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WHO ARE NEW YORK'S OLDER ADULTS?

New York The State's Older Population Number and Projections					
	Ages 55-59	**Ages 60–74**	**Ages 75–84**	**Ages 85 and Over**	**Total Older Population**
2007*	1.2 M	2.2 M	901,194	355,963	4.6 M
2025 Projections**	956,336	3.1 M	1.1 M	548,011	5.8 M

* U. S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, Table B01001 (2005-2007).
**U. S. Census Bureau, Interim State Projections of Population by Single Year of Age 2004-2030, File 3 (April 1, 2005).

New York has the third largest number of older adults in the United States, and the aging of the Baby Boomers is swelling the ranks of the State's older population. The oldest Boomers turned 64 in 2010, and the youngest Boomers will turn 60 in 2024. There has never been a standard definition of what constitutes "old age"; and the Boomers are re-defining all aspects of aging, what it means to be older, and *when* someone would consider himself or herself "old."

"How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?"
— Satchel Paige

Often, all older people are considered as one homogenous group—the elderly. At other times, for simplicity and convenience, they are categorized into three groups, by age—the young-old, the old-old, and the oldest-old. Such approaches do not realistically reflect what researchers observe about older people: they are the most diverse of all age groups—a multi-generational group ranging in age from 55 to over 100, with extremely varied traits, characteristics, preferences, and needs. Thus, it is hard to define, describe—put a label on—New York's older adults. Yet, from New York City to Long Island, from Albany to Buffalo, from the cities to the rural communities of New York, there are many images and stories that will shed some light on the question, "Who are New York's older people?" Here are some examples:

- On two different episodes of a television cooking show, the host (a man in his 40's) had his mother and grandmother on the show. The host's mother was "jetting in" from a vacation in warmer climates, clad in a trim, very chic suit, and sporting a tan. The host's grandmother was making biscuits in her kitchen, clad in a simple housedress, telling stories of how she learned to make biscuits from her mother.

- Several years ago, a new senior apartment community opened in upstate New York. Within a few weeks, one group of residents couldn't wait to get bingo started. Another group of residents called the local college to see if they could get some students to come and teach them to use the computer.

- Mark taught high school for 35 years. He retired at age 60 because of the physical, emotional, and time demands of being a good teacher. He almost immediately began to volunteer at the local library and soon became manager of the library association's used bookstore. He also became involved in his community's local government, serving several terms on the town board.

- Anna is 63 years old. She doesn't speak English very well, and she works full time in her family's restaurant. She is a widow who finds the routine of keeping up her house increasingly difficult. She is also taking care of her 83-year-old mother who has Alzheimer's disease and who does not speak English at all. She is finding it harder to keep working full time—to help her family—and to meet the demands of caring for her mother.

- Jim is a widower who is living alone in the house he shared with his wife for 50 years. Many of his remaining friends go to Florida for the winter, but Jim is not able to afford to do that. He is no longer comfortable driving, especially in the winter and at night. There are many days when Jim goes to bed and thinks, "I haven't talked to a single person today."

- Marion is a 70-year-old homeowner. She recently retired from working for the State and is looking forward to being able to travel and see the USA with her friends. She is also looking forward to being able to spend more time on her passion – gardening.

- Louise and Jack moved into a senior apartment complex after Jack had a heart attack. While they were finding it harder to take care of their apartment, they seemed to be doing ok; but one day, Louise fell and Jack was unable to help her get up. When their neighbors heard their cries, the EMTs came and transported both to the hospital, where doctors found that both Louise and Jack had some serious health issues and recommended that they move into an assisted living residence.

- Esther is 64 and has just completed a PhD in social work.

- Joanne is 65, is divorced, and lives in her own home. She works full time as a secretary and also has full custodial responsibility for her two grandsons who live with her.

- Don is 78 and a retired college professor. He is a snow bird, spending half the year in New York and half the year in North Carolina. Since his retirement he has expanded his work as a labor arbitrator and mediator to full time.

- Barbara is 90 years old, has had two hip replacements, wears two hearing aids, uses a cane, and can no longer drive. She continues to care for her 95-year-old husband who is physically very frail, but neither of them wants to move out of their long-time home.

- Jeff is a 70-year-old Viet Nam veteran. He lives in one of New York's Adult Homes and continues to suffer emotionally from his wartime experiences.

These are real stories of real people: New York's older adults. They are our neighbors; they are our family members; and they are our friends. They are healthy, vibrant men and women who are working, are volunteering in their communities, are traveling, and are living active lives. They are men and women who are caring for themselves and their spouses, who are caring for their own aged parents, who are helping their adult children financially, and who may also be raising their grandchildren. They are men and women who are very frail, who are developing physical and mental health issues that limit their ability to live the lives they imagined for themselves, and who need some assistance.

Our eldest senior New Yorkers, the "Greatest Generation," have had their lives shaped by two world wars. Many in this generation benefited from government educational assistance for veterans; members of this generation had the largest one-generation jump in educational attainment in New York history. Because of their intimate connection to our country in wartime, they have a strong sense of country, have been active participants in the electoral process, and lived the "American Dream." They have also been shaped by the Great Depression and, so, have been savers, and more inclined than later generations to plan for their futures. As our oldest New Yorkers, they are generally upbeat about living longer and hopeful about the activities and efforts of government and the private sector to address issues for those who are aging.

Our youngest senior New Yorkers, the "Baby Boomer generation," are just beginning to realize that they are now "older New Yorkers." While these older adults are among the best educated of our population, they are also the generation that has focused on career and upward mobility, for themselves and their families. They are used to success and used to things happening "now." As older New Yorkers, they are now bringing their business expertise and expectations for success into their retirement. Because they have been used to autonomy and control in their lives, they expect that they will continue to be in control of their personal situations as they age. However, unlike the eldest seniors who have saved for their futures, many of the baby boomer generation have not been savers. They have used their resources in their businesses, in their family lives, and to help their adult children. This means that while this generation of older people may be more skeptical about the sustainability of government programs, they may be in greater need of government programs in their retirement years.

Whether the older New Yorker is a member of the "greatest generation," a "baby boomer," or a transition member between the two, some things are universally true: all older New Yorkers want to continue to live independently in a place they call home; they are vigorously involved with their families; and they hope that they can be active and healthy and make decisions for themselves throughout their lives. When all is said and done, isn't that what is the hope of all New Yorkers?