

EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR

# Celebrate OLDER AMERICANS MONTH THIS MAY

By Rebecca Williams,  
Facility Director of Barton Woods Assisted Living

There's a lot to celebrate in the month of May: May flowers, Mother's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Memorial Day, and the Kentucky Derby. But did you know that May is the national observance month honoring Older Americans? Older adults play vital, positive roles in our lives and communities, as family members, friends, mentors, volunteers, civic leaders, members of the workforce, and more. Just as every person is unique, so too is how they age and how they choose to do it. Remember, there is no "right" way. That's why the theme for Older Americans Month 2022 is *Age My Way*.

Many of you may show no interest in Older Americans Month, but we are all Older Americans in a sense. We're older than we were when we started this sentence. So, why and when did this become a name for one part of our American population? Older Americans Month was established over 50 years ago in 1963, when only 17 million living Americans had reached their 65th birthday. A meeting in April 1963 between President John F. Kennedy and members of the National Council of Senior Citizens led to designating May as "Senior Citizens Month," the prelude to "Older Americans



Month." They wanted to draw attention to the contribution of Americans who had come before the rest of us. Remember, it wasn't great getting old in the old days. A third of Older Americans lived in poverty, and there were few places where a senior with age-related health issues could live with independence, dignity, and purpose. A month to remind us every year has helped to change that. It hopefully resulted in all of us adding an extra level of respect toward Older Americans.

With over 50 million people today over 65, there is much to celebrate and honor. Every President since Kennedy has issued a formal proclamation during or before the month of May, asking that the entire nation pay tribute in some way to older persons in their communities. The Administration for Community Living is the official government agency that supports older adults and people of every age with disabilities to live in and contribute to their communities. The 2022 theme *Age My Way* is an opportunity for all of us to explore the many ways older adults can remain in and be involved with their communities.

Today, the Greatest Generation transitions to the grown-up post war babies we call the Boomers. One would think generations are only recognized by wars or by the greatest struggle they overcame in their collective American life. But, really, how often do we think, "There goes a member of the Greatest Generation," or introduce our parents and grandparents, "This is Jack, a survivor of the Vietnam Era?" We don't. We instead value their character, ethics, kindness to others, and their sense of humor, not to mention their manners. Older Americans Month is to say, yes, we value them, why not honor them? The idea of President Kennedy and every President since has been that honoring means more than setting aside a month and asking that we send a card. We should not limit the appreciation of Older Americans to one month on the calendar.



How will you observe the month? We suggest to just observe the person. It doesn't take a parade, just a visit. And a question, "Will you tell me what it's like to be you today?" None of us should lament our age. What matters is today's challenge. Have we stopped thirsting for knowledge? Have we stopped loving and learning? No, no matter our age. You, whatever your age, are the next Older American. What do you want your kids and their kids to remember? If you think things were better back in the day, what was so much better about it? Probably that older adults had

more respect, that people paid more attention to them. But wasn't it also that you could delight in every little new thing that came along? We can all relate to that. Young Americans, the Older Americans in your life have all of that to offer and more. You watch movies all the time that take you back to earlier times. Well, here's the real-life version, right in the room or on the phone with you. You can ask, "Then what happened?" You will be proud to know it and repeat it, all because of the Older Americans in your life. It is important to remember that the best classroom in the world is at the feet of an older adult. What a gift it is for someone to hear, "Will you teach me how to do that?"

And you, Older Americans, who's to say this isn't your month to shine? Maybe this month has been set aside for you to show us what you've got. Teach us that tango step. Better yet, show us how to live in the day. Show us how, when disappointment wants to crush you, you move on. Show us how, when given a chance, we become better people. We need you for that. We always have.

Barton Woods Assisted Living is excited to celebrate Older Americans Month. Everyone at Barton Woods works daily to ensure that older adults remain involved and included in our community for as long as possible. Take the time to recognize that May is Older Americans Month. Take the time to celebrate everyone aged 65 and older in your life.

Connect with us at Barton Woods Assisted Living for tips, ideas, and ways to give back to America's Greatest Generation. Connect with us at [www.bartonwoods.org](http://www.bartonwoods.org), [rwilliams@bartonwoods.org](mailto:rwilliams@bartonwoods.org), or (989) 695-5380. This month Barton Woods Assisted Living hopes you learn and appreciate that caring for those that once cared for us is one of life's highest honors.

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