



## NEWS RELEASE

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HIGH-RES "FRAUD FIGHTERS" PHOTO AVAILABLE

### "Fraud Fighters" Call Center at WISE & Healthy Aging Receives \$188,000 Grant from AARP Foundation

**SANTA MONICA (Feb. 18, 2009)** - For the third consecutive year, WISE & Healthy Aging has been awarded a grant from the AARP Foundation. According to Grace Cheng Braun, president and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging, the \$188,000 grant is to support the nonprofit social service agency's "Fraud Prevention Call Center" – one of only seven such programs in the entire country.

This program, staffed by more than 20 "Fraud Fighter" volunteers, is a proactive telephone call center that reaches out to seniors nationwide – alerting them to scams and telemarketing frauds that target seniors and offering tips on how to avoid being victimized. Program volunteers are provided with a script which is updated weekly to focus on the most current scams. "We try to reach seniors before they are victimized," says Cheng Braun. "But often when we call, the seniors tell us that they have already been taken in by one fraud or another. In these cases, we refer them to their State Attorney General's office and other area resources."



*WISE & Healthy Aging Volunteer Fraud Fighters celebrating the completion of more than 87,000 calls at local restaurant, Fritto Misto. [A high resolution version of this photo is available upon request.]*

According to Petula Storey, director of Volunteer Services at WISE & Healthy Aging, Fraud Fighter volunteers completed more than 87,000 telephone calls to seniors in all parts of the country in 2008.

Natural disasters and economic downturns provide numerous opportunities for scammers. "We're finding that the current economic situation is resulting in unprecedented schemes and scams by unscrupulous individuals and groups who prey on the fears and uncertainties of the elderly," says Storey. "With the loss or severe reduction of their retirements, many seniors are desperate for help and therefore become convenient targets for fraudulent operators."

Most recently, private companies have been soliciting seniors and other home owners with a scheme to charge them an unreasonable fee for a service they do not need – the filing of

decline-in-value reassessment applications for their property. As home values decline, people are concerned about foreclosures and paying property taxes. According to a news release distributed by Rick Auerbach, Los Angeles County Assessor, "Companies using clever names like 'Tax Adjusters,' 'Tax Review,' or 'Tax Reassessment,' are mailing misleading solicitations which arrive in official-looking envelopes. They are written in language with deadline warnings which can easily be mistaken for an official government form."

According to Auerbach, there is no need for homeowners to pay anyone a fee to file a decline-in-value reassessment application. In fact, it can be downloaded from the assessor's Web site or requested by phone – and it is very easy to complete.

Mary Fenton has been a Fraud Fighter volunteer for only about six weeks, but she says she greatly enjoys helping other seniors, and also likes meeting and chatting with the other volunteers in the program. "I come in four days a week for about three to three-and-a-half hours. The people I talk to are so appreciative and thank me for calling. It makes me feel good to know that I'm doing something to help others."

For more information on the WISE & Healthy Aging Fraud Prevention Call Center, or to learn more about becoming a WISE & Healthy Aging Fraud Fighter volunteer, please call 310-394-9871 ext. 450.

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WISE & Healthy Aging, a social services organization, enhances the independence, dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. This nonprofit is the result of a Nov. 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and Center for Healthy Aging.