Mark Zeug, Chairman, National Senior Games Association

Greetings, everyone. Alooooha. It's great to see all of you here.

I am indeed privileged to be part of this Healthy Living Celebration this afternoon, and enthusiastically applaud the focus on fitness in opening this event.

For I believe that proper exercise and eating habits will do more to improve longevity and quality of life for seniors than all other efforts combined.

That is the mission of the National Senior Games Association, organizer of the National Senior Olympics, the largest multi-sport event in the world for seniors. We are dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles through education, fitness and sport.

NSGA is the national organization that spearheads the senior games movement, sanctioning and coordinating efforts of senior games organizations across the country. Presently, we serve 50 member state organizations, located in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

This past June, more than 10,000 seniors from all parts of the country converged on Pittsburgh for the Summer Games, competing in 18 different sports and amassing hundreds of event records. And demonstrating again that sports provide excellent incentive for seniors to get fit and stay fit throughout their golden years.

As more and more seniors realize the value of an event like the Senior Olympics to drive their quest for fitness, our programs have grown accordingly -- we are expecting around 15,000 senior athletes at our next Summer Games, set for June of 07 in Louisville, Kentucky. Two years later, we'll do it again in San Francisco, and in 011, we'll be in Houston. You can learn more at NSGA.com.

Many national games athletes began their journey to Pittsburgh by first competing in one of the more than 300 local senior Olympics events held annually around the country. In all, some 200,000 seniors nationwide

participate in one or more sports competitions conducted by these state and local senior games.

And many more participate in non-competitive fitness activities such as Walk Deleware or the Hawaii Walkarama. They do it for fun. They do it for fellowship. And they do it for fitness. Because they know that fitness pays. We all know the data – you can expect to live up to 10 years longer if you stay physically active, you can expect to save about $3,600 per year on medical and pharmaceutical costs by staying active in your senior years, you will be better able to combat illness when it does strike, you will be healthier and happier and enjoy life more if you stay physically active.

We all know it, and our seniors prove it every time they lace up their running shoes, or pick up a tennis racquet. Our participants range in age from 50 to 103. In Hawaii, we even welcome 40-year-olds – we call them pre-seniors.

We also foster Research and Education through the NSGA Foundation -- Dr. Jenifer Mason, a trustee of the Foundation and prominent researcher who is here as a delegate is currently working with the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, the Texas Medical Center and the LSU Pennington Biomedical Research Center to better understand senior health problems and find ways to create better adult health and fitness through education.

We need more research like this to help us get at the problem, but we already know what the problem is – more than 50 percent of seniors are couch potatoes. They are so physically limited that they cannot walk up a flight of stairs without gasping for breath, they cannot run a few steps to catch a bus or walk across a mall parking lot without being in distress.

There's our problem folks. And we need to address it at this forum. In size, social impact and actual cost – cost in dollars and cost in reduced quality of life – it dwarfs all of the other problems identified in the list of resolutions we have before us. This is not just me talking – the Rand Corporation estimates that the social and economic costs of physical inactivity exceed the costs of smoking and drinking combined.

We need to take a serious look as these resolutions to see how implementation can be formatted to include a focus on fitness. We've got to come up with ways to encourage more seniors to be physically and mentally active, and to stay that way. We know what the outcome needs to be – we just have to figure out how to get there.

But we are a powerful group of intelligent people who represent nearly every aspect of life that could possibly affect our seniors. If we can't do it, nobody can. We're here, let's do it. SENIOR POWER!