chapter to be a relevant voice and resource in our community for individuals 50+. These smaller project-focused meetings are filled with laughter, goodwill, and a collective need to do something constructive for the common good.

Blacksburg AARP is truly a special Chapter. I hear that all the time and I am now beginning to understand why. If you look back over the 40+ years of history of the chapter, you can see the impact of the effective leadership and engaged membership. In a time when some chapters in the state are challenged by decreasing membership, the Blacksburg Chapter is optimistically planning for its future. With the terrific support we receive from the state AARP led by Jim Dau and regionally from our good friend and supporter Brian Jacks, Blacksburg AARP is confident as it seeks new challenges in its pursuit of supporting successful aging of its members as well as others in our community who are 50+.

My goal for this year is to work with the Board and the membership to continue the tradition of the chapter for responsive leadership in which we continue to pursue opportunities to serve our community, learn something new, and support efforts to engender the successful aging for ourselves and others. I invite new and returning members to let me know what they like about the chapter and how it meets your needs. At the same time, if you have ideas about how we might add new features or change others to meet your needs, please bring those forward. Finally, if there are ways you would like to engage in chapter activities, let me or other Board members know. One of the things that you can count on is that the AARP Blacksburg will help you do what you want, how much you want and when you want to do it as you pursue your goal for successful aging.

## Chapter Highlights 2018

### Recognition

Pat Hyer was awarded the top honor for AARP Virginia, the Ethel Percy Andrus award, at the 2018 All Volunteer Assembly. This award recognized Pat's broad and deep commitment to AARP issues and programs.

### Member Services and Communication

- Conducted 8 public meetings featuring a variety of programs plus June picnic and December Holiday luncheon
- Published 9 chapter newsletters (thanks to Carolyn Rude and Sandra Griffith for editing and to Judith and Roy Jones for preparing the newsletter for mailing)
- Maintained 13 active committees, reporting at monthly board meetings
- Maintained a chapter website with up-to-date information about the chapter and chapter activities (thanks to Don Creamer, Peter Magolda, and Lisa Moose)
- Established a credit card payment system for payment of health fair participants (thanks to Don Creamer and Lisa Moose)
- Co-hosted (with LLI) a fundraising event at Whitebarrel Winery
- Co-hosted (with LLI) a friend-raising event, Bluegrass and Barbecue
- Provided hospitality at each public event (thanks to Thais Beams)
- Developed an album of photos from chapter events (thanks to Peter Magolda)

### Community Partnerships

Maintained and developed robust partnerships: AARP Virginia, VCOM, NRV Agency on Aging, Lifelong Learning Institute at VT, Center for Gerontology at VT, VT Retirees Association, Community Foundation of the NRV, Blacksburg TimeBank, Blacksburg Community Center, Christiansburg Recreation Center, Montgomery County Christmas Store, Micah's Soup for Seniors, Retired Senior Volunteer Program

### Community Support

Led the biennial AARP/VCOM Health and Wellness Fair, with VCOM and the Christiansburg Recreation Center; engaged 140 exhibitors and provided services and information to over 430 visitors. (Thanks to Jennie Reilly and others, \$6,739 in proceeds will support charitable giving over the next two years.)

Served 1,326 clients through the Tax-Aide program (thanks to Pat Ballard and a dozen AARP volunteers)

Collected more than 1,000 bags of food for the Blacksburg/Christiansburg pantries. Launched a food drive for Mother's Day and a November pet food drive to help seniors be able to feed and keep their pets (thanks to Sally Anna Stapleton)

Contributed to charitable organizations that serve seniors in the NRV, including the Warm Hearth Foundation fundraiser—Cheeseburger in Parrot-dise, Blacksburg's Leading Lights, and GiveBig NRV.

Initiated "Arts Across the Generations" to highlight artistic work in the NRV including seniors and made \$500 in awards (thanks to Wendy Baldwin and Peter Magolda)

Exhibited at Blacksburg's annual Steppin' Out festival

### Education, Citizenship Support

Partnered with the Lifelong Learning Institute to present an LLI special event with the Aging in Place Task Force

Presented an orientation class on the TimeBank program

Participated in state AARP Virginia Advocacy, Legislative, and Volunteer meetings

Supported OneVirginia2021 (nonpartisan redistricting effort)

Tracked Virginia and National legislative initiatives related to AARP objectives; reported findings at chapter board meetings, and published in chapter newsletters and website (thanks to Val Coluni)

Met with Congressman Morgan Griffith, Delegates Joseph Yost and Chris Hurst, Senator John Edwards, and staff members of Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine

## The AARP Tax-Aide program

The 2019 tax-aid program begins February 2 and ends April 15. The location is the Christiansburg Recreation Center (Senior Activity Room). If you need help with your taxes, please call to schedule an appointment: 382-2349.

Counselors will be available for preparing taxes:

1:00 – 4:00 pm, Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday

9:00 am – noon, Saturday

If you are interested in volunteering with this program, please contact Pat Ballard: pballard@vt.edu • 382-1189

### Grants to Community Partners

At the holiday luncheon, AARP-Blacksburg presented a total of \$3,000 to charitable organization in the New River Valley that provide services for seniors. Funds to support this giving come from proceeds of the Health and Wellness Fair.

Representatives of the organization are pictured L-R:

Ellen Stewart, NRV Time Bank; Joy Herbert, Blacksburg Community Center—Senior Center; Tina King, Agency on Aging; Jessica Wirgau, Community Foundation of the NRV, Blacksburg Senior Center Endowment Fund; Dianne Krallman, Soup for Seniors (St. Michael Lutheran Church); Mandy Hayes, RSVP Supplies for Seniors; Brad Epperly, Christiansburg Community Center Senior Programs; Norma Cox and Lisa Holland, Montgomery County Christmas Store—Seniors



**1. Loans through a Confession of Judgment. A GOOD DEAL OR A SHAM?**

These loans are usually used by borrowers to expedite the loan process and to avoid excessive paperwork. These contracts are terrible as they give the lender total control over all the borrower's assets. They are not legal in many states. They are used by retirees (some AARP members) and the unemployed who are starting a business. The lender requires the borrower to sign a Confession in order to obtain the loan. In some states judges have sometimes ruled that the borrower has given up all legal rights, and when problems occur the courts, cannot be used to settle differences. Many borrowers do not obtain legal advice first as they are anxious to begin their work and they believe the lender has "courted" them so well any problems will be quickly resolved. A MAJOR MISTAKE!! When violations of the contract take place (late payment, missed payment, an unforeseen emergency), the lender does not have to accept any condition to give temporary relief. The lender quickly gets a judgment in the courts and immediately begins taking control of the borrower's assets. It's been reported that many times the borrower is not even aware that a judgment has been made against them. Sometimes the lender has classified the loan as a merchant class advance to avoid adverse actions. These judgments are very big business. Since 2012 such judgments have totaled 25,000, resulting in a loss to borrowers of \$1.5 billion. These judgments are almost impossible to overturn. What is surprising there is little evidence that state and federal regulators are aggressively policing these loans. And we have a couple of states who are very willing to let the abuses go on as it helps the budget. The message for us is NEVER, NEVER SIGN these contracts/advances without first getting legal advice.



**2. Gerrymandering (drawing voter districts).** The U.S. Supreme Court now has our Virginia issue for the third time. Republican leaders in our General Assembly asked the court to overturn a lower court ruling which went against them (redrawing districts for the 2019 Virginia election). Previously the Governor and the House were requested to redraw our districts because they were illegal but they could not agree on a solution so the issue is back in the courts. Our assembly members feared that to redraw the districts so close to the elections would cause great confusion for our voters. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear their appeal in Spring 2019.

In addition to court activity one of our very active state organizations (OneVirginia2021) is trying to end this threat to our democracy by proposing an independent redistricting commission to draw these districts in the future. This will give our voters a real choice in electing our representatives. This action would require a constitutional amendment including a vote by all Virginia voters. Virginia is ranked as one of the most gerrymandered states in the country both on the congressional and state levels. See more information at [onevirginia2021.org](http://onevirginia2021.org).

**Research participants needed!**

Volunteers are needed in a research study on **balance training**. Participation involves 6 sessions, totaling approximately 6 hours.

You are eligible to participate if you:

- are 50–75 years old
- are able to stand or walk for 30 minutes without pain or mobility aid
- have not had a bone fracture within the last 10 years
- do not smoke
- are not currently in physical therapy

Participants will be compensated \$100 for completing the study.

For more information, contact Leigh Allin at [lallin@vt.edu](mailto:lallin@vt.edu).

**Sign the petition to support ratification of the ERA**

<http://varatifyera.org/petition>

Virginia could become the 38th and final state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, to make it part of the Constitution. 86% of constitutions around the world guarantee gender equality, but the U.S. Constitution does not offer the same guarantee to women. Laws supporting equal rights can be repealed, ignored, or interpreted widely. Only the Constitution guarantees rights.



**Blacksburg Chapter #2613**

Chapter meetings are the third Tuesday of each month at the Blacksburg Community Center, Patrick Henry Drive at 11:30 am. There are no meetings in July or August. Board meetings are the first Tuesday of each month at the Blacksburg Community Center at 10:00 am.

**Chapter Officers 2019**

- President • Jerry Niles, [niles@vt.edu](mailto:niles@vt.edu)
- Vice President • Don Creamer, [dgc2@vt.edu](mailto:dgc2@vt.edu)
- Secretary • Pat Hyer, [hyerp@vt.edu](mailto:hyerp@vt.edu)
- Treasurer • Pat Ballard, [pballard@vt.edu](mailto:pballard@vt.edu)
- Assistant Treasurer • Ruth Anne Niles, [rniles2@icloud.com](mailto:rniles2@icloud.com)

**Board of Directors**

- 2019—Tamara Hodsdon, Peter Magolda, Jim Montgomery, Wanda Smith
- 2020—Isabel Berney, Jeananne Dixon Bame, Hugh VanLandingham
- 2021—Doug Feuerbach, Judith Jones, Lisa Moose, Leslie Pendleton

Newsletter editors: Carolyn Rude, Sandra Griffith

Photographer: Peter Magolda

**Weather Policy**


The Blacksburg chapter follows the weather policy of Montgomery County schools. If schools are closed, the chapter will not meet. If the school opening is delayed, the chapter will will meet.

**AARP Website** [www.blacksburgaarp.org](http://www.blacksburgaarp.org)



Blacksburg Chapter #2613  
 Jerry Niles, President  
 P.O. Box 10082  
 Blacksburg, VA 24062

**Nonprofit  
 Organization  
 U.S. Postage  
 PAID  
 Blacksburg, VA  
 Permit No. 32**

**Blacksburg Chapter  Member Application for 2019**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Annual (Calendar Year) Dues: **\$15.00** (includes spouse or partner)

New \_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_ 90+ years old (free) \_\_\_

Please consider an additional donation to support our AARP chapter and its projects. \$10\_\_\_ \$25\_\_\_ \$50\_\_\_ \$100\_\_\_ Other \$\_\_\_

Donations to the Blacksburg Chapter help us carry out our mission and community service activities while keeping member dues as low as possible. However, donations to the chapter are not tax deductible.

Please make your check payable to "Blacksburg AARP Chapter #2613."  
 Mail the check and this form to: .

AARP Blacksburg Chapter • P.O. Box 10082 • Blacksburg, VA 24062