

AARP®

Maine

A Mission, A Legacy, An Opportunity

Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus founded what is now AARP more than 50 years ago. At that moment, she probably never dreamed that her efforts would eventually result in an organization with 53 AARP state offices nationwide and a membership of almost 38 million people 50+. Already a powerful advocate in Washington, she no doubt did envision the critical role that AARP would play on Capitol Hill and in state capitols across the country.

Dr. Andrus was a school teacher and the first female high school principal in the state of California. She saw firsthand the economic plight of retired educators in the post-Depression era. At the time, it was an accepted insurance industry standard that it was not “fiscally sound” to offer health insurance to anyone aged 65 or older. Since Medicare did not become available until 1965, and pensions were meager, many retired teachers at the time found themselves living in poverty during their so-called “golden years.”

Dr. Andrus was spurred to take action when she discovered one of her retired colleagues living in just such deplorable conditions: she was living outside of Los Angeles in, of all places, a chicken coop. Armed with the belief that everyone has the right to age with dignity, Dr. Andrus was moved to fight for the rights of retired teachers everywhere. She began a campaign to provide affordable medical insurance for retired educators. Eight years later, the first-ever group health insurance coverage was offered to retired teachers throughout the nation. At that time, Dr. Andrus founded the National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA).

What happened next was incredible. Thousands of older Americans who were not retired teachers (and therefore not eligible for NRTA membership) contacted the Association wanting to know how they, too, could obtain health insurance and other NRTA benefits if they were not retired teachers. Recognizing that many other older Americans needed help as well, she decided to

start a new association. In 1958, Dr. Andrus founded AARP.

But Ethel Percy Andrus saw AARP as doing much more than offering health insurance for older Americans who needed it. She believed that people’s older years should be an opportunity for new growth and participation in society. She referred to AARP as “an army of useful citizens” who had the ability, the experience and the desire to promote and enhance the public good. She gave us the motto that still guides us today: “To serve, not to be served.”

AARP’s four official goals were to: 1) Enhance the quality of life for older persons, 2) Promote independence, dignity and purpose for older persons, 3) Lead in determining the role and place of older persons in society, and 4) Improve the image of aging. Today, we are guided and motivated by these same principles. As it was then, AARP is non-partisan and nonprofit. With our growing membership, we advocate on behalf of 50+ Americans, working across the nation in communities large and small to address the advantages and the challenges we all face as we age.

Here in Maine, AARP has an official state office located in Portland, but our work spans the entire state. Our team consists of five AARP staff, six AARP chapters, and 228,000 members, many of whom serve in volunteer and leadership roles in the organization. During each state legislative session, our staff and volunteers are at the state house in Augusta almost every day. We meet with legislators, attend hearings, and deliver testimony, working to represent our members on issues of concern to them. These issues include access to home and community-based services, affordable prescription drug costs, lower energy costs, the protection of vital services for low-income older and disabled residents, financial



Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, AARP founder

protection and consumer fraud to name a few.

We collaborate with many state and local community leaders and organizations on issues of concern to older Mainers such as transportation and housing. Our community service and outreach initiatives, pioneered and managed by volunteers, have touched many older Mainers in significant ways. Just before the 2011 holidays, for example, the six AARP Maine chapters located between Sanford and Millinocket, answered our challenge to collect food for local food pantries. Through their creative strategies and dedication, they collected more than four tons of food. If you are interested in joining a chapter so that you, too, can take part in such important initiatives, you can call our office or go to our website for more information: www.aarp.org/me

On the national front, AARP is committed to protecting Social Security and Medicare. We consistently reach out to and work with policy makers on both sides of the political aisle to find answers that make sense. We know that our members watched all summer long in 2011 as their vital benefits were debated on Capitol Hill. Few would have believed it possible that these programs would emerge intact without undergoing major cuts, but thanks in great part to the voices of AARP members, that is exactly what happened.

In 2012, we are conducting listening sessions in communities throughout Maine to hear your opinions and ideas on how to protect Social Security and Medicare. We encourage you to participate in *You've Earned a Say* and make your voice heard.

AARP has many other services available in the state which are open to members and non-members alike. Since 1968, the AARP Tax-Aide program, administered through the AARP Foundation, has helped more than 50 million taxpayers file their returns for free. AARP Tax-Aide sites are located in convenient places such as libraries, malls, banks and senior centers. More than 35,000 dedicated, IRS-certified volunteers nationwide provide this quality tax preparation service. To locate a site in your community, visit the Tax-Aide website at www.aarp.org/taxaide or call 1-888-227-7669.

Another popular program is the AARP Driver Safety Program. Class participants learn defensive driving techniques, new traffic laws and how to handle problem situations on the road. By taking this course, graduates are also eligible for a reduction in either their auto insurance

or moving violation points. To learn more about AA Driver Safety and to register for a local class, call 1-888-227-7669 or go to www.aarp.org/drive. The cost is \$12 for AARP members and \$14 for non-members.

AARP was founded by one woman who was determined to make a difference in the lives of others. As Dr. Andrus wrote in one of AARP's earliest publications, "Our community is the place where we as older individuals can be the most effective." This is part of Dr. Andrus' extraordinary legacy and today AARP continues to champion that philosophy.

To contact AARP Maine, call 1-866-554-5380 or send us an email at aarpme@aarp.org

You can also go to our website at www.aarp.org/me or like us on Facebook at AARP Maine.

By Jane Margesson
AARP Maine Communications Director



*Meredith Tipton,
Co-chair of "You've
Earned a Say",
delivering a speech.*



Volunteer Charlene Thompson, right, of Saco distributing AARP materials at a community engagement event.