Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. By many measures Vermont is already one of this country's oldest states. Our aging population will grow significantly over this decade and beyond. The demographic trends of aging present some serious challenges in areas such as health care, social security and employment. The Center on Aging at the University of Vermont was founded in the fall of 2008. In recognition of the major social political and economic issues that loom in our future because of significant demographic shifts taking place. This afternoon I'm joined by the Center’s Associate Director of Education to discuss careers and education in aging. Deborah Worthley holds a master's degree in gerontology education and is the founder of UVM's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. She has been involved in an aging network in a number of ways including her service on the boards of the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging and the Alzheimer's Association. Welcome and thanks so much for being with us.

Deborah.: Thanks Judy glad to be here.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about one of the focus areas of UVM Center on Aging, its education. Why is that an important focus?

Deborah.: I think primarily something all of us are aware of, is the aging of our population. Specifically the baby boomer wave is coming through. Last year, 2011, that's when the baby boomers first started retiring. That wave is going to continue on into 2030. So the workforce demographics are changing and aging demographics are going to be a much higher percentage of older adults in our population. The fastest growing age segment right now is 85 plus. By 2030 20 percent of the population is going to be over 65. There are a lot of people working in the field of aging but many of them do not have formal education in the field of aging or gerontology too. That's why education is really a key focus at the Center on Aging.

Judy.: Education really has to catch up with the demographics?

Deborah.: I would say yes it does that's reality.

Judy.: What attracts people to work in the field of aging?
Deborah.: A variety of things. A lot of times it's personal experience. Someone either had a grandparent or relative, oftentimes a parent that they became involved in taking care of. They realize how important it is for quality of life for older adults and they see services may not be there to provide for a loved one as they thought they should be cared for so it catches the attention and particularly young people often say that. I was very close to a grandparent and this is something that really interests me; I'd like to know more about it. That's one reason. Another reason is people are seeing what's happening with demographics and see some opportunity. It's a variety of reasons why people get into the field.

Judy.: We are the terms gerontology and geriatrics what's the difference between those two areas?

Deborah.: Geriatrics is really the medical field you can see up on the screen there it's the study of health and disease in later life. People who are working in geriatrics are medical professionals. Gerontology is more the study of aging, broad-based from a biological, sociological and psychological perspective. Understanding the life course per say. It's not focused on the medicine of aging so it's a much broader approach.

Judy.: What types of jobs exist for gerontologists or aging specialists?

Deborah.: There's a huge array of jobs. I break them down into several categories. Health care, for one, which would encompass more of the geriatrics field so physicians, geriatric nurse practitioners, and people in the therapy fields: physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Then there's education and research. People who go through and get a Ph.D. and end up teaching at the college level in gerontology programs. Researchers--there is a huge amount of research taking place in the field of aging. A vast body of knowledge is just continuing out there. People who are interested in getting into a field like that. The service industry is enormous; people who are interested in housing, architects, attorneys, and lawyers. In the state of Vermont the area agencies on aging for instance are really service providers. There's one of those in every region of the state. They have case managers, they run meals on wheels programs so those are some examples of some of those areas. A lot of entrepreneurs are getting into the field of aging as they see opportunities for starting a new business that provides a service for older adults. When people start looking into it, there's a lot of opportunity out there.

Judy.: It is really amazing when you have somebody in your family whose aging you know how specific how very specific these things can become. With one or two simple services can mean a huge difference.

Deborah.: It can. People realize when they have an aging relative if they need to be there and be on top of their care. That's not discounting what's out there for services but an example of how important it is to pay attention to what's going on providing for older adults.

Judy.: Do you have any Vermont specific examples?

Deborah.: There's a lot going on in Vermont certainly in the healthcare area. I mentioned the area agencies on aging. At the state level in government there's the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living- there's a huge staff. Many of whom are in the policy field or service field. The senior housing field in Vermont is huge. There are many many new facilities that are being built so all of those have stuff from administrators all the way down to service
providers cleaning rooms for people and providing meals. And there are a lot of entrepreneurs in Vermont. Vermont is a very entrepreneurial state as we know so there are people that are coming up with new businesses that are serving this population with Vermont being the second oldest state in the nation.

Judy.: What kind of education and training is required to work in the field are aging?

Deborah.: There are different tracks you can take there is formal education in the form of college level and a lot of colleges and universities around the country offer either undergraduate certificates or master's programs in gerontology. UVM for instance has a certificate program in gerontology which is specifically designed for what's called for non-traditional earner. Somebody who might be making a career change, already has a degree or may not have a degree but wants to get specific education and training in gerontology. There is a lot of professional development that's conducted by organizations that provide services for older adults. They run workshops in house of that type of thing. There's lots of national conferences so there's a variety of ways to get education. Then you can go right up through to getting a master's degree or PhD, along those lines.

Judy.: What kinds of courses would someone take as part of this curriculum.

Deborah.: Taking a certificate in gerontology at UVM as an example, a student ideally would start out by taking a course called the Foundations of Gerontology which is a broad introductory course to the field. It gives you the scope of what gerontology or aging education is all about. Then you would start taking courses like the biology of aging, nutrition and aging, ethics and aging. A death and dying course. You might take a policy course if you're interested in getting into the more policy advocacy area. It really cuts across the whole field of biological, psychological, and sociological aspects of aging so you really get a broad in-depth education in the field of aging.

Judy.: Is this something that we see younger students gravitating towards? We think about kids who are getting out of high school they are thinking of sciences or business degrees or something? Is there more of an effort underway to attract younger people to think about this at least?

Deborah.: I think there's beginning to be. There are opportunities for high school students to do internships or to volunteer. Volunteerism is a great way for people to become exposed to aging. They could be a volunteer for one of the local organizations or even a nursing home where they could get exposed to the older adults and discover that these are real people…who have lives and they would like to get more involved in that field. It's growing but slowly. I think the more exposure that young people are given, the more interested they will become. In fields like occupational therapy, in physical therapy just in their training at the college level they are introduced to older adults as part of their education. They become more exposed and other students might as students might randomly take a gerontology course at the undergraduate level and that might get them interested.

Judy.: Are you finding that there are a lot of you mention this earlier a lot of students that are coming to this later in life as far as a second career realizing the opportunities that there are jobs?
Deborah.: That's very common. Women for instance not that I want to segment the jobs and aging to just women because a lot of men are interested in the field as well but if women are reentering the workforce for instance had interrupted education and they're looking for a new career gerontology is often something that they start looking at. That also might come from having taken care of a parent and a lot of times people are looking at a business opportunity being self-employed so that's something that interests them as well working in the field of aging. There's a lot more marketing out there about what's happening demographically so I think the awareness is increasing slowly but there are some opportunities out there this is a field I wouldn't have considered otherwise.

Judy.: Tell me about some of the programs the Center on Aging sponsors to support people already working with elders or who want to learn more?

Deborah.: This year we are in fact if a couple weeks we are hosting a panel discussion on exploring careers and aging. There is a slide on the screen right now that's on February 13 and it's going to be from 6 to 8 PM at the Davis Center on the UVM campus. It's free, open to the public, we’re hoping people who are interested in learning more will come to that. There will be five panelists all of whom work in the field of aging and it will be mediated by Dr. Bill Pendlebury who's the Director of the Center on Aging. It will be a chance for people to hear from people who are working in the field and also ask questions. There will be refreshments so it will be a great event.

Judy.: What's the theme for this symposium? What are some of the topics?

Deborah.: The theme for this year's symposium, which is an annual event now as we've been doing this for four years. We do one in the northern part of the state and one in the southern part of state. This year's theme is “the power of positive aging.” So we try to pick a theme that resonates with the audience. The audience for the symposiums is primarily people who are already working in the field so it's really a professional development opportunity for folks who are already serving older adults. They are over-subscribed every year with about 300 people who come to the one in Burlington at the Sheraton, and about 200 who come to the one in Castleton. The keynote is Dr. Allan Teel; he's actually a geriatrician from Damariscotta Maine. He's written a book called: Alone and Invisible No More. He actually has developed a practice where he goes into older people's homes to provide health care to them directly. He is breaking the mold of providing health care to older adults. Some other sessions include one on elder abuse. Increasing awareness of elder abuse. Nutrition guidelines. The updated nutrition guidelines for older adults which came out in 2010. There will be a workshop on that. And Dr. Pendlebury is going to be doing a session on new ways of diagnosing Alzheimer's Disease. We're going to have a session on some fun activities to focus on people who provide activity and recreation therapy to older adults to get out of the standard activities that have been conducted over the years. A lot of variety so it will be a great conference.

Judy.: What are the best organizations that can provide folks with more information about careers and aging? I know we have a number of web sites that we want to walk our way through.

Deborah.: We do. There's a host of them there's the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. That focuses more on people who are interested in teaching in the field of aging but they've run wonderful conferences every year. I've been to many national conferences -- there's
the Gerontological Society of America which is a much bigger organization. They hold a
national conference every year. They publish a lot of literature. Then there's the ASA, the
American Society on Aging, that's even broader because it encompasses anybody in any
occupation who works in the field of aging and then of course the Center on Aging at
UVM. We're becoming a clearinghouse for resources and trying to guide people to information
that they might be seeking around the field of aging. So there's a lot out there.

Judy.: Deborah thank you so much for joining us today. That's our program for today I'm Judy
Simpson we'll see you next time on Across the Fence.

Across the Fence is brought to you as a public service by University of Vermont Extension
and WCAX TV.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of
Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture,
cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political
beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.