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# Lynchburg conference offers clues for healthy aging

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Jill Nance

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James Brooks, an Adviser for the AARP Office of Volunteerism and Service, speaks about spirituality, faith and aging at the Annual Conference of Aging at Lynchburg College on Tuesday. Photo by Jill Nance

Posted: Tuesday, June 2, 2015 6:06 pm

**Amy Trent**

For more than an hour Tuesday morning, caregivers and healthcare professionals

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Conference attendees of the Annual Conference on Aging listen to the closing keynote by James Brooks of AARP on Tuesday at Lynchburg College. Photo by Jill Nance

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Happiness, Passanisi said, is very much a choice. Although 50 percent of happiness is determined by genetics and 10 percent by circumstances, another 40 percent is determined by how we choose to think and behave, she said.

That 40 percent is the part she focuses on, and she starts by telling people it is critical for individuals to take responsibility for their happiness. As a means to obtain happiness, Passanisi asked her audience to find balance in their lives based on their values, beliefs, deciding what they can do without and using their "heart song" as a compass. According to Passanisi, balance "is a state of mind, not a state of affairs," a feeling rather than something that can be measured.

"You have to live with intention if you want a healthy balanced life and want to age well," Passanisi said, asking attendees to imagine what kind of older person they want to be.

laughed and nodded in agreement as Kathleen Passanisi shared the power of happiness with the roughly 400 attendees of Lynchburg College's 2015 Conference on Aging.

The theme for this year's event, an annual conference hosted each June by the Beard Center on Aging was "Aging well in mind, body and spirit." Specialists from across the state converged to discuss finances, health, relationships, ethics, nutrition, conflict resolution, Medicaid, elder abuse and much more.

Passanisi, a humorist and medical professional, started the day as the morning's keynote speaker.

"You can't be too happy," Passanisi said, explaining happy people live longer, sleep better, and are more optimistic and compassionate.

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She then recommends individuals use their values, beliefs and heart songs to guide them as they try to achieve emotional, social, vocational and spiritual health.

Breathing correctly, sleeping, meditating and practicing gratitude are some of the methods she recommends for achieving balance and happiness.

Outside the lecture hall, surrounded by the dozens of vendors in Schewel Hall's lobby, Ken Vance, housing services coordinator for the Central Virginia Alliance for Community Living, was marveling at the timing of Tuesday's talk.

His job can be stressful, he said, describing an unfortunate incident with a contractor who was helping one of his clients just a day before.

"Conferences like this help us get refocused so that we can continue serving the community," Vance said. He planned to attend a session on aggressive behavior specifically to help him with what he faces at work.

"It's things like this that help us stay focused and prepare us for whatever we may encounter," he said.

Janice Stephens, an LPN at the Williams Home, an assisted living facility for women not far from Centra's Virginia Baptist Hospital, had praise for not only Passanisi, but for the event itself.

"It's so well organized, it's set up so nicely," Stephens said as she and a co-worker sifted through the pamphlets and flyers being offered by various agencies.

Passing out information upstairs about the Adult Care Center after the day's first keynote address, ACC Director Shanda Rowe still was smiling.

"I agree with everything she was saying," Rowe said. "You have to make your own happiness and happy people live lives that are much more full."

The Conference on Aging continues with a post-conference workshop on Alzheimer's disease and dementia care today in Lynchburg College's Schewel Hall. The intensive Alzheimer's and dementia class is designed by the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners (NCCDP) for those interested in learning more about dementia and those wanting to become Certified Dementia Practitioners. Registration begins at 8 a.m. For more information, call (434) 544-8456

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