

BETSY CHERNAU'S SECRETS TO LONG LIVING: THINK, MOVE, LAUGH, HELP
Community Leader Encourages Gifts to Upcoming Give65 Campaign

Betsy Chernau lives her own personal Golden Rule every day.

"If I can make *one* person smile each day," says Chernau, "then my life is a success!"

At 87, Chernau is a living beacon of light for other aging adults in Middle Tennessee through her longtime support and volunteer efforts at AgeWell Middle Tennessee, the regional nonprofit that champions informed and positive aging and serves as a convener on issues affecting the aging population.

The organization runs in the family, Chernau said.

Her mother, Elizabeth Jonas Jacobs, founded the Council on Aging (which rebranded as AgeWell in 2021) and saved the organization when Metro Nashville was closing the Council of Community Services when city leaders felt it conflicted with the growing United Way of Nashville in 1985, Chernau recalled.

"She was 85 at the time and went to Mayor (Richard) Fulton and said this organization needs to remain open. She had started a directory (which continues publication today) of all the various places and resources for the elderly and knew that it was important for those individuals and families that needed one place with all the critical information available," Chernau said. "She was an amazing woman who cared about Nashville more than anything in this world."

Today, Chernau continues to support her mother's legacy at AgeWell by "doing whatever I can do to help. Sign letters. Make phone calls."

Chernau's mantra of giving back is one reason she is enthusiastic and supportive of the upcoming Give65 campaign, the online national fundraising event that is for organizations serving aging adults that AgeWell participates in annually. The 65-hour Give65 Event begins at 8 a.m. CDT on Tuesday, July 12 and concludes at 1:00 a.m. CDT on Friday, July 15.

She credits AgeWell for helping her deal with the pandemic over the last couple of years.

"You wake up one morning and realize you are totally isolated and alone," Chernau said. "Both of my children live out of town, but I am lucky that I am healthy and can afford to live alone ... have a good place to sleep, but it was a trying time for me."

“Luckily, between my friends and AgeWell, I got through it. Plus, I believe you need that purpose in life – something to do, something to support, and AgeWell plays an important role in our community.”

Chernau said AgeWell Middle Tennessee’s role as a trusted community resource is only going to grow in the years ahead.

“So many of us are living longer and getting care is sometimes very difficult, especially with everyone in the household working now. There are children with aging parents who are seeking help and asking, ‘What do I do? Where do I go? Who do I call?’ AgeWell is here to help older adults and their family caregivers.” Chernau said.

Chernau never thinks about slowing down. Both of her parents were civic activists throughout their lives. Her father Homer Jonas was an officer of The Temple for more than 15 years, served as a member of several boards throughout his life and opened the first Kay Jewelers in Nashville in 1928. Chernau’s mother was a leader in the Travelers Aid organization during World War II and led a League of Women Voters campaign to support the creation of a metropolitan form of government in Nashville in the early 1960s.

“My mother’s motto was ‘If you see something that needs to be done, do it.’ I believe that and think if you are going to get involved, then jump in up to your neck and do what you need to,” she said. “For me, aging well is about keeping your mind active, your body moving, keeping your sense of humor and helping others.”

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