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Senior Expo- Keep these 'dates' in mind

09/28/06

by **bob allen**

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Arnold Eppel, director of the Baltimore County Department of Aging, reminds anyone who may have forgotten: Seniors get lonely, too. And often, like their younger, single counterparts, they discover that meeting that someone special can be difficult.

Enter 8 Minute Dating, the newest addition to the annual Senior Expo/Baby Boomer Expo, held this year Oct. 11-12 at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium.

"We concentrated last year on issues (for seniors) like safe dating and how AIDS can happen to anyone," Arnold said.

"Well, the flip side is that when older people lose a spouse or loved one or get divorced it's not as easy to meet someone new," he said. "With 8 Minute Dating, we're saying it's never too late."

8 Minute Dating is a form of speed dating - meeting many potential dates in a short period of time in a safe setting. All registrants must undergo some screening and sign confidentiality agreements in accordance with 8 Minute Dating's procedures.

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"We are urging men to participate," Eppel said of the expo's 8 Minute Dating matchups, which run from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Oct. 11 in the 4-H Building. "There is always a shortage of men at these kinds of events.

"You can meet as many as 10 to 12 people in a half-hour, and if you don't like them, you don't have to date them," Eppel said of the established 8 Minute Dating system.

For those seniors and baby boomers who do meet someone who makes the sparks fly, along with those who don't, there is a happy hour event with Motown and Beatles music that's free to everyone who pays the \$5 fee for the 8 Minute Dating registration.

The expo also will feature seminars and a video presentation about Alzheimer's disease, courtesy of the Alzheimer's Association of Southern Maryland.

The seminars will take place every hour on the hour, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Oct. 11 and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 12.

Fifty percent of Americans who make it to age 85 or older suffer from either Alzheimer's or some form of dementia, Eppel said.

According to the Alzheimer's Association of Central Maryland, 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease - and that number that is expected to rise considerably as the average life span continues to lengthen and the baby boom generation goes from gray to white.

Not only is Alzheimer's devastating to those who suffer with it, it often can be just as hard on their caregivers, many of whom are the baby boomer children of today's seniors, Eppel said.

"It's scary because baby boomers (who have parents with Alzheimer's) often don't know how to act or react or how to find treatment and avoid institutionalization," Eppel said.

Alleviating this fear and filling the information void is the purpose of the expo's Alzheimer's sessions, which include what Eppel describes as "a very powerful" video. Experts on the topic will be on hand to help people learn more about the disease and its manifestations as well as available resources, treatments and support groups.

"We want baby boomers to begin talking to their parents about important issues, including health and finances," Eppel said. "Baby boomers also need to start planning for their own futures."

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