

Panel inspires older adults to take ‘Your Second Chance’

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THE CHRONICLE

A project for her graduate studies class, Disrupt Aging, turned into a panel presentation for nearly 75 attendees on Saturday, Jan. 12, at Novant Health Conference Center. Jodi Farley, a graduate student at UNCG, came up with the idea for a panel presentation by people who have taken risks to take a “second chance” in new careers as older adults. While researching the project, Farley was referred to Mark Hensley, Associate State Director of Community Outreach and Advocacy of AARP, and to Theresa Hoffman-Makar of Forsyth Futures and Age-Friendly Forsyth, who welcomed the opportunity to partner with her on the project.

According to Farley, she originally hoped to have a diverse panel of both men and women, but found early on that the men she contacted were either busy or not interested. That led her to do some research that showed that while women “tend to have more social and community relationships,” men tend to live in “silos,” with less social interaction. She mentioned that a future project may be to find ways to help men feel less isolated and more open to forming new friendships.

She ended up with four women who were excited to have the opportunity to tell how they developed new businesses at mid-life. The women on the panel represented an artist, a yogi studio owner, a restaurateur, and an elected official. As they answered questions from Farley, their passion for their careers was obvious.

Lynn Felder, a journalist for the Winston-Salem Journal, described herself as a “serial second actor,” having held a variety of jobs. She developed an interest in yoga when she was only 16, but living in a small South Carolina town, there appeared to be no way to develop that into a career. Instead she went to college and studied theatre. She spent her early years in the newspaper and publishing business,

fully make some positive changes in our community. Motsinger said she believes that “regular people who care about ordinary things should be in elective office.” She has been a member of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school board for 12 years and at the age of 55 ran unsuccessfully for the 5th District Congressional seat.

Beth Blair is an artist who sold her first

teach, but because she wanted to learn all she could. She was asked to teach a yoga class for cancer patients and discovered that she loved to teach.

Haglund grew up in the kitchens of her grandmothers who were great cooks, then mentioned that her mother wasn’t such a good cook. Her mother was in the audience and agreed with Haglund, generating laughter from the audience. Haglund said

After the panel discussion, Sam Matthews, executive director of the Shepherd’s Center of Greater Winston-Salem, gave a short presentation on Retirement Re-imagined, a program that the Shepherd Center offers to adults age 65 and older. The program isn’t designed to cover the financial aspects of retirement, but the psycho-social aspects to promote and support successful aging.



From left, panelists Beth Blair, Lynn Felder, Mary Haglund and Elizabeth Motsinger at Your Second Chance event on Jan. 12.

piece in her 50s. She is a licensed massage and bodywork therapist, but is now focusing on her art. She said she made a commitment to get up every morning at 4 a.m. and paint until 7 a.m. She also made the decision not to worry if there were people

she used cooking as a way to express her love for people.

Motsinger said at the age of 16 she worked on her first political campaign for a town council position. At first she didn’t want to run for office, but instead ran meetings to find good candidates to run for school board. She then discovered that she was the good candidate.

The panelists discussed the challenges they have faced as they pursued their passions. Blair said that her great challenge was committing to getting up every day to paint and her lack of confidence because she wasn’t professionally trained. Felder faced more ageism when she tried to get her first journalism job in her early 30s than she has faced in her 50s. Haglund said the “good old boy network” has been her biggest challenge and that she has had to “work twice as hard to get half as far” to get the respect in the restaurant community. She said that “gray-haired old ladies are typically invisible. I’m here to say ‘No!’ I’m not going to be invisible. My 50s were the most creative of my life.”

Motsinger said, “Running for office sucks. If you don’t want your heart broken 15 to 20 times a day, don’t run for office.” But she also stressed that everyone should be kind to those who run for office, whether you support their position or not, or people will not want to run.

The panelists offered this advice at the end of the discussion:

Blair: “Make that commitment and do it. Don’t listen to the trolls and the naysayers.”

Felder: “Be teachable. Have an open mind, be childlike again.”

Haglund: “Just do it. There are people that talk, talk, talk and those that do, do, do. I don’t see obstacles as stop signs. They are not failures but learning experiences. Stick to your vision.”

Motsinger: “Write letters to the editor, get into chats on social media, get your name out there in lots of different ways.”

Deb Burcombe, Program Director for Outreach for the Wake Forest Sticht Center for Healthy Aging and Alzheimer’s Prevention, and the chair of Age-Friendly Forsyth, spoke about what we can do as a community to make this a place where we can age well. She quoted her mother who told her, “If it’s not illegal or immoral, don’t be afraid to do it.” Age-Friendly Forsyth is an initiative that connects, informs and engages older adults to live our best lives. She introduced Arleatha Patterson, the Community Engagement Coordinator for Age-Friendly Forsyth, who will be leading their resident engagement initiative and is looking for volunteers to serve on this committee. Burcombe also stated, “Ageism is one ism that we will all be one day.”

After the program, attendees stayed around to talk with the panelists and others in attendance. Jan Morgan said, “Learning that we have experiences in common, motherhood, cancer, divorce, then seeing that these women are living vibrantly, creatively, in spite of losses and reversals in fortune, is very encouraging to me. Plus, they are doing so with such spirit and such a great sense of humor.”

Jodi Farley said that she was very pleased at how this turned out. “I think the panelists were great, the speakers were great, and the partner connections were critical to the success.”

Hensley said, “Jodi envisioned more than a term paper – she saw an opportunity to really impact and inspire others. AARP-Triad was pleased to support Jodi’s incredible passion for this project and make it a reality.”

Attendee Theresa Leftwich remarked after the program that “My grandmother is 90 and is technology savvy, just got back from a trip to Cuba, and plays with a seniors volleyball group. She’s my example of why I should keep going.”



Theresa Leftwich (on right) talks with Arleatha Patterson about how her grandmother is her inspiration for successful aging.

then took a break and studied yoga, then returned to the newspaper business. But yoga was always an important part of her life, whether she was studying it or teaching it to others. She finally took a leap of faith in her 50s and opened The Yoga Gallery with co-founder and friend Judi Maloy.

Mary Haglund is a well-known local restaurateur, having opened Mary’s, of course, after years of being a self-described “troublemaker.” Haglund happened to meet the owner of a small restaurant who needed to sell quickly due to a health emergency. Haglund’s parents provided the collateral to buy the restaurant and it soon opened as Mary’s of course on Brookstown Ave. Haglund had no formal training as a cook, but that didn’t stop her from pursuing her dream. She later took a leap of faith in moving to a location on Trade Street back before there were many businesses there and changed the name to Mary’s Gourmet Diner. She admitted it took some time for her regulars to follow her to the new location. Realizing a need for women to have a network to support and uplift them, at the age of 63 Haglund started “Mary’s Mavens,” which she said “is one of the most fulfilling things I’ve ever done in my life.”

Elizabeth Motsinger also identified herself as a “troublemaker” in her youth. At 21 she had a child and was a single mother. At 28 her husband died suddenly and she had two children to raise. She knew an education gave her the best chance of taking care of her family, so she enrolled in Winston-Salem State University in their PA program and is now a certified physician’s assistant. At the age of 49 she decided to run for office to hope-

her art didn’t appeal to, but to paint what made her happy.

When the panel was questioned about their motivation, Blair said that she had to confront her lack of confidence and that “the demons inside were coming out on the canvas.” She didn’t make a business plan, she just started pursuing her art.

Felder said that in 1998 and 1999 she battled cancer and that “yoga was the only thing that made me feel like a person and not a sick person.” When she recovered, she decided to register for classes in how to teach yoga, not that she intended to



Nearly 75 people attended Your Second Chance panel discussion on Jan. 12.