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—FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Seniors Create a ‘Splash’ at Jefferson Park to Promote Healthy Aging and Longevity

Health fair connects Harlem seniors who are at greater risk for obesity and diabetes to vital health and nutrition information

NEW YORK, NY – June 26, 2008 – The Department for the Aging (DFTA), in partnership with Generations Plus Northern Manhattan Health Network, today hosted over 600 Harlem and Bronx seniors at Thomas Jefferson Park for the second annual *Seniors Day: Here to Stay Health Fair*. In addition to available health screenings and health resources, seniors participated in water exercise demonstrations, Tai Chi, and line dancing. The health fair is part of the Department’s ongoing collaborative initiative with health providers to meet the health and long term care needs of New York’s growing older adult population. Joining Commissioner Edwin Méndez-Santiago, LCSW were City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, Senior Vice President of Generations Plus Northern Manhattan Health Network Jose R. Sanchez, Executive Director of Metropolitan Hospital Meryl Weinberg, representatives from Community Board 11, the East Harlem Community Health Committee, Union Settlement Association, and members of the Department’s senior health partners.

“The hundreds of seniors here today are being connected to vital local health and information resources that will empower them to take charge of their health,” said Commissioner Méndez-Santiago. “Learning about your blood pressure and other critical measures of your health are among the most important steps to a healthier lifestyle. The Department urges all seniors to take their health into their own hands.”

According to the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Community Health Report, East Harlem residents are more likely to be obese and have diabetes. Filling a vital need for health education in East Harlem, the fair offered blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, bone density, and glaucoma screenings, in addition to nutrition trainings. Local non-profit organizations and area social service agencies provided seniors with details of benefits and services available to them.

“We welcome the opportunity to partner with DFTA to advance our mutual commitment to strengthen and improve the quality of life of our growing aging population and encourage seniors to embrace healthier lifestyles,” said José R. Sánchez, Senior Vice President of Generations Plus Northern Manhattan Health Network. “This collaborative effort with the Department for the Aging allows our acute care hospitals and neighborhood clinics to address specific needs of New York’s growing older adults. Providing appropriate levels of preventive care and effective treatment modalities at earlier stages will help to eliminate disparities in health outcomes, enhancing the quality of life of this vulnerable population.”

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As the number of older New Yorkers grows and as more seniors choose to age in place, the Department for the Aging is committed to helping older New Yorkers make healthier choices and live longer and healthier lives. Currently, there are 1.3 million seniors over the age of 60 in New York City; this is projected to grow 46 percent over the next 25 years. To address this increase, the Department for the Aging launched a modernization effort in January to strengthen and improve services that seniors receive today and to prepare for the growing and diverse needs of tomorrow's seniors. This includes making health and wellness programming—including exercise classes, walking clubs, and on-site health screenings—a core component of DFTA's 329 senior centers.

Currently, DFTA has an array of volunteer based, peer to peer health promotion programming, including Know Your Numbers. This program encourages senior center participants to know three sets of numbers that are vital to good health—their cholesterol, glucose and blood pressure levels. According to research, seniors who are aware their health status and make healthier choices are less at risk for chronic diseases and other conditions. Healthy seniors are able to remain in their own homes and communities without having to sacrifice their independence or quality of life as they age and their needs increase.

Sixteen seniors were recognized for their contribution to the quality of life of East Harlem residents through their volunteer efforts in the areas of health, housing, immigration, safety, culture education or other significant efforts. The seniors are: Jannie Adderly (Central Harlem Senior Center), Hattie Bradford (Schomberg Senio Center), Thaddeus Bradley (Wagner Senior Center), Margarita Casanova (Benjamin Flores Senior Center), Evelyn Cofield (JASA 1199 NORC), Jose Constante (Union Settlement), Cleo Davis (Wagner Senior Center), Katherine Horne (Project Linkage House), Jimmie Isom (Rangel Senior Center), Alice Knight (JWJ Senior Center), Emma Means (Wagner Tenants Association), Elba Rosa (Casabe Senior Center), Leonardo Valentin (Theatre Arts Senior Center), Aida Watson (Wagner Senior Center), Saundra Watson (JASA 1199 NORC), and Maria Zayas (Corsi Senior Center).

Generations Plus Northern Manhattan Health Network, the largest network in New York City's Health and Hospitals Corporation, is comprised of Metropolitan Hospital, Lincoln Medical and Mental Health, and Harlem Hospital. The Senior Citizens Wellness Fair is an outgrowth of a growing partnership between senior centers in Northern Manhattan and the Bronx and local community hospitals, including Lincoln Medical & Mental Health Center and Segundo Ruiz Belvis. The Department for the Aging is working closely with the Health and Hospitals Corporation's (HHC) Northern Manhattan and Bronx hospitals and the respective senior centers in the area to establish collaborative health programming and educational activities in order to improve access to health information and health services in the community.

The health fair was free and open to the public. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the City Parks Department participated in the event.

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