**Jim McGuire, nonprofit entrepreneur, senior services advocate par excellence, mentor, prepares to retire from the Area Agency on Aging 1-B**

**Jim McGuire, Area Agency on Aging 1-B’s director of research, policy development and advocacy (and one-time interim CEO), is retiring Dec. 1.**

**With McGuire’s imminent retirement, Michigan seniors are losing a true innovator and one of their staunchest advocates.**

**In nearly four decades of work on behalf of older adults in Michigan, McGuire has spearheaded initiatives that have resulted in door-to-door bus service for seniors in Oakland and Macomb counties, a state budget for in-home care programs, and an interfaith volunteer program – all key to helping people age in place. He has taught gerontology and policy courses at UM, EMU and Madonna University, regularly presents his work at national conferences, and has authored grants bringing millions of dollars into southeast Michigan, creating jobs and serving seniors and family caregivers.**

**McGuire founded the Silver Key Coalition, a group of statewide aging-services advocates, to lobby for more funding for in-home care for people who are not poor enough to qualify for state aid but too poor to afford private services. This work achieved an unprecedented 43% increase in state funding over a four-year period. He was inspired by his grandmother’s situation – and a motivational book for would-be entrepreneurs.**

**The key to his success has been seemingly bottomless energy, an ability to bring together stakeholders under a common cause, to gather and assemble data to create strong value propositions – and then to convince policy makers of the rightness of the idea.**

**“I’m essentially an entrepreneur in a nonprofit world,” McGuire says. “In the business world you build companies and scale up and plan to grow and maybe be bought out. I started a half-dozen nonprofit and program rather than companies. It’s all the same thing; some people like the deal. Getting a grant is like creating something of value from nothing – you get addicted to the thrill of doing deals. That’s why I write so many grants.”**

**McGuire has led some 40 ad hoc study committee investigations since 1985 in order to “take a deep dive and identify areas of concern and possible solutions” in the world of older adults and family caregivers. More recently, a committee produced a report on the need to support kinship caregivers, an issue that has gotten the attention of state lawmakers. This summer, McGuire and an ad hoc committee will assess the financial health of Social Security and Medicare and study solutions to protecting the problems.**

**Jim McGuire: History of a Planner/Nonprofit Entrepreneur**

Thirty-six years ago, McGuire joined the Area Agency on Aging 1-B, primarily in the role of transportation planner. He had been in a similar role for the City of Dearborn, working to expand small bus service for seniors. When he joined AAA 1-B in 1985, McGuire focused on expanding the state **Specialized Transportation Services** for the purpose of helping senior centers and nonprofits access operating funds for small bus service. At that point, working with Dan Dirks, a former head of the defunct SEMTA transportation service, McGuire was able to match donated vans from service organizations like Kiwanis and an unlikely source – a banker who was brought in to rescue Michigan National Bank.

He and Dirks worked with aging network advocates to convince lawmakers in Lansing that transportation for seniors in southeast Michigan deserved state funding and were able to almost double the restricted $850,000 program to help local transit authorities and senior centers expand their bus services. Today, the budget is around $3 million – and now seniors and people with disabilities can get door-to-door service.

In 1987, 13% of older adults named transportation as an unmet need; in a 2019 follow-up survey, the number fell to 6%. McGuire is proud that his hard work paid off.

“Transportation is always there as an issue, but it’s of smaller magnitude than it’s ever been,” he says.

McGuire, who has a master’s degree in policy-driven social work from Western Michigan University, turned his considerable energy to making home- and community-based services a cornerstone of the agency’s agenda. Other states had begun to shift resources away from nursing homes to the community, something he saw as critical to helping older adults in Michigan maintain their independence. McGuire helped to advocate for the statewide expansion of the care management piece necessary to put the MI Choice Medicaid Waiver Program in place (the program allows for wraparound care in a person’s home). Today, AAA 1-B is among 20 agencies statewide that administers the MI Choice program, which will enable over 1,000 people this year who need a high level of medical care to receive services in their home at a significantly lower cost to taxpayers than nursing home care.

In the early 1990s, Jim developed the Interfaith Volunteer Caregiver Service, winning a grant and convincing Catholic Social Services to run it. The organization has hundreds of active volunteers and is still flourishing, thanks in part to funding by AAA 1-B.

In 2005, McGuire formed AAA 1-B’s Senior Advisory Network of individuals interested in advocating on behalf of older adults.

In 2015, McGuire founded the Silver Key Coalition, a lobby for nonprofits that is focused on reducing the wait list for in-home services for seniors – especially the “near poor,” a population that is neglected and often the most vulnerable. They have too many resources to qualify for state aid but not enough to truly afford private services.

McGuire says the Silver Key Coalition effort was inspired by the business book “The ONE Thing,” a motivational book by Gary Keller that argued for focusing on one primary goal to achieve success.

“In my case, I am so stretched I have to just do what’s needed to meet expectations; rarely do I throw myself completely into one thing,” he says. “I decided to focus on one thing and not compromise on advocating all out for in-home services.”

Former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder was receptive to a data-driven approach, and that’s what McGuire provided. With plenty of shoe leather and an innovative marketing strategy, the coalition won support from legislators.

“I’m representing 30% of the state, so I knew that to be successful, I needed to establish partnerships with other organizations across the state,” says McGuire. “We did marketing things like putting 7,000 keys in a container at the state capitol to represent 7,000 seniors on wait lists for non-Medicaid in-home services. We gave every legislator a jar with one key representing each senior in their district that was on a wait list and silver lapel pins shaped like a key to wear and show their support. We made it data-driven. We have a white paper – one of my greatest hits – showing how wait lists hurt seniors. They are more likely to end up in nursing homes, die sooner, and their family caregivers are more likely to miss work.

“In the first five years, we got a 46% increase in funds for home- and community-based services. It was pretty damned successful.”

Most of the $13.6 million from the state’s general fund supports Meals on Wheels and services like the Community Living Program, which provides seniors with in-home services (personal care and housekeeping) at low or no-cost.

In 2017, McGuire found himself in the role of agency CEO, a position he didn’t relish. AAA 1-B was going through a leadership crisis and was saddled with money-losing programs when he was plucked to lead it back into stability and solvency.

It wasn’t easy: there was no HR director and no CFO. McGuire had to balance books and calm tempers. He essentially had to change the culture of the agency, which meant restoring trust in the agency of internal and external stakeholders.

“My job was to turn the agency back around and make the agency a better place,” he says. Fortunately, the relationships he had built with county commissioners (who are represented on the agency’s board of directors) and community leaders over the decades helped him get the agency back on track.

“My philosophy is to be 100% transparent, and I’m not afraid to apologize when a mistake has been made,” McGuire says.

He did not want the job, though, as it did not fulfill his professional goals. Michael Karson, the agency’s current CEO, was hired.

McGuire is on the cusp of his 65th birthday and ready to devote himself to other interests. His successor as director of AAA 1-B’s Planning and Advocacy department is Katie Wendel, who previously served in the position of senior manager of advocacy.