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MEET THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MINDS IN AMERICA

National health education campaign, *Beautiful Minds: Finding Your Lifelong Potential*, identifies Americans who are keeping their minds beautiful without letting age be a barrier

Beautiful Minds: Finding Your Lifelong Potential is a national health education campaign designed to promote the importance of brain health and empower Americans to develop and maintain healthy, beautiful minds by incorporating key lifestyle factors known as the four dimensions of brain health — diet and nutrition, physical health, mental health and social well-being.

A partnership between the National Center for Creative Aging and *life'sDHA*[™], a DSM Nutritional Products brand, the campaign features inspiring stories of individuals who are fulfilling the four dimensions of brain health and accomplishing amazing things well into the second half of their lives.

The campaign also features the 2014 *America's Brain Health Index*, a state-by-state ranking of brain health that delivers data on how well Americans are successfully incorporating the four dimensions of brain health into their daily lives and states where more action is needed.

Below are profiles of the 2014 *Beautiful Minds* finalists, as well as information on where their state ranks in the 2014 *America's Brain Health Index*.

For more information about the campaign and to hear inspirational stories from each *Beautiful Mind*, visit www.beautiful-minds.com.

Bruce Mondschain **71, Deerfield, Ill.**

Life's phases invite us to continue learning and making contributions to the world. I believe in a balance of work, relationships, learning, community engagement and health.

My wife gave me a professional camera when I was 50 and I began to feed my creativity through photographing and exhibiting fine arts photography and portraiture of notable musicians. My hobby became an accomplished passion when my work was displayed at the Smithsonian.

At 54, I started a healthcare consulting company that brings together all the types of work I've done, once again defining what I want to do when I "grow up." I believe in healing the world. I'm also involved with my congregation and serve on an art museum board.

After 48 years of marriage to my best friend, I believe in owning your own behavior and reminding people how much you care about them. Both of my parents died at 62, which I took to heart and decided to get on the treadmill, give up red meat, reduce flour and sugar consumption and become an activist for cognitive vitality, life planning and healthy aging.

Fun fact: Bruce is leading by example in his home state of Illinois, which ranks No. 37 on *America's Brain Health Index*.

Carol Siegel
75, Alexandria, Va.

I love tackling new artistic challenges. Drawing from my career as a professional photographer, I now teach art and poetry workshops at adult day care centers.

After a satisfying career that included teaching photography to young people, I decided to pursue my passion of enabling people to express themselves through art. At 55 I returned to school, where I earned a master's degree in expressive therapies.

Currently I'm a teaching artist at Arts for the Aging, an organization that provides arts and engagement programs to people in nursing homes and adult day care centers. I've had wonderful experiences teaching art and poetry workshops to these seniors, including taking them to see an anniversary showing of one of my earlier photography exhibits at the Alexandria Black History Museum.

There is an art to living a full and gratifying life. I feed my mind by helping others discover the joys of artistic expression. I feed my body by eating nutritious foods. I stay active by practicing yoga five times a week, swimming twice a week and walking my dog.

Fun fact: Word has it that Carol is among the majority of Virginia residents who strive for better brain health. The state is ranked No. 18 on *America's Brain Health Index*.

Cheryl Vassiliadis
60, Hoschton, Ga.

Dance is my passion, but my dreams for a ballet career ended at 11 when I was diagnosed with severe scoliosis. I rediscovered dance at 50 when friends persuaded me to teach them some moves. Now I bring the love of dance and movement to the world around me.

I teach dance and rhythm to adults aged 60 to 98. One day I'm teaching ladies over 55 who meet to get their groove on and exercise their bodies, but also their brains and social skills. The next, I'm teaching seniors who move to music while seated due to health issues. The following day, I'm bringing jubilation to adults with dementia and Alzheimer's, who freely express their joy while swaying to upbeat tunes.

The dancers see that life's rich experiences needn't diminish. Isn't that what we all hope for — to keep embracing life head-on to discover our own best selves?

Fun fact: It's not surprising that Cheryl hails from the state that ranks No. 10 in the nation when it comes to brain health, according to *America's Brain Health Index*.

C.K. Perez
81, Chicago, Ill.

Fitness became a priority for me at 52 when I dedicated myself to staying in shape to ensure I was living life to the fullest. At 80, unlike most my age, I bike nine miles to work, which is teaching fitness classes and lifeguarding.

I was in the military earlier in life, working in the CIA headquarters and later serving in France. After 23 years of marriage I divorced, got hooked on working out at the gym and became a competitive weight lifter.

I'm very deliberate about building and maintaining brain health. I earned a degree in social work at 67. I don't own a TV or computer, choosing instead to read or listen to the radio. I learn all the names of everyone in my exercise classes. It's important to have in-person and verbal interaction with people every day. I also feed my body with the same good intentions — putting good in and avoiding the bad, but I do love a glass of chocolate milk after a workout.

Fun fact: C.K.'s home state of Illinois is ranked No. 37 on *America's Brain Health Index*, which ranks each state's brain health.

Judith Mares Lazar
65, Washington, D.C.

While succeeding in a busy finance career, it can be easy to say, "I don't have time" to give back or even cook a homemade meal every night, but I have chosen to put others first. Even the smallest acts of kindness can be impactful.

When I became a single working mother, I always had to multitask while holding a job and caring for my family and a father with Alzheimer's. His disease impacted my family greatly, making body and mind health a topic of great importance. I made it a point to give my life and my children's a purpose, so we volunteered at local soup kitchens, which gave us new perspectives on life and let us show love to those less fortunate than ourselves. In addition to mental fulfillment for optimal health, I strive to cook nutritious meals for my family and myself. I enjoy providing homemade meals that not only taste great, but also are healthy choices.

Being accountable is a key factor in maintaining mental and physical fitness. I stay fit by belonging to three gyms and a yoga center, where I enjoy the camaraderie of exercising and socializing. I recently retired from my job as a Chief Investment Officer and have taken a position working for the Federal Government, which has been an enthralling change for the second half of my life.

Fun fact: Washington D.C., where Judith calls home, is among the top brain-healthiest areas of the county with a No. 6 ranking on *America's Brain Health Index*.

Leecynth “Lee” Hunkins
84, New York, N.Y.

As a professional playwright and television writer, my life experiences allow me to create intriguing stories for others while keeping my mind active and young.

In spite of no formal education in writing, I learned my craft from hands-on experience in a Harlem community theater. I have now been in the business for more than 50 years and have won numerous awards and accolades, including two Emmy nominations. I’m especially proud of my teleplay, “Hollow Image,” which appeared on national TV in 1979 as well as my writing for the PBS “Reading Rainbow” series.

I stay active and engaged by volunteering with the New York City Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, Healing Arts Initiative and Goddard Riverside Community Center. I love learning from others, so I make it a habit to get to know everyone I meet; perhaps that’s why my list of friends keeps growing. I learn from others and offer what I can in the way of friendship. I’m filled with curiosity and wake up each morning wondering what the new day has in store for me. A beautiful mind keeps expanding in life.

Fun fact: Leecynth’s home state of New York is ranked near the top of the brain-healthiest states, with an *America’s Brain Health Index* ranking of No. 8.

Pei Chang “Patty” Wang
90, San Jose, Calif.

As a Chinese opera singer, painter, musician and volunteer, I follow my heart and mind with my own ideas for a healthy and fulfilling life. Growing up in China, I was the first in my family to attend a university, and instead of having an arranged marriage, I chose my husband myself.

This inner spark of independence remains in the second half of my life. Instead of choosing assisted living, I live independently. I’ve honed fine arts skills to become a Chinese opera singer and have performed a one-woman show in traditional costumes and makeup before hundreds of people. I’ve become an avid painter, creating art for the homes of my five children and 12 grandchildren. In my 70s, I learned to play guitar and play in a community band called the Silver Strings, which releases songs documenting members’ growth as musicians and learners. I also volunteered for my local police department.

I relish the opportunity to make independent choices each day. I make sure to eat nutritious meals and stretch daily. Living a mentally engaged lifestyle can make 90 feel like 60 again.

Fun fact: Pei Chang is a shining example of the many Californians who are striving for better brain health. The state ranks No. 13 on *America’s Brain Health Index*.

Peter Phildius
84, Wellesley, Mass.

I started competitive swimming at 68 as part of my formula for a long life: have a purpose, keep moving and stay connected.

I keep moving by competing in the U.S. Masters swim program. I've won 63 gold medals and have ranked in the top 10 nationally in the breaststroke.

Staying connected is not hard in my work as a business consultant for entrepreneurs. I love coaching people young and old. I also help active seniors connect with each other through a website my partner and I created.

I never plan to retire and recommend that if you do, look for an encore career, something that allows you to help people and have an income at the same time. I may not make it to 100 years old, but why not try? I will probably make a lot of friends along the way.

Fun fact: Ranking near the top of *America's Brain Health Index* at No. 16, Massachusetts is home to Peter and many brain-health-conscious residents.

Renee McClendon
58, Diamondhead, Miss.

Volunteering is a passion that has become a full-time commitment for me. I realized I receive much more than I give when I volunteer — working with students to help mold their minds while learning the important lessons of those who have gone before us.

I have a master's degree in music and taught K-12 Iowa kids in gifted education while getting involved with National History Day after school. For 10 years, I taught this yearlong academic program in which middle and high school students conduct historical research for state and national competitions. Eventually, I became a full-time volunteer for the Mississippi National History Day Program. I love traveling throughout our state, helping teachers facilitate this enriching learning opportunity for students.

My nutritional and physical health is attributable to lifestyle: I participate in a weight-training program and bike or walk 15 miles per week. I'm not an athlete, but it's important to eat healthy and stay active in the second half of my life.

Fun fact: Renee's efforts to achieve better brain health can serve as inspiration to others in her home state of Mississippi, which ranks last on *America's Brain Health Index*.