

AGEOPTIONS NOW

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Linda Siegel to Lead AgeOptions Board

Linda Siegel, the new chair of the AgeOptions Board of Directors, sees “a big year ahead” that will present challenges and opportunities to the agency and the board. She lauds the board for its foresight in planning to confront major changes in both demographics and funding sources.



“There are a lot of unknowns, and the strategic planning now underway is very timely,” she said. “We have to ensure that AgeOptions remains accountable, that we stay on top of things and that we continue to be innovative.”

“Changes in the aging population, especially the growing numbers of ‘old-old’ and ‘young-old’, are going to be very challenging,” Linda said. “People are going to expect different things from us and it’s important that we define ourselves to be sure we deliver the best services possible to our stakeholders and the people we serve in the community.”

As to funding, “We may see some reductions and establish some new sources,” she points out. She is confident of AgeOptions’ ability to weather the challenges affecting most social service agencies. “There are going to be changes, but we recognize it and we’re planning for it. That in itself is optimistic. We have to keep things moving forward.”

AgeOptions is well prepared to do that, Linda said, because “we have an excellent board, Advisory Council and staff. The board is strong and involved, the Advisory Council is active and the staff is committed and well-versed. And our network of community partners is incredible and highly supportive.”

Her plans include strengthening partnerships with the municipalities AgeOptions serves and expanding fundraising efforts beyond the annual Celebrating Aging event. Advocacy, she said, is going to be critical. “We’re going to be working against budget cuts and legislative changes. We have to emphasize services and what we can offer. The development of a strong volunteer base will be essential.”

Linda brings a wealth of experience in the aging network, as well as in the business and community sectors, to her position on the AgeOptions Board of Directors.

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Before moving to the Chicago area in 2001, she served as director of volunteer programs and then as associate executive director of the Area Agency on Aging of Palm Beach/Treasure Coast, Inc., which covers a five-county area in southeast Florida. While there, she implemented several new volunteer projects including a Foster Grandparent Program and the Leadership Institute for Active Aging. She was also associate executive director of the Palm Beach County Private Industry Council for 12 years.

It was perhaps logical that she would contact AgeOptions CEO Jonathan Lavin when she moved here. He referred her to Mather LifeWays, where she served as a consultant until 2004 and implemented a Legacy Corps program for the Chicago area.

Legacy Corps, which also made a grant to the AgeOptions Caring Together, Living Better caregiver support program, trains older volunteers to provide respite care.

Linda is field manager for the Legacy Corps National Direct AmeriCorps program, which operates in nine states. She is also a research assistant in the Department of Health Services Administration at the School of Public Health at the University of Maryland.

"I started getting into the aging network in the Chicago area, and Jon asked me to join the board in 2006," she said. She served on the Resource Development Committee from the beginning, eventually becoming its chair, and has co-chaired the annual fundraiser with Carla Rozycki for four years.

Linda and her husband, Gene Siegel, who is mayor of Chicago Ridge, have five children and six grandchildren.

A native of upstate New York, she has a BS degree in social welfare with concentration in Children and Family Services from Plattsburgh State University College of New York. She was drawn to the social welfare field because she's a people person, she said. "I feel it's very important to help other individuals who might be in need, as you never know when you may need help also."