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Dr. Robert N. Butler joins Council of Advisors

Physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist, public servant and Pulitzer-Prize winning author, [Dr. Robert N. Butler](#) has joined the ITNAmerica [Council of Advisors](#). Dr. Butler has long been involved in a broad array of social and health issues. He is perhaps best known for his advocacy of the medical and social needs and rights of the elderly and his research on healthy aging and dementia.

Dr. Butler first learned about ITNAmerica at a [Gerontological Society of America](#) meeting where he met founder Katherine Freund. Dr. Butler said he was impressed with Katherine's ideas, specifically citing the [CarTrade](#) program that allows members to trade cars for rides; and the program in which volunteers can earn mileage credits and donate those credits to a loved one anywhere in the country served by an ITN affiliate.

"It's an imaginative organization," Dr. Butler said. "Transportation is a terrifically important issue because if people can't get from one place to another, whether to the doctor or a friend, they are comprised. I hope to be useful to a terrific organization and constructive on the council."

Personal mobility contributes to several "Quality-of-Life Indicators" in Dr. Butler's book, ["The Longevity Revolution: The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life."](#) Those indicators include social well-being, physical well-being, and personal well-being, and more specifically independence, joyfulness, and adventure. "When you try to visit friends, for example, you are at a definite disadvantage without access to transportation," he said.

Access to transportation helps older people age in place, too. Dr. Butler said, "People want to live at home as long as possible. Good transportation gets you to the doctor or other services you need to maximize the chances you can age in your own home."

When asked about the perception of older adults drivers, Dr. Butler said, "The cultural perception is negative: They will make mistakes or cause accidents, but the truth is, adolescents have more accidents, and alcoholism is the number one cause of auto accidents and death."

"Family members and communities need to be alert and aware of how important it is to provide safe senior transportation. It is an educational process to get them to recognize what needs to be done," Dr. Butler said.

Dr. Butler stresses the importance of convincing baby boomers to think about their mobility. "They need to be interested and involved in health promotion and disease prevention now," he said.

"There are 15,000 senior centers in the U.S.," Dr. Butler noted. "They could be a great source of volunteers who can store their credits to eventually use when they decide to stop driving."

When asked about his personal experience as a doctor caring for older adults with mobility problems, Dr. Butler responded, "I think of one person who loved driving, but it was disturbing to have him on the highways. We struck a deal that he would only drive in the immediate environment, but stay off highways. That protracted his opportunity to use his car, and spared him or others from getting hurt."

Driving only during the day or only on familiar routes is a common way for people to start the transition from driving. Moving over to the passenger seat is usually a gradual process that happens over many years.

"Dr. Butler's extensive experience advocating for seniors will be an asset to ITNAmerica," said Freund. "He is a pioneer in his field and I am honored to welcome him to the Council."



Katherine Freund honored at AARP the Magazine's 2009 Inspire Awards

Katherine Freund, ITNAmerica founder and Executive Director, received an [Inspire Award](#) from [AARP The Magazine](#) on December 8 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.

The 2009 honorees include Glenn Close (Mental Health Advocate), Richard M. Cohen (Voice for the Chronically Ill), Martin Eakes (Lending to the Poor), Katherine Freund (Transportation Activist), Peter Gallagher (Alzheimer's Advocate), David E. Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D. (Latino-Health

Researcher), Quincy Jones (Global Poverty Fighter), Susan Love, M.D. (Cancer Crusader), Rose Nakamura (Compassionate Caregiver), and Alma Powell (Children's Advocate).

"These leaders set a great example for all on how passion can support and spark change in creative, innovative ways. Their stories are truly inspiring," said Nancy Graham, Vice President and Editor of AARP The Magazine.

In their award announcement, *AARP The Magazine* writes, "Katherine Freund is the last person you'd expect to be an advocate for older drivers. In 1988 her son, Ryan, then three years old, was run over by a car. The driver, an octogenarian with dementia, didn't stop; he said later he thought he might have hit a dog. But after Ryan recovered, Freund turned to the mishap itself. "We do have to screen older drivers," she says. "But once you identify someone as impaired, they still need transportation." And so Freund established the Independent Transportation Network, a nonprofit that last year offered more than 30,000 rides to seniors, with affiliates in eight states. Unlike publicly funded transportation for older adults, which limits trips to doctors, churches, and grocery stores, ITNAmerica has no restrictions. "It's hard to make a case that the public should fund discretionary rides," Freund says. "But it's easy to make the case that quality of life depends upon them."

At the awards ceremony in Washington, Katherine introduced the ITNAmerica mascot, the Ginger Boy™. He has a head for business, a non-profit heart, and wears boots because this boy is willing to work. Please read his [story](#), whip up a batch for a bake sale with this [recipe](#), and [donate](#) the proceeds to support dignified transportation.



ITN is underway in St. Charles, Missouri

A letter from Althea West, Gerontologist

My interest in helping older adults started when my mom called me on a Monday morning in 1992 and said, "I don't think I should be driving anymore, and I think I should sell my car." When I asked her why, she explained she had been at church the night before, and couldn't remember the route back to her home. Her decision came out of nowhere for me, but when I started checking, it turned out she was having trouble with her medications, she couldn't balance her checkbook, and had trouble remembering details. My mom was very good at compensating and she had fooled us all for a long time.

My mom subsequently came to live in my home and I provided the support she needed to live as independently as possible. It was a privilege for me to be able to help, and I was surprised at how she struggled with feelings of dependency. She constantly apologized for needing a ride, or needing help with her meals or medications. We eventually developed a good system that worked for both of us, but I have always remembered her apologies for accepting support and how her perspective colored her world.

After my mom's death, I had the opportunity to go back to college and finished a BA in Psychology and a MA in Gerontology from Webster University, St. Louis. Since then, I have focused my efforts on helping older adults age successfully and finding ways to maintain the quality of their lives and their independence for as long as possible.

In 2006, I was working with a volunteer community senior services organization. A transportation committee was formed to investigate options for alternative transportation to those who cannot drive safely anymore. When surveying our community, we found a few choices for transportation but most were restricted to medical transportation or transportation for those with disabilities. The available 24/7 transportation in our community is from taxi companies, but is cost-prohibitive for some in our suburban community.

We found there are many who should give up their driving but delay making that decision because they feel they will lose their independence, and there are few alternatives for those who struggle with driving. I just had a conversation with an 83-year-old client who said her doctor suggested she not drive anymore because of vision problems. Instead of taking his advice, she is now looking for another doctor!

I read an article in the [AARP Bulletin](#) about a transportation service called ITNAmerica. The model sounded perfect for my community (St. Charles, Missouri), so I called the headquarters in Portland, Maine, to see how we could implement the ITN model in St. Charles County, Missouri.

After many meetings and several conversations with leaders from local municipalities, non-profit organizations, local businesses, a municipal planning organization, and state government, an ITN affiliate in St. Charles is becoming a reality. "Timing is everything" according to [Sally Faith](#), Missouri State Representative for the 15th District. She is the Chairperson for the St. Charles County Transit Authority and understands the need for an alternative transportation option in St. Charles County. Ms. Faith has been instrumental in helping other community leaders catch the vision. One of the priorities in our community is finding a transportation model that does not depend on taxpayer funding, and since ITN is a membership

organization that relies on a collaborative effort between individuals, their families, corporate alliances, and other non-profit organizations rather than relying on taxpayer dollars, it is a perfect fit.

After collaboration with many on our stakeholders' committee (which includes researchers from local universities, a physician, business owners, social workers, non-profit leaders, and marketing representatives), our funding sources include a grant for \$225,000 in matching funds from [East/West Gateway Organization](#), and support from local municipalities, non-profit organizations, foundations, and local business owners. Lutheran Senior Services is our premier sponsor, having pledged \$20,000/year for three years. St. Joseph's SSM Health Center and Veterans Home Care have made generous pledges of \$5000 each.

ITNAmerica truly provides a win/win opportunity to offer a transportation alternative to those who will actually use the transportation system. Older adults can benefit from the independence and dignity of a member organization that provides convenient, safe and reliable transportation and the community can be assured of a dependable transportation alternative without burdening the taxpayer.

We anticipate signing a contract with ITNAmerica in the first part of 2009 and offering our first rides by fall of 2009.



ITNPortland delivers trip of a lifetime

ITNPortland™ delivers people from Point A to Point B in a safe and efficient manner, but along the way, some pretty extraordinary things happen.

Carol Wernig, a member of ITNPortland since 1999, thought about traveling to her grandmother's homeland but her visual disability made it impossible to go on her own. Pauline "Polly" Spencer, a volunteer driver since the death of her husband in 2005, felt she was meant to see the world, but life's responsibilities came first. The two women met when Polly picked up Carol from work to drive her home.

It just so happened that the facilitator of the widow's support group Polly attended was an experienced traveler who occasionally escorted small groups. One day, Polly asked about the possibility of a tour and found out it could be done. "Carol," she said, "Pack up. We're going to Ireland!" Polly also recruited two other women to join the adventure.

Their journey lasted nine days, starting in Dublin. They toured the city, took in the theater, and sampled Guinness at a local pub. Both women praised the friendliness of the Irish people and commented how everyone in their group enjoyed themselves. Pauline and Carol also visited the Hills of Tara and the Boyne Valley; the Newgrange monuments, where custodians allowed Carol to "see" the ancient stones by touching them, the Wicklow Mountains, and several other attractions as well. They ended up in Kenmare, a small Irish town preserving some of the old customs, such as Saturday market day and herding the sheep through the streets. A trip to Iceland and Polly's ancestral homeland of Scotland is planned for 2009. "Never say never," Carol cautioned.

The relationship Polly and Carol developed is part of the magic of ITN. On a bus, you see the bus driver for a second while dropping your coins in the box. (ITN works on a debit system, so no money changes hands in the car, and no tipping is allowed.) In a taxi, you sit in the back seat and pass your money through the partition.

But with ITN, the passengers are in the front seat of the volunteer's own car, and the rapport between the rider and the driver is more like that of a neighbor or friend. The car is a personal space, like someone's home or yard. It is a congenial, comfortable, little capsule where friendships can germinate as two people sit side by side, rolling along. People talk and begin to trust one another and share.

Thanks to ITNPortland, two lives were changed forever. "We are grateful we could be the catalyst for such wonderful memories, and strive to foster a community spirit where "miracles" like this happen more and more often," said Liz Charles, Manager of ITNPortland.



Apple pie gamble pays off for ITNGreaterLA

The automobile and the apple pie are two great symbols of our country. Katherine Freund, Founder and Executive Director of the Independent Transportation Network® (ITN®), combined the two to help older Americans retain their freedom to go anywhere at any time -- another great American value.

In 2005, Katherine was speaking at a public forum in Santa Monica to

drum up interest in establishing an ITN affiliate in the area. Milt Weiner, former local AARP chapter president, was sitting in the front row, frowning. He raised his hand and asked, "How do you know when you've failed?" Milt had already seen four attempts to establish senior transportation in the Pacific Palisades area fail.

But Katherine was determined to replicate the ITN model she created in Portland, Maine, that has provided over 200,000 rides for approximately 1000 seniors since 1995. People over 60 and those with visual impairment become dues-paying members of ITN and can schedule rides 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for any purpose at all within the service area. Each ride costs approximately half of a taxi fare, and all rides are provided in cars, with arm-through-arm, door-through-door service.

Katherine said to Milt, "I'll bet you an apple pie that in one year from today, ITN will be up and running." Milt upped the ante: "I'll bet you an apple pie, a gallon of ice cream, and \$1000!"

A year came and went, and there was still no ITN in Santa Monica. In Milt's opinion, people weren't supporting the effort because they think they can count on relatives or neighbors to get them around after they give up their keys. But in truth, people hate to ask for favors or feel like a burden. They often end up isolated in their homes, "Out of sight, out of mind."

The "Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options" study found: "Compared with those who still drive, older non-drivers make 15% fewer trips to the doctor, 59% fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants, and 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities."

When Katherine returned to Santa Monica for the "Walk for Rides" fundraiser, she met up again with Milt and handed over a personal check for \$1000. She insisted that Milt take it. "It's a matter of honor," she said. Milt turned around and matched her \$1000 as a donation to ITN, but then the stakes got higher when the Omidyar Network announced a matching grants program.

Established by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and his wife Pam, the [Omidyar Network](#) is a philanthropic investment firm "committed to creating and fostering opportunity for people around the world."

In 2006, the organization announced an innovative funding project for which their online community would decide on specific thematic funding areas, and then choose organizations within those areas to fund.

One of the areas chosen to be funded was called "Aging Well - Contributing to Lifelong Vibrancy." ITN*GreaterLA* was selected to be funded for its grassroots and innovative approach to the transportation problem facing our growing older population.

Specifically cited in ITN's nomination was that the model is self-sustaining and uses "alternate currency." The latter refers to the myriad ways riders pay for their transportation: by donating their unused vehicles for an equal value of ride credits; by volunteering as a driver and saving up their mileage credits for their own future use (Transportation Social Security™); by using credits donated to them by their children or other volunteers; by participating in the Road Scholarship™ program if they are low-income; and by choosing whether they want to lower their costs by sharing rides, booking rides with 24-hours notice, or visiting health centers or businesses that "subsidize" rides for their patients or customers.

ITN*GreaterLA* is now up and running, thanks in part to the matching grant from the Omidyar Network and a friendly wager. In August ITN*America* and its national insurance partner [Liberty Mutual](#) sponsored a "Make Every Ride Count" event in Los Angeles where they discussed safe driving alternatives, tips for having conversations around transportation with a senior driver, and suggestions for staying safe behind the wheel. ITN*GreaterLA* currently has 17 volunteer drivers and a very busy board that would happily accept more volunteers, car donations, or members. Anyone in the community can [join](#) to support dignified transportation, even if you don't qualify to ride.

Epilogue

Katherine still owes Milt the apple pie and ice cream.

In further pie bribery news, when Katherine established ITN*Portland* in 1995, she had trouble recruiting volunteers. With money scarce, she took out an ad offering an "Apple Pie Signing Bonus."

The phone rang off the hook, and the people who responded to the ad were ones who shared many of the values fundamental to an organization that brings your older neighbor to the hairdresser or dialysis or wherever else he or she wants to go. Maybe they also appreciated the creativity and hard work put into baking from scratch. Or maybe they just liked apple pie.



Rolling out rides with research

It has been almost 20 years since Katherine

 Freund shared a vision with one of her faculty advisors at the [Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service](#), in Portland, Maine. The vision would become the Independent Transportation Network (ITN). The faculty advisor, [Richard Fortinsky](#), now Professor of Medicine and the Physicians Health Services Chair in Geriatrics and Gerontology at the University of Connecticut Health Center, would become ITNAmerica's first Director of Research and Evaluation.

From that first day, Rick encouraged Katherine to put her vision into writing and helped her as often as he could to develop and ask the right research questions. Rick has always understood the importance of transportation to quality of life and well-being in the context of aging, and the need to incorporate research and evaluation into the daily life of the ITN enterprise. It was through his guidance that Katherine presented her first ITN paper at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the [Gerontological Society of America](#) in 1991. Although Rick left Maine in 1993, they remained in contact as Katherine's work on ITN moved forward. When the very first ITN research money arrived, Katherine turned again to Rick for guidance. Because ITN is a replicable model linked with one national database, they knew the time would come to study transportation in a way that had never been done before. That time came in 2005, when ITNAmerica was created to support the replication of the ITN model.

Rick has had a strong role in the development of the Uniform Data Set (UDS) ITNAmerica now uses to capture uniform data for all customers when they initially sign up for the service, for all volunteer and paid drivers, and for all rides scheduled and completed. This data set provides a unique source of information to support research projects that allow ITNAmerica to better understand the mobility needs of older adults, their families and their communities, and to continuously improve the quality and sustainability of the service. In addition, the data base is a potential resource for [Research Group](#) (RG) members in the future as they pursue their own research studies.

Rick and Katherine turned to their colleagues for insight to help frame the important issues to study. From this small group of colleagues, the ITNAmerica Research Group was formed. Framing those issues has been the major role of the RG to date, with the understanding and the vision to know that the best research opportunities are still ahead. Rick's principal role in the Group is directing the evaluation of the [Atlantic Philanthropies](#)-funded rollout of ITN affiliates. The evaluation looks primarily at the effects of having access to ITN-based transportation on quality of life among ITN customers.

Some RG members have already been involved with specific ITNAmerica research projects, while other members will be involved as the group continues to lay out future projects. In addition to Dr. Fortinsky, other members of the Research Group based in the U.S. are: Dr. Richard Marotoli, Dr. Germaine Odenheimer, Dr. Nina Silverstein, and Dr. Loren Staplin. Additional members include Dr. Desmond O'Neil in Ireland and our newest member, Dr. Bonnie Dobbs in Canada. Current ITNAmerica research topics include: (1) the impact of ITN on the quality of life of older adults, family members, and volunteer drivers, (2) how the availability of ITN impacts the health care practitioner's willingness to address the driving issue with patients, (3) mobility patterns among older adults who stop or limit their driving, (4) the role of alternative transportation as part of the transition from driving for older adults, and (5) an update of Daniel Foley's 2002 Driving Life Expectancy study.

Research and evaluation will always be critical to the development and refinement of ITNAmerica. Colleagues like Rick Fortinsky and other members of the RG make ITN a special example of the marriage of service and research to the benefit of aging individuals who require transportation to sustain the quality of their lives.

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