Medical science, take a bow. Your goal was to combat disease and bring long, healthy life to millions of patients, and you’ve succeeded beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. Thanks to penicillin and other discoveries, the servicemen of World War II survived their battles in record numbers, and came home to produce the greatest demographic bulge of offspring ever seen in America. Those resulting Baby Boomers have watched survival rates for heart disease, cancer, stroke, and many other conditions climb higher every year. Millions of people who in earlier days would have died young, from infections, from childbirth complications, from trauma, have instead recovered and lived on.

And now, the challenge: how to take that good news, and keep it good. Breakthroughs and better treatments, declining birthrates, along with many improvements in social science and policy, have led to a steadily rising percentage of older Americans. The change is already happening, and will become increasingly apparent in the next 20 years, particularly in a small state like Vermont, where by 2030 one in four residents will be over age 65. As society ages, it has profound implications for all aspects of life. The “wave” of aging is on the horizon; how we go about positioning ourselves now will determine how well we ride that wave when it reaches us.
Standing in the fragrant gardens of UVM’s Englesby House on a warm July day, just after the formal announcement of her gift to found the new center, Lois Howe McClure speaks to a gathering of supporters of the Center from across the University, and state and non-profit agencies. “The statistics are really scary,” she says, “I really don’t think we’re ready for it.” For one mid-day hour, the honeybees that normally have the garden to themselves this time of year have been displaced by the prestigious group of public figures who have gathered for the announcement event in July included (from left) Lt. Gov. Brian Dubie, William Pendlebury, M.D.’76, Mary Cushman, M.D.’85, Gov. Jim Douglas, Dean Rick Morin, Lois McClure, Dean Betty Rambur, President Fogel, and Rachel Kahn-Fogel. At right, Fogel extends personal thanks for the McClure gift.

With that challenge in mind, one of Vermont’s foremost philanthropists, Lois Howe McClure, has made the largest gift ever by the McClure family to help find ways to meet the challenge. The $5 million McClure gift, coupled with $100,000 in funding from the State of Vermont, has underwritten the lion McClure gift, coupled with $100,000 from the State of Vermont, has underwritten the

For Lois McClure, the realization of the need for better understanding of aging issues came originally not from statistics, but from a personal experience she had a couple of years before Mac’s 2004 death, when they were on a trip to Philadelphia. “We were waiting to board a flight back to Burlington when Mac fainted,” she recalls. “He came to fairly promptly, but we were told he could not board until he had been seen at the hospital. This was the start of a very difficult two days.” McClure was carrying a list of all her husband’s current medications, as well as other pertinent information, but none of that seemed important to the health care providers she encountered at the emergency department. After an inconclusive day, Mac was admitted to the hospital and Lois was told to find herself a room in a local motel.

“The next morning, at 5:00 a.m., I returned to the hospital, but was told I could not go to the patient floor until 8:00 a.m. I insisted they call the patient floor anyway. As it turned out, they were quite anxious for me to come to the floor at once. It had been a bad night, and my husband was eventually moved to a room next to the nurse’s station.”

From her position next to the station, Lois heard that more tests were in store for her husband. She decided to take action. She called the airport and found there was a plane leaving for Burlington in two hours. “Despite significant protest from the staff,” she says, “I helped dress my husband and we left by cab to the airport and, eventually, home. I made a promise to myself and to Mac that we would never find ourselves in this situation again.”

A few weeks after this incident, at a support group meeting for relatives of those who, like Mac McClure, had Alzheimer’s disease, Lois met that day’s featured speaker, Dr. Pendlebury. She told him of her experience, and her realization that many older Americans must be put in such situations every day — conditions that may only get worse as the number of older Americans increases. She contrasted her Philadelphia experience to a time many years earlier when the caregivers at the Vermont hospital where her daughter was a patient encouraged her to spend the night close to the child. Pendlebury listened to her story of an imperfect health care system, and remembered it when, several months later, he was charged to lead a working group on aging-related issues.

The call for a special effort to produce a white paper on aging issues came in 2006, from the University’s provost and Graduate College. William Pendlebury was charged with forming a working group that would study the problems of an aging Vermont, and suggest actions the University could take to help contribute to solutions. “It was paramount, for me, that this effort be broad-based, and university-wide,” says Pendlebury. Trained as a neurologist, Pendlebury later did a fellowship in neuropathology, today he is a professor of medicine, neurology, and pathology at the College of Medicine, is medical director of the Memory Center at UVM/ Fletcher Allen Health Care, and performs research focused on age-related degenerative disease. Currently he is the lead investigator at UVM on a Phase 3 clinical study examining a new approach to treating Alzheimer’s disease using a therapeutic antibody called bapineuzumab, that helps the body’s own immune system to clear Alzheimer’s-inducing plaques from the brain.

The white paper working group included mem-
Three former College deans attended the Center on Aging announcement:
from left, John Evans, Ph.D., John Fogarty, M.D., and John Frymoyer, M.D.

A RECORD OF SUPPORT
For decades, UVM and Vermont have benefited from the philanthropic spirit of Lois Howe McClure and her late husband, J. Warren “Mac” McClure.

• In 1978, the McClures made a $500,000 challenge grant toward the renovation of Bailey-Howe Library (which is named after Lois’s late father, David Howe).

• In 1987, a $1.5 million gift established the McClure Professorship in Musculoskeletal Research and the McClure Center for Musculoskeletal Research.

• In 2002, the McClures gave a $5 million challenge grant to the John & Nan Frymoyer Fund, which supports the work of distinguished clinicians and teachers at the Colleges of Medicine and the College of Nursing & Health Sciences.

Lois McClure has also been a continuing supporter of other smaller projects at the University, including the Robert Hull Fleming Museum.

AN AGING VERMONT
A comparison of real and projected data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows the marked change in Vermont’s population by the year 2030. By the third decade of this century the percentage of people over 65 will nearly double.

Percentage of Vermont Population by Age Group

FALL 2008
21