

Low Density Meets High Tech: Enhancing Social Engagement in Rural Communities

n4a 44th Annual Conference
New Orleans, LA
July 30, 2019

OATS | OLDER ADULTS
TECHNOLOGY
SERVICES

INTRODUCTION TO OATS

- **2004:** Nonprofit activist Tom Kamber and a group of volunteers launch Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) in New York City.
- **The purpose?** To help seniors learn and use technology to live better in the digital age.
- The inaugural program is a free ten-week computer course for people age 60+.
- Classes meet twice weekly in community technology labs.
- First taught in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, OATS courses are soon spreading all across New York City.





OATS TAKES ROOT

- Within ten years, OATS teaches 10,000 class sessions at over 70 partner sites and builds 30 new computer labs in New York City.
- In March, 2013, OATS launches the Senior Planet Exploration Center in Manhattan—America’s first technology-themed community center for older adults. Nearly 15,000 seniors attend during the first year.
- The Senior Planet motto is “Aging with Attitude.”
- Senior Planet and its innovative programs receive extensive press coverage in print, television, radio, and digital media, eventually winning a PR Week award for best campaign of the year.
- The OATS content website for older adults, SeniorPlanet.org, receives over a million unique visitors each year.



SENIOR PLANET

Exploration Center



OATS EXPANDS

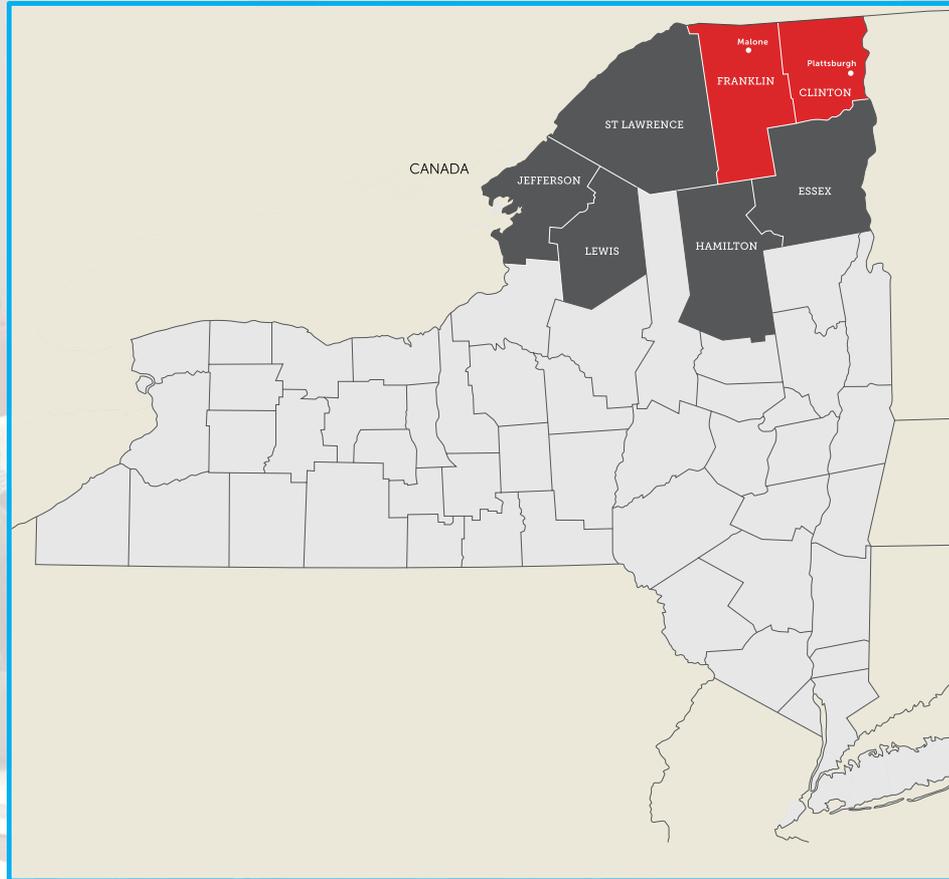
- 2015: OATS expands programs outside of New York City for the first time.
 - A new Senior Planet center launches in Plattsburgh, New York, focused on rural aging and technology.
 - Partnerships with local sponsors bring OATS to Maryland, Florida and California.
- In 2018, foundation grants of more than \$3 million help expand Senior Planet into Texas and Colorado.
- Also in 2018, international partnerships bring OATS to Israel and launch a consultancy in Spain.
- OATS is asked to speak on five continents promoting the Senior Planet ideal of celebrating aging and empowering people over 60 with technology and world-class programs.



CONTENT & METHODS

- OATS offers more than 25 courses on topics including:
 - Device Essentials (iPad, PC, or Chromebook). Available in five languages.
 - Digital Culture
 - Connect! (social engagement)
 - Money Matters
 - Start-Up (entrepreneurship)
 - Team Senior Planet (exercise program)
 - Activate! (leadership training for advocacy)
- Courses are taught in groups of 10-15, with a written course book and professional trainer.
- Courses are supplemented by over 200 modules of digital content provided online through Senior Planet U, the OATS online learning platform.

MAKING RURAL SENIORS A PRIORITY



PROGRAM ELEMENTS

- Senior Planet North Country Center.
- “Tech Spot” Exploration Console.
- “Senior Planet @Home” for isolated, mobility-impaired participants.

Popular courses included:

IPad and Chromebook Basics • Smart Home Technologies • Smartphones • Drone Adventure • Digital Photography • Social Media



RURAL OUTCOMES



DEMOGRAPHICS

- Enrollment: 1,300+(22% of eligible population)
- Median Age: 73
- With Disability: 40%
- Living Alone: 35%



RESULTS

- 83% reported QOL increased
- 40% purchased device
- 33% signed up for broadband
- 98% would recommend

WHAT WE LEARNED



- Links to infrastructure roll-outs can be fortuitous.
- What worked in urban tended to be popular in rural areas too—basic tech, social networking, small-group format.
- Traditional technology lab formats may need adaptation for rural settings.
- At-home training was important for isolated seniors.
- Partnerships were essential for outreach, enrollment, and program hosting.
- Media coverage and public agency participation led to ongoing support.

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THE FUTURE OF RURAL

OATS has called for the federal government to adopt the USDA recommendation of securing digital connectivity across rural America, and to further support complementary broadband adoption and training.

States should launch technology training centers for older adults in rural districts and provide funding for quality outreach, training, and programs.

Corporate and philanthropic foundations should provide initial financing of start-up efforts for nonprofit entrepreneurs, and should sponsor annual convenings to promote sharing of best practices and outcome data.

Nonprofits should continue to collaborate to establish and grow programs that use technology to empower older adults in rural areas, including standalone centers, training partnerships, home-visiting programs, and research collaboratives.

THANK YOU



www.oats.org