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Avery Point
BY ERICKSON SENIOR LIVING

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Appreciating talent

First, I want to congratulate again the winners of our Celebration of the Arts amateur art competition. You may recall we announced their names in our June issue.

In our art section this month, we include brief profiles about three Richmond-area winners and include images of their artworks. I hope you enjoy reading about the sources of their creative sparks and find their stories inspiring.

I also want to congratulate our own writing staff and our wonderful freelancers who have recently been recognized for their top-notch work.

Each year, we enter a selection of our writers’ original stories in the annual journalism competition held by the North American Mature Publishers Association (NAMPA), the association for newspapers and magazines specifically for the 50+ demographic.

That competition attracts hundreds of submissions every year and is judged by internationally respected faculty at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. This year, our four publications, each of which competes in a different category based on circulation, received a total of 18 NAMPA awards.

Diane York’s cover story for the March Fifty Plus, “Ever changing artwork, powered by the sun,” won first place in the Profile category. The judges said, “This is a complicated story, but the writer has her arms around it and tells it clearly and authoritatively. For the reader, it is a trip into an unfamiliar but captivating world, and thanks to the writer, an accessible one.”

And our regular gardening columnist Lela Martin, from Virginia Cooperative Extension, won second place in the “Do-It-Yourself” category for her story, “Create your vegetable victory garden.” “It’s teeming with strong tips for lots of success,” the judges said.

Our travel writer, Victor Block, won first place for two “most inviting” stories with a maritime theme: one about Panama and its famous canal and one about a riverboat cruise on the Danube, both of which appeared in Fifty Plus last fall.

Longtime contributor Glenda Booth, who also authored this month’s cover story (see page 5), won first place for a Beacon feature story about women pilots who participate in an annual airplane race.

And several of my columns — on diversity, COVID-19, artificial intelligence and music — were honored in the Editorial, Senior Issues and Personal Essay categories.

Our other editions weren’t too shabby, either!

Our managing editor, Margaret Foster, won first place awards for two cover stories in Fifty Plus’s sister publication, the Beacon. One was about the rapid rise in availability of medical marijuana, and the other was a profile of Lonnie Bunch III, the new head of the Smithsonian Institution and founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Our Howard County Beacon February cover story, “Facing a painful part of the past,” won Ivey Noojin first place in the Topical Issue category.

Robert Friedman won first place for his profile of novelist Alice McDermott, which was our March cover story for both the Howard County and Baltimore Beacons.

Writer Simone Ellin won first place in the Feature category for her cover story about Baltimore’s Rock Steady Boxing program for Parkinson’s patients.

And theatre reviewer Dan Collins won first place for two of his reviews of Baltimore productions.

Our Greater Washington edition overall won first place in the General Excellence category, which is one of the most meaningful.

And as a result of all the above awards, we were honored with Best of Show — the top prize of the whole competition.

In short, nearly every Fifty Plus and Beacon staff writer and freelancer was honored in this national competition, and we couldn’t be prouder of each of them.

Of course, whatever awards we do or do not win, what matters most to us is that you, our readers, are pleased with the practical information, news and entertainment you find each month in our paper. Please let us know what you think — even (actually, especially) if you think we are missing the boat in any particular area.

Also feel free to share ideas for future stories and to recommend your fellow citizens for profiles. Your opinions, suggestions and letters to the editor are always welcome, whether you contact us by mail, phone, fax, email or online.

I want to conclude by expressing my thanks to, and admiration for, all our writers (and editors) mentioned above as well as the other members of our staff, who work so diligently to produce multiple editions of our publications every month.

I’d like to thank them by name for their efforts and devoted contributions:

Vice President of Operations Gordon Hasenei; Vice President of Sales & Marketing Alan Spiegel; Art Director Kyle Gregory; Director of Operations Roger King; Advertising Representative Lisa Benton-Hawkins; Assistant Editor Catherine Brown; Content Manager Ashley Griffin and last, but certainly not least, my wife, the Beacon’s president, Judy Rosenthal.

Fifty Plus and the Beacon would not exist without all of their efforts, nor without you who read our publications each month. I offer my sincere appreciation to each of you.

Don’t miss our Expo!

Just a reminder that our first virtual 50+Expo brings together nearly 100 informative exhibits and dozens of expert speakers, engaging classes and varied entertainment, all available 24/7 at beacon50expo.com.

Please take a minute to visit this totally free event, which runs through the end of January, and see all that we offer there. We hope you choose to stay and explore the site, and that you will return often and encourage your friends and family to visit, too.

And while there, be sure to register for our $100 door prize drawings. A new winner is selected every week. Again, that’s at beacon50expo.com.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Thank you for your November cover story on “What retirees (should) want.”

I was shocked when Dr. Ken Dychtwald shared, “about half the retired population are bored out of their wits.” Seriously?!

Perhaps I am blessed. I retired from the federal government in 2015 at age 56. Young, I know. My 56-year-old husband had died unexpectedly the year before. Our kids were 21 and 15.

To retire from my federal agency, one must attend a four-day retirement seminar. As expected, benefits for the prospec—

See FROM THE PUBLISHER, page 24
Avery Point is the new Erickson Senior Living™ continuing care retirement community coming to Short Pump, Virginia!

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Folklore society nourishes African heritage

By Glenda C. Booth

At the gateway to the historic black community of Jackson Ward, a light-filled, street-level building is brightened by the colors of Africa: rich reds, yellows and greens.

This is the headquarters of the Elegba Folklore Society, a cultural arts organization at 101 East Broad Street, whose mission and outreach are different from other Richmond museums.

The society, established 30 years ago by president and artistic director Janine Bell, showcases African art, offers tours, hosts performances and organizes festivals.

This month, the society will host its annual Kwanzaa Festival virtually. Kwanzaa, a non-religious celebration from December 26 to January 1, honors African Americans’ roots.

Growing up in Greensboro, North Carolina, Bell knew nothing about her African roots. “My parents did not know their African heritage, and their parents didn’t know about it. It wasn’t discussed,” she said.

In later years, something in her stirred, much like a spiritual awakening, and she decided to immerse herself in the history and culture of Africa. As an adult, she did some research and learned that her ancestors were from today’s Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

“Likely, my ancestors passed through Richmond’s markets on the way to enslavement in North Carolina,” Bell said.

On a visit to Senegal, Bell saw people living in family compounds and realized that their buildings were organized like those on her grandparents’ North Carolina farm. She connected the dots instantly, recognizing a link to her family’s African roots right in front of her. “That was very grounding for me,” Bell said.

She formed the Elegba Folklore Society as a gathering place and center for African cultural experiences that honor “the richness of Mother Africa’s gifts to us,” Bell said.

To the Yoruba people of West Africa, Elegba is a deity, an intercessor who opens pathways. It’s a word that means “to bring clarity out of confusion” — an especially relevant theme during this time of racial sensitivity, Bell said. “Elegba Folklore Society promotes an understanding of the present by valuing the past.”

Why did she create the society? “Many untold stories, learned history, and cultural identities need celebration,” Bell explained. “Our African identity was systematically washed away, suppressed, repressed and ignored.

This [society] gives me a sense of my humanity. Our mission speaks to re-instilling cultural foundations in the African American community.”

History maker and trailblazer

In 1990, the Valentine Museum and the Community Foundation chose Bell as a Richmond History Maker in their annual tribute to local “trailblazers” who make lasting community contributions.

“Janine Bell, the founder of Elegba Folklore Society, was honored as a Richmond History Maker based on her powerful and ongoing work as the leader of the organization,” said Bill Martin, the Valentine Museum director.

“Janine Bell and the Elegba Folklore Society play a vital role in the Richmond community and have, in many ways, laid the groundwork for so much of the rich cultural development we see across the city today,” said Katherine O’Donnell, executive vice president at Richmond Region Tourism, also lauds her work: “The Elegba Folklore Society has been a great cultural asset and partner to our destination for many years.”

To colleague Enjoli Moon, founder and creator of the Afrikana Film Festival, Bell “has a way of presenting and grounding that is engaging. It is a lived experience for her, and she brings authenticity to it,” Enjoli said. “Black life is a part of our reality.”

Art from across Africa

The Broad Street cultural center is full of African art, books about Africa, and textiles and cloth made in Africa, including wearable art such as mud cloth — a centuries-old, textile art that originated in Mali and is hand-dyed with mud.

The center also has kuba cloth woven, palm leaf fiber enhanced by stitchery, a traditional fabric of the Kuba people of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

There are batiks from Burkina Faso and designer fashions from Cotonou, Benin. There are wooden carvings from Mali, the Congo, Nigeria and Ghana, and bronzes and metal art from Mali, Senegal and Ghana.

Dionna Plush, who started as a volunteer and now works in the center, considers it “a calming place.” One day a woman came in and said, “I am just trying to find myself. Here I can be myself,” Plush said.

Music, dance, films and more

The Elegba Folklore Society’s center is also a performance space. The society has programs such as African drum workshops, dance performances, films, discussions and workshops.

They have also staged music and dance performances around Virginia, in Washington, D.C., Detroit, Philadelphia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Cuba, Senegal and Switzerland. Most dance performances are Manding dance, some are Yoruba, and some are from South Africa.

“The vocal, instrumental and dance performances usually tell a story because story and song are part of the African diaspora experience, Bell explained.

For guests, it’s not a passive theater-type experience. “We want it to be a feeling experience,” she stressed. “We want to touch them in their center and have them leave us differently. We want people to be transformed.”

In the center’s education programs, “reconnecting African-descended people with origin stories is hugely important,” Bell said.

While helping African-Americans revive or connect to their cultural heritage, Bell believes she can build bridges to a broader community — a particularly compelling goal in light of the summer protests surrounding the removal of Richmond’s Confederate statues.

In non-pandemic times, the society leads walking tours in Richmond organized around themes. One called “In the Beginning” follows the trail of enslaved Africans. (Richmond was the country’s second largest slave trade center after New Orleans in the mid-1800s.)

Janine Bell founded the Elegba Folklore Society in 1990, naming it after the Yoruba spirit “who opens the roads, bringing clarity out of confusion,” according to its website.

This year, the society’s annual weeklong Capital City Kwanzaa Festival will be presented virtually starting on Dec. 26.

“The tour titled “Our Souls Live Here” is our tribute to local “trailblazers” who make longstanding contributions. This year, we take a special moment to reflect on the work of Black lives that were lost to the systemic violence of racism and police brutality. It is a powerful reminder of the need to remain vigilant in our pursuit of justice for all.”

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Can a good night’s sleep help your heart?

By Alyson Kelley-Hedgepeth, M.D.

It is estimated that more than 50 million Americans report difficulty sleeping.

With our busy American lifestyle, where we are overcommitted in both our work schedules and personal lives, it may seem that sleep is indeed a luxury. But a good night’s sleep is increasingly recognized as an important factor in maintaining good health overall, and good cardiovascular health in particular.

Disrupted sleep has been implicated in cardiac disease risk in multiple ways. Insomnia and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) are the most common sleep disturbances and affect sleep duration and sleep quality, which in turn impact cardiometabolic health.

OSA is a serious sleep disturbance in which breathing stops or becomes shallow more multiple times each night because the tongue or throat tissues block the airway. It is estimated to affect somewhere from 10% to 25% of adults.

Insomnia is also a common sleep disturbance, estimated to affect up to 25% of adults, but is frequently undiagnosed. The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends screening for OSA in everyone with heart failure and atrial fibrillation.

Poor sleep and diet may be related

In a recent study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association, researchers analyzed the relationship between sleep and eating patterns — which also affect cardiovascular health — in almost 500 women. The women reported on their sleep quality, the amount of time it took to fall asleep, and whether or not they had insomnia. They also reported on their dietary habits.

The study found that those who had the worst sleep quality consumed more added sugars than women with better sleep quality. Women who took longer to fall asleep consumed more calories and more food overall. And women with poor-quality sleep were more likely to overeat and to make unhealthy food choices. Poor diet is known to increase risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Since this study is observational, we cannot draw conclusions of causality. We can surmise that the sensation of being satisfied or full is affected by sleep deprivation, likely via complex hormonal signaling.

We can also consider that poor diet (too much of the wrong kinds of food) may affect our ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. In addition, poor diet and overeating are associated with obesity, an important risk factor for CVD.

Irregular sleep boosts heart risk

Another recent study, published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, linked sleep irregularity to the development of CVD. This study followed nearly 2,000 adult men and women without CVD for five years.

Participants wore wrist trackers to track sleep and activity. Study participants also completed a comprehensive sleep study and answered questions about their lives, including diet.

Researchers found that irregular sleep duration increased the risk of heart disease. Those with the most irregular sleep duration and variable bedtimes had more than double the risk of developing heart disease, compared to those with less variability in sleep duration and more consistent bedtimes.

Researchers think that multiple factors could link irregular sleep patterns with harmful metabolic changes, such as obesity, diabetes, and elevated cholesterol, all of which impact CVD risk.

And since our metabolic health may be affected by sleep, our dietary choices may be even more important when we are sleep deprived.

There is growing evidence that sleep is important to optimal health. Pay attention to how long and how well you sleep at night. If you have insomnia or poor-quality sleep, talk to your doctor about having a formal sleep study and about factors that could help to improve your sleep.

Tart cherry juice may improve your sleep

By Kristen N. Smith

You may be familiar with tart cherries if you like to cook. Tart cherries (also known as sour cherries) are used in dishes like pies, preserves, soups, cakes, tarts, sauces, cocktails and more.

But did you know that these tasty fruits are more sour than sweet cherries like Bing and Lamberts cherries.

They also are believed to have higher antioxidant contents than sweet cherries, giving them the potential to have stronger health benefits.

Tart cherries are rich sources of antioxidants, in particular anthocyanins, which are responsible for the purple pigmentation of these fruits. They possess a strong antioxidant capacity as well as anti-inflammatory qualities, making them disease-fighting tools.

Tart cherry juice concentrate, specifically, seems to have the highest antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activities compared to frozen, canned or dried cherries.

Irregular sleep could increase sleep propensity

In one study, 20 participants were given either a placebo or 30 milliliters of concentrated tart cherry juice within 30 minutes of waking and 30 minutes before bed each day.

The tart cherry juice group saw significant increases in time spent in bed, total sleep time and total sleep efficiency. People who drank cherry juice slept an average of 39 minutes longer than those who drank a placebo.

In another study, people with insomnia drank two 8-ounce servings of tart cherry juice in the morning and the same before bed for two weeks.

Scores for insomnia severity were significantly reduced after supplementation, and participants also woke up fewer times during the night.

Try twice a day

If you suffer from sleep disturbances and feel like you’ve tried everything, give tart cherry juice a try. Juice may be the easiest and most convenient option; you’d have to eat a whole lot of fresh cherries to equal a few ounces of juice.

Drink a cup of tart cherry juice about an hour before bed or twice a day (in the morning and before bed).

Check your local health food store for a high-quality tart cherry juice (without added sugars) or tart cherry juice concentrate, and follow the recommendations on the bottle.

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More will have free access to doctor’s notes

By Carla K. Johnson

More U.S. patients will soon have free, electronic access to the notes their doctors write about them under a new federal requirement for transparency.

Many health systems opened up records on November 2, the original deadline. At the last minute, federal health officials gave an extension until April 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Britta Bloomquist of Duluth, Minnesota, has been reading her clinical notes for years, first struggling through red tape and more recently clicking into a secure online patient website.

“It means information about your care can no longer be hidden from you. And you have a say in your care,” said Bloomquist, 32, who has a rare type of arthritis that took years to diagnose.

What’s changing

Patients have long had a right to their medical records, including doctor notes, but obtaining them could mean filling out requests, waiting for a response and paying fees. A 2016 law said delays and barriers must be removed.

If you already use a patient portal such as MyChart to email your doctor or schedule an appointment, you may soon see new options allowing you to view your doctor’s notes and see your test results as soon as they are available. You may get an email explaining where to look, how to share access with a caregiver, and how to keep other eyes off your information.

Many people won’t notice a change. About 15% of healthcare systems already are letting patients read doctor notes online without charge. That means about 53 million patients already have access to their doctor’s notes.

Will this help me?

Studies have shown that patients who read their notes understand more about their health, take their medications as prescribed more often, and feel more in control of their care.

That’s true for Bloomquist. Diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis, she had extensive surgery to straighten her right leg in 2018. She gets regular drug infusions and sees multiple specialists. It’s a lot to remember.

“I’ve become a health nerd,” Bloomquist said. “Reading the notes has kept me on the same page as my providers about what’s going on.”

Will I understand the jargon?

You may have to look up terms. Or ask your doctor to translate at your next visit. And doctor’s notes tend to use abbreviations. “SOB” means short of breath, by the way. “BS” can mean bowel sounds. And brace yourself if your weight is an issue.

“I’m a heavy-set person, OK? And their favorite word to use is obese,” said Rosie Bartel, 71, of Chilton, Wisconsin. “You have to get used to that.”

To Bartel, who became more involved in her care after getting an infection in the hospital, reading notes means she’s doing what she can to prevent errors and stay healthy.

“I don’t have to remember everything said to me in a 15-minute appointment,” she said.

What if I spot an error?

Patients do find mistakes in their notes, and some errors are serious enough to affect their care, research has found.

“A clinician has eyes on thousands of notes, but a patient has eyes only on one, so it has powerful safety implications,” said Cait DesRoches, director of OpenNotes, a Boston-based group working for greater access to patient notes.

Bloomquist learned that it’s difficult to fix inaccuracies in her medical record. Some of her notes say her surgery was on her left leg. It was on her right. She said she reported the error several times, but it hasn’t been fixed.

Are there exceptions?

Psychotherapy notes don’t need to be shared with patients. And doctors can hold back a note if they think it will cause physical harm, such as a note about domestic violence if the abuser has access to the patient’s health information.

As for parent access to teenagers’ information, state laws vary, DesRoches said. That means some health systems allow parents to see at least some of their teenager’s notes, while others do not.

Parents can check with their children’s doctors to find out how it works in their states.

What do doctors think?

Some doctors worry this will mean more phone calls from confused patients. Dr. Marlene Millen of UC San Diego Health, which launched a pilot program for primary care patients in 2018, said that’s not her experience. “I did not get a big bump in questions at all,” Millen said.

Many patients aren’t interested in their notes and never read them, she said. Others do, and they save her time because, when they arrive for appointments, they “already know what the next step in the plan is because they had read the prior note.”

See DOCTOR’S NOTES, page 9
Dear Savvy Senior,

My mom, who's 76, has become more forgetful lately and is worried she may be getting Alzheimer's disease. What resources can you recommend to help us get a handle on this?

—Oldest Daughter

Dear Oldest,

Many of us worry about memory lapses as we get older, fearing it may be the first signs of Alzheimer's disease or some other type of dementia.

To get some insight on the seriousness of your mom’s problem, here are some key warning signs to be vigilant of and some resources you can turn to for help.

Warning signs

As we grow older, some memory difficulties — such as trouble remembering names of people or places, or forgetting where you put your glasses or car keys — are associated with normal aging.

But the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease are much more than simple memory lapses. Knowing the early warning signs is a good first step in recognizing the difference between typical age-related memory loss and a more serious problem.

To help you evaluate your mom’s condition, here’s a checklist of some common early symptoms to watch for:

— Asking the same questions repeatedly
— Getting lost in familiar areas
— Failing to recognize familiar people
— Having difficulty following directions
— Misplacing items in inappropriate places (for example, putting keys in the microwave)
— Having difficulty completing familiar tasks, like cooking a meal or paying a bill
— Having trouble remembering common words when speaking or mixing up words

For more information, see the Alzheimer’s Association list of 10 early signs and symptoms at 10signs.org.

Another good tool to help you evaluate your mom is the Self-Administered Geocognitive Exam (SAGE test) that was developed at Ohio State University’s Wexner Medical Center. This free test helps identify mild cognitive impairment and early dementia and can be taken at home in about 10 to 15 minutes. The SAGE test can be taken online at BrainTest.com.

For professional help

If you would rather have professional assistance in evaluating your mom, the Alzheimer’s Foundation of America (see alzfdn.org) is another good resource you can turn to.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday they provide free, confidential virtual memory screenings done via video chat in real time. Your mother will need a phone, tablet or computer with a webcam and internet capability to complete the screening.

The screenings are given by healthcare professionals and take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Once the screening is complete, the screener will review the results with your mom and let her know if she should see a doctor for further evaluation. To set up a memory screening for your mom, call 1-866-232-8484 and make an appointment.

If you find that your mom does need further evaluation, make an appointment with her primary care doctor for a cognitive checkup and medical examination. Depending on what’s found, she may be referred to a geriatrician or neurologist who specializes in diagnosing and treating memory loss or Alzheimer’s disease.

Keep in mind that even if your mom is experiencing some memory problems, it doesn’t necessarily mean she has early-stage Alzheimer’s.

Many memory problems are brought on by other factors, such as stress, depression, thyroid disease, side effects of medications, sleep disorders, vitamin deficiencies and other medical conditions. And if that’s the case with her forgetfulness, by treating these conditions she can reduce or eliminate the problem.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of The Savvy Senior book.
Who should be screened for cervical cancer?

Q: A friend's mother was diagnosed with cervical cancer. Should I be worried about this, too?
A: Cervical cancer occurs when there is uncontrolled cell growth that starts in the cervix. Sadly, more than 13,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer every year.

More than 20% of cases of cervical cancer are found in women over 65, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS).

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that older women up to age 80 are as likely to contract cervical cancer as younger women. In addition, the study found, “Cervical cancer incidence rates increased with age and were higher for black women than white women.”

Since January is Cervical Health Awareness Month, now is a good time to consider the topic. The good news is that cervical cancer is one of the most preventable types of cancer, being largely caused or boosted by a virus for which we have a vaccine.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common type of sexually transmitted infection. Although it is harmless in most cases, it can lead to genital warts or cervical cancer.

The risk factors for cervical cancer include: having human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), smoking, long-term use of oral birth control, giving birth to three or more children, and having multiple sexual partners.

The ACS recommends that the two most important things to do to fight cervical cancer are to get the HPV vaccine if you are younger than age 45 and/or to be screened regularly by medical professionals for signs of cervical cancer.

Q: Is the HPV vaccine for everyone?
A: No. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that children aged 9 to 12 get vaccinated. Children and young adults aged 13 to 26 who have not been vaccinated, or who have not received all doses, also should be vaccinated as soon as possible.

Adults aged 27 to 45 should discuss the vaccine with their healthcare providers. Recent data has shown that a small population may benefit from late vaccination.

Q: What screenings should I get?
A: The two screenings recommended by the ACS are:
—Pap test: looks for “precancerous cells” on the cervix that may become invasive if not treated, and
—HPV test: looks for human papillomavirus, which can cause the precancerous cells on the cervix to become invasive.

Pap testing is recommended starting at age 21. Pap and HPV co-testing are recommended starting at age 30 up to at least age 65.

The CDC recommends that women be screened every three years until at least age 65. As its website states, “The only way to know it is safe to stop being tested after age 65 is if you have had several tests in a row that didn’t find cancer within the previous 10 years, including at least one in the previous five years.”

Q: What else do you recommend?
A: As stated before, one modifiable risk factor is smoking. If you need smoking cessation help, reach out to your healthcare provider or local pharmacist. You can discuss your needs for vaccination and screenings with them as well.

Joel Castillo is a fourth-year Pharm.D. student at VCU School of Pharmacy. He majored in chemistry at Virginia Commonwealth University. After graduating from pharmacy school, he hopes to pursue a career in ambulatory care pharmacy, emergency pharmacy or oncology pharmacy.

Doctor’s notes
From page 7

UC San Diego Health opened notes to another 130,000 patients in November, as more specialists are added. Millen, who's been highly involved in the transition, said it’s frustrating the federal deadline was extended just last month.

“We spend all this time getting ready, and we could have spent that time doing other things, like working on the pandemic,” she said.

—AP
By Kelly Bilodeau

Though many people think of hair loss as a male problem, it affects at least a third of women. But unlike men, women typically experience thinning hair without going bald, and there can be a number of different underlying causes for the problem.

“Some are associated with inflammation in the body. Some are female-pattern hair loss,” said Dr. Deborah Scott, assistant professor of dermatology at Harvard Medical School and co-director of the Hair Loss Clinic at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

But the good news is that in many cases hair loss can be stabilized with treatment, and it may be reversible. When it’s not, there are some new cosmetic approaches that can help.

Understanding hair loss

The first step in dealing with thinning hair is determining what’s happening inside your body. Some are external, such as taking certain medications, frequently wearing hairpieces, using too much heat, or tools such as dryers and other devices that heat the hair. Underlying illness, autoimmune conditions such as lupus, nutritional deficiencies, or hormonal imbalances may also cause hair to shed.

Underlying causes for hair loss

Numerous problems can trigger female hair loss. Some are external, such as taking certain medications, frequently wearing hairpieces, using too much heat, or tools such as dryers and other devices that heat the hair. Underlying illness, autoimmune conditions such as lupus, nutritional deficiencies, or hormonal imbalances may also cause hair to shed.

A condition called frontal fibrosing alopecia, which typically causes scarring and is an inflammatory condition affecting the scalp, might be eczema, psoriasis, or a condition called frontal fibrosing alopecia, which typically causes scarring and is an inflammatory condition affecting the scalp. It’s more effective in treating smaller, more defined areas of balding. It requires recovery time.

Cosmetic options for hair loss

When medical treatments fall short, women can also consider cosmetic options to make up for lost hair, such as a wig. At the other end of the spectrum is hair transplantation, a surgical procedure that moves active follicles from the back of the scalp to areas where the hair is thinning. Once transplanted, the hair grows normally.

Hair transplantation is typically performed as an outpatient surgical procedure. In appropriate patients, it can be extremely successful, but it won’t work for everyone, Scott said. One drawback is the expense: it can cost thousands of dollars and is not covered by insurance. The procedure also requires recovery time. And it may not be appropriate for women who have diffuse thinning across the whole scalp. It’s more effective in treating smaller, more defined areas of balding.

Kelly Bilodeau is executive editor of Harvard Women’s Health Watch. © 2020 Harvard University. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.
Some, not all, weight fluctuation is normal

By Kristen N. Smith

Weight fluctuation throughout the course of a day is normal. Weight fluctuation throughout the course of your life can be harmful. Sounds contradictory, doesn’t it? It’s not.

A person should strive to maintain a consistent healthy weight throughout life. Fluctuation in large amounts throughout your life — that lose-gain-lose-gain cycle so many of us experience through so-called “yo-yo dieting” — can tax the cardiovascular system, set the stage for diabetes, slow metabolism, and make it increasingly more difficult to lose weight.

As if that’s not enough, it can permanently stretch skin out of shape (yes, permanently), which worsens as you age. Exercise cannot bring it back once it reaches that stage.

“The expansion and contraction of the skin is what plays havoc,” Alan Matarasso, M.D., clinical professor of surgery at the Hofstra/Northwell School of Medicine told Health.com.

Weight fluctuation also increases your chances of a heart attack. In fact, many medical doctors advise patients who have had cardiac surgery to report any daily weight fluctuation of two pounds or more immediately.

“For every one and a half- to two-pound change in weight fluctuation, the risk of any coronary or cardiovascular event was increased by 4%, and the risk of death by 9%,” Sripal Bangalore, M.D., an interventional cardiologist said about a recent study on TheCardiologyAdvisor.com.

Daily fluctuation is normal

People normally experience weight fluctuation throughout the course of a day. That change can be as large as four or five pounds, mainly due to fluids and salts. (Read some weight-loss forums, however, said Livestrong.com, and you may hear about weight fluctuation up to 10 pounds; if you’re experiencing that, you should seek help from a doctor).

Most of us weigh the least amount in the morning, after we void, and the most at the end of the day, especially if we eat a big, late dinner.

“Since most of us can’t eat enough in a day or two to actually gain five or 10 pounds, if you notice a dramatic increase on the scale, chances are it’s due to water,” said Anita Petruzzelli, M.D., doctor for BodyLogicMD, in an article in Shape.

“Eating, drinking, urinating, having a bowel movement and exercise can all impact your body’s water composition and therefore weight,” she said. True weight gain or loss takes time.

Seasonal changes also normal

“In the summer, body weight can go up by several pounds due to increased body water. This is accomplished through fluid-conserving hormones such as aldosterone, which allows the kidneys to retain more fluid and reduces the amount of salt in sweat, a measure that also aids in water retention.

“The increase and stabilization of total body water can only be accomplished by continuing to exercise in hot weather, and will not occur in people who spend most of their time indoors in air-conditioned environments,” explained John Castellani, a researcher in the Thermal & Mountain Medicine Division of the U.S. Army’s Research Institute of Environmental Medicine on ScientificAmerican.com.

Several medical procedures commonly have weight fluctuations as a common side effect. Though there are several factors involved, water retention (edema) is a major contributor to postsurgical weight changes.

The bottom line is, weight fluctuations are impacted by several factors, some that are within our personal control and some that are not in our hands.

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Quick and easy North African lentil soup

By America’s Test Kitchen

Red lentils are an ideal legume. For one thing, they’re quick to prepare, cooking up in less than 20 minutes, with no presoaking or brining required.

But the best thing about cooking red lentils is that, unlike other beans and legumes, you don’t need to worry about getting the interiors of the beans to soften before the skins rupture. With no skins to contain them, red lentils disintegrate as they cook.

In countries like Egypt and Morocco, cooks embrace this inevitability by turning their red lentils into soup. They add them to sautéed aromatics, stir in some warm spices, and then simmer the mix in broth or water. Less than half an hour later, they have a satisfying soup.

To develop our own recipe, we started by sautéing onions in butter and then used the warm mixture to bloom fragrant spices, like coriander, cumin, ginger and a pinch of cayenne, found in North African versions of this soup.

We used tomato paste and garlic to complete the base before adding the lentils, which we cooked in a mix of chicken broth and water to give the soup a full, rounded character.

After only 15 minutes of cooking, the lentils were soft enough to be pureed, but hauling out the blender or food processor seemed like overkill for such a simple soup.

Instead, we swapped the wooden spoon we’d been using for a whisk. Thirty seconds of whisking did the trick: We had a coarse puree that was homogenous from top to bottom.

Following the lead of North African cooks, we added 2 tablespoons of lemon juice to the pureed soup. The effect was like adjusting the focus on a manual camera: All the flavors were instantly more vibrant and defined.

A drizzle of spice-infused butter and a sprinkling of cilantro were all we needed to complete the transformation of commonplace ingredients into an exciting yet comforting soup.

Red Lentil Soup with North African Spices

Serves 6
Ingredients:
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 large onion, chopped fine
Salt
Pepper
¾ teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
Pinch ground cinnamon
Pinch cayenne
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 garlic clove, minced
4 cups chicken broth
2 cups water
10½ ounces (1½ cups) red lentils, picked over and rinsed
2 tablespoons lemon juice, plus extra for seasoning
1½ teaspoons dried mint, crumbled
1 teaspoon paprika
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

Directions:
Melt 2 tablespoons of butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and 1 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and not browned, about 5 minutes.

Add coriander, cumin, ginger, cinnamon, cayenne and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Stir in tomato paste and garlic and cook for 1 minute. Stir in broth, water and lentils and bring to a simmer.

Simmer vigorously, stirring occasionally, until lentils are soft and about half are broken down, about 15 minutes.

Whisk the soup vigorously until it is coarsely pureed, about 30 seconds. Stir in lemon juice and season with salt and extra lemon juice to taste. Cover and keep warm.

Note: Soup can be refrigerated for up to three days. Thin the soup with water, if desired, when reheating.

Before serving, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons butter in a small skillet. Remove from heat and stir in mint and paprika. Ladle soup into individual bowls, drizzle each portion with 1 teaspoon spiced butter, sprinkle with cilantro and serve.

Pair this soup with a salad and bread for lunch or a light supper.

For 25 years, confident cooks in the know have relied on America’s Test Kitchen for rigorously tested recipes developed by professional test cooks and vetted by 60,000 at-home recipe testers. See more at americastestkitchen.com/TCA.

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Stop weakening your immune system

Everyone talks about masks. I like them and wear them, but they provide external protection only. While masks are important and useful, I will be totally honest with you about them. The way we respond from a pathogen has more to do with our internal protection, as in our immune system!

So ask yourself if it’s up to par. If it’s not, then you need to start fertilizing your garden of microflora (i.e. probiotics) and also avoid or minimize anything that weakens your immune system. In no special order, here are the most common factors that suppress our immune systems.

**Alcohol**
People think of this as good for the heart, but studies repeatedly show that alcohol leads to free radical harm in your liver and can lead to compromised liver enzymes as well as hepatotoxicity. If your liver can’t filter out and neutralize poisons and pathogens, your immune system is weaker.

**Smoking**
I can say everything here that I just said for alcohol. Additionally, smoking is a known drug mugger of vitamin C, which helps reduce misery from the common cold and flu.

If you smoke, you have lower levels of C and, again, this weakens your ability to fight other pathogens. Furthermore, smoking hurts your lungs and that is one target organ of COVID-19.

**Junk food**
Need I say more than the word “junk?” If you’re eating junk food, your body is still starving for nutrients at a cellular level. You may very well be at a healthy weight and BMI (body mass index); however, your cells are dying for more nutrition and that means your immune system is weak.

**Medications**
There are some immune-suppressing medications that people take for autoimmune conditions to slow down the self-directed attack at their own tissue. For example, methotrexate, azathioprine, and etanercept are three that come to mind off the top of my head. These are necessary, and I’m not saying to discontinue them. However, those who take them should be extra vigilant about exposure, masks, social distancing and so forth. Since you shouldn’t stop your medications, just be more careful in general.

Another immune-suppressing category are steroids such as inhalers for asthma and those used for allergies (prednisone, dexamethasone, hydrocortisone and so forth). Cyclosporine is another such medicine used frequently after organ transplants.

**Infections**
If you have HIV, Lyme disease, bartonella, candida, mold exposure or mononucleosis, for example, these types of chronic infections weaken your immunity.

Your body is already fighting in these cases, and dealing with an imbalanced set of pro-inflammatory cytokines. As a result, another infection would be harder to deal with because your immune reserves are spent.

Supporting your body by eating healthy foods and taking antioxidants is key to keeping your immune system strong. So, as we approach the colder months, consider both internal and external methods for immune support. This way you give yourself the best odds.

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A Virtual Home for the Holidays
In the midst of the pandemic, we give thanks. As 2020 comes to a close and we reflect on the continuing impact of COVID-19, we give thanks for the opportunity to support and serve older adults and caregivers.

As we think about the theme “Home for the Holidays,” we may recall that as recently as last December (2019), we used the November and December holiday season as a time to remind families and friends to check on the wellbeing of older loved ones. We suggested that “Home for the Holidays” was a time to check on needs of older adults for assistance and to call on resources such as Senior Connections, FeedMore and the National Elder Care Locator to get older relatives and friends connected.

This year, though separated by distance, we are still united virtually, and the desire to serve has never been greater. There are many opportunities for us to help older adults connect with programs and services that help prevent and address the challenges of isolation and provide opportunities for connections.

This is the mission of Senior Connections, “to empower seniors to live with dignity and choice.” This mission is carried out by providing a range of home and community services that make it easier for older adults and caregivers to access resources, improve health, support increased mobility and enhance quality of life.

We can support social connections by promoting fundraising for critical services through the Annual Empty Plate Campaign, and assuring support during the holidays in collaboration with many community partners. In this issue of Engage at Any Age, resources for connections are highlighted as we reflect on the timely theme, “Home for the Holidays.”

For the past 17 years, the Richmond Metropolitan Region has generously supported our Empty Plate Campaign. This year, the Campaign has been more successful than ever in raising funds to fill “empty plates” for older adults and caregivers with meals, rides, home care, medications, information, volunteer support and opportunities to address COVID-19 needs. The Campaign also provides the opportunity to recognize community leaders who improve the quality of life for older adults through connections and support. Recipients of this year’s awards include Dr. Ellen Netting (Retired Professor, VCU Department of Social Work), Mrs. Marilyn Branch-Mitchell (Human Resources Director, Senior Connections) and Mrs. Lynne Seward (Retired CEO, A Grace Place Adult Services), who were selected for the Phoebe and Frank Hall Award for Humanitarian Service to Older Virginians.

Additionally, aside from the Empty Plate Campaign awards, the Richmond Times Dispatch is recognizing Ms. Missi Boyer (Director, Nutrition and Wellness, Senior Connections) and Ms. Diane Foster (Nutrition and Wellness Services Coordinator, Senior Connections) as Health Care Heroes who have provided exceptional support and services in response to COVID-19. As leaders in our Nutrition and Wellness Program, they have championed the distribution of food, meals and protective supplies to thousands of older adults who are experiencing significant outcomes related to health, safety and well-being.

We commend all of these individuals for their contributions in promoting and supporting important services that help older adults improve health and maintain social connections.

Thanks also to all of the supporters of our 2020 Empty Plate Campaign. We are still accepting contributions to fill “empty plates.” Contributions may be made on our Website (seniorconnections-va.org) or sent to us at 24 East Cary Street, Richmond, VA 23220. We appreciate your consideration of a year-end gift to Senior Connections.

Best wishes to all and thank you,
Thelma Bland Watson

Executive Director’s Message
Dr. Thelma Bland Watson
Executive Director, Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging

Senior Connections Joins National Campaign to Raise Awareness of Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Adults and Caregivers

The holidays will look a bit different for many of us this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live and interact with one another. For many older adults, this can mean a loss of social connections that, if left unaddressed, can have serious negative mental and physical health consequences.

This is why Senior Connections is participating in Home for the Holidays, a national campaign led by the Eldercare Locator and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), this year in partnership with the University of California, San Diego Center for Healthy Aging. Launched every year during the holiday season, Home for the Holidays is intended to help families and friends discuss difficult topics with their loved ones. A new consumer brochure is the focus of this year’s campaign, “Staying Connected and Healthy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Resources for Older Adults and Caregivers,” which highlights the importance of social connection, its impact on our physical and mental health, and ways the Aging Network can help older adults connect to their communities during this time of limited in-person social interactions. To download a copy, visit n4a.org/h4h2020.

Senior Connections can inform and connect consumers to programs that provide a variety of ways to stay connected to others in their communities. This is all part of our mission to help older adults maintain existing, and develop new, social connections to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

For more information about the campaign and other local resources available for older adults and their caregivers, contact Senior Connections at (804) 343-3000.
Connecting the Isolated: How Richmond-Area Nonprofits are Assisting Individuals Suffering from Social Isolation

Everyone gets lonely from time to time. Human beings are social creatures who are naturally drawn to interpersonal relationships. Even at birth, infants instinctively feel the need for connection and belonging. This need for connecting with others follows us throughout our lives and even into our sunset years.

However, for some individuals, loneliness can take on a form that can be very overwhelming. When this happens, it is referred to as Social Isolation.

Consider the case of Roger P., a 75-year-old man who lives in an assisted living facility. Roger has never married and has no children. Although he has siblings, nieces and nephews, these relatives live a two-to-three-hour drive away and thus cannot visit frequently.

In addition, Roger has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. Roger cannot drive and is only able to leave his residence when the facility-owed bus takes the residents on weekly outings. Further, the fact that Roger lives on a fixed income makes his socialization options even more limited.

Complicating matters for Roger P. was the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, Roger had been visited by a friendly visitor volunteer every Saturday. However, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and state-enforced social-distancing regulations forced these in-person visits to cease in March of 2020.

Fortunately, on Roger's birthday in July of this year, his friendly visiting volunteer came to his facility to help him celebrate. The volunteer realized how much he had touched Roger's life when he saw him tear up through the plexiglass window that separated them.

Not Alone
Roger P. is not alone. PsychologyDictionary.org defines social isolation as “the voluntary or involuntary absence of having contact with others.” Social isolation is an issue that touches many individuals on both a national and local scale.

According to a 2019 study by the Health Resources and Services Administration, one in five Americans reported that they feel socially isolated. In addition, according to the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, there are more than 35,000 older adults currently living alone in these areas, and this number will continue to increase in the years ahead.

Three of the major risk factors for social isolation, as illustrated in the case of Roger P., are being over the age of 65, living alone and having a disability. Roger P. also exhibited other risk factors for becoming socially isolated, which include: being unmarried, widowed or divorced, having a low income, having retired or being unemployed.

Studies have shown that the more the aforementioned factors characterize an individual, the greater the risk of that individual becoming socially isolated. In addition, research from the CDC has cited increased risk for many physical and mental ailments associated with social isolation. These include an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, anxiety and even suicide.

Social Worker Diane Hargraves is very familiar with the struggles faced by these individuals. Her organization, Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC), is a Richmond based nonprofit that serves older adults as well as younger people with physical or mental health issues. “Most of our clients have limited or nonexistent support systems” says Hargraves. “As a result, many of them struggle with anxiety and depression.”

Debbie Ward, Volunteer Coordinator for Richmond-based nonprofit Family Life-line, says that her organization often deals with populations whose characteristics put them at greater risk for social isolation. “The typical age for clients is 79 years old, and the income for many of our elders is considered low or very low,” says Ward.

COVID-19: Proverbial Gasoline on the Fire
Even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation was a major issue for many individuals, particularly older adults and the disabled. The new reality ushered in by the pandemic has introduced new challenges.

In-person contact has been greatly limited, and this has had adverse effects on the support systems of many individuals. As a result, our country is experiencing an epidemic of social isolation to a degree unseen in previous times, and Greater Richmond is no exception.

Teresa Baldwin, Volunteer Director at Jewish Family Services (JFS) of Richmond, has seen firsthand the impact that the pandemic has had on the senior and disabled populations that they serve. “Our clients are lonelier than ever, and they have expressed feelings of hopelessness, depression and helplessness,” says Baldwin.

Likewise, Vestine Patrick of Chesterfield County Aging and Disability Services (CCADS), a nonprofit based in Chesterfield, has seen an increase in the need for their telephone reassurance services. “Prior to the pandemic, volunteers were only making calls Monday to Thursday,” she says. “However, from March until August of this year, volunteers were calling clients seven days a week.”

Adapting to the Times
Greater Richmond nonprofits have gone to great lengths to adapt, both in terms of time and technology. “We have dedicated volunteers who are spending more time talking with their clients than before the start of the pandemic,” says Hargraves of Commonwealth Catholic Charities of Richmond. “Clients know they can look to us for information about resources and options.”

In addition, telephone reassurance volunteers are relying more on digital technology to bridge the isolation gap. “Some of our volunteers are utilizing email, text messaging and virtual formats to communicate with their clients,” says Ward of Family Life-line.

Jewish Family Services is implementing similar strategies. “We are working on establishing call/zoom groups to expand social groups by allowing clients to speak to one another,” says Baldwin.

Changing Times, Unchanging Service and Gratitude
Despite the societal changes that have resulted from the pandemic, the excellent service given by telephone reassurance volunteers and the gratitude expressed by their clients remains the same. Nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond area have managed to stay grounded in their founding principles.

“At Jewish Family Services, we have proudly provided care and counseling to hundreds of people of all ages, faiths and economic levels in our community for more than 165 years. We are dedicated to building a stronger, healthier and happier Richmond,” says Baldwin.

Likewise, Patrick says that the volunteers at Chesterfield County Aging and Disability Services have continued to work diligently to connect individuals to networks who may otherwise not be connected. “We are a ‘one-stop-shop’ for information and referrals for our older adult community,” she says.

Finally, Hargraves of Commonwealth Catholic Charities realizes the need that her clients have for increased connection, and they often express deep gratitude for CCC and the support they receive from the volunteers during their times of need. “Having something to look forward to and knowing someone cares enough to call and really listen helps to decrease anxiety and depression,” says Hargraves. “Clients know they can look to us for information about resources and options.”

For more information about becoming a client/volunteer of any of the aforementioned nonprofit organizations providing telephone reassurance, here is their contact information:

Senior Connections Telebridges
(804) 343-3024
shevely@youraaa.org

Chesterfield County Aging and Disability Services (CCADS)
(804) 768-7878
www.chesterfield.gov/188/Aging-Disability-Services

Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC)
(804) 285-5900
www.cccofva.org

Family Lifeline (FLL)
(804) 282-4255
www.familylifeline.org

Jewish Family Services (JFS)
(804) 282-5644
www.jfsrichmond.org
EXPAND YOUR CIRCLES
Prevent Isolation and Loneliness as You Age

As we age, circumstances in our lives often change. We retire from a job, friends move away, or health issues convince us to eliminate or restrict driving. When changes like these occur, we may not fully realize how they will affect our ability to stay connected and engaged, and how much they can impact our overall health and well-being.

We need social connection to thrive — no matter our age. But recent research shows that the negative health consequences of chronic isolation and loneliness may be especially harmful for older adults. The good news is that, with greater awareness, we can take steps to maintain and strengthen our ties to family and friends, expand our social circles, and become more involved in the community around us.

Having a social network that meets our needs means different things to each of us. We hope that the information and resources below motivate you to evaluate your situation and, if needed, take action to strengthen the relationships that matter the most to you. And don’t forget — when you open up your world to new people, sharing your time, talents and wisdom, it’s a win-win for you and your entire community.

How Widespread is the Problem of Social Isolation?

- An estimated one in five adults over age 50 — at least 8 million — are affected by isolation.

What are the Factors That Put You at Greater Risk?

- Major life transitions or losses*
- Psychological or cognitive challenges
- Being a caregiver for someone with a serious condition
- Inadequate social support
- Rural, unsafe and/or inaccessible neighborhood
- Transportation access challenges
- Language barriers
- Age, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation and/or gender identity barriers

Caregivers: These risk factors may also provide you with clues to what to look for should you have a family member or neighbor who is isolated or lonely.


What Steps Can You Take to Stay Connected and Engaged?

Sometimes it takes effort to stay connected. You may have noticed that your social engagements have decreased or that you have gone days or weeks without speaking to or interacting with others.

It never hurts to take stock of your network of activities and friends and to evaluate what you can do to make more connections. See the simple Self-Assessment Checklist on page B-4 that will help you determine your level of risk of becoming socially isolated or lonely and whether you should take steps to expand your circles of connection and engagement.

National Resources

The following national resources can provide a comprehensive level of support for older adults, including the homebound, who are struggling with isolation and loneliness.

Area Agencies on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) serve older adults in virtually every community in America. Senior Connections is the AAA for the Greater Richmond area. AAs provide a welcoming environment for older adults and caregivers interested in participating in social and health promotion activities, as well as a range of services such as meals, transportation and in-home services.

To reach Senior Connections, call (804) 343-5000. To learn more about AAs elsewhere in the country, call the Eldercare Locator at 800.677.1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov to get connected today.

Eldercare Locator

The Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers seeking assistance across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. Through its National Call Center (800.677.1116), which operates five days a week from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, and website (www.eldercare.gov), the Locator serves as a trusted gateway for older adults and caregivers searching for information and resources that can be crucial to their health, well-being and independence.

Connect2Affect

Connect2Affect is an online resource featuring tools and information to help evaluate isolation risk, reach out to others who may be feeling lonely and disengaged, and find practical ways to reconnect to community. It is for individuals, families and the community at large. Learn more at connect2affect.org.

Acknowledgements: In the development of this information, we worked closely with AARP Foundation, a national leader and expert on the topic of social isolation. We are grateful for their guidance and support. This was published as a brochure by the Eldercare Locator, a program established in 1991 and funded by the Administration on Aging within the Administration for Community Living; it is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a). The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of its members so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Visit www.n4a.org to learn more.

Resources

“Connect2Affect Introduction” — Lisa Video www.youtube.com
“Learn How to Use Social Media and Other Technologies” Tool http://aarptek.aarp.org/
“Doing Good is Good for You: Volunteer!” Brochure www.n4a.org/volunteercenter
“Before You Give Up the Keys: Create a Roadmap for Transportation Independence” Brochure www.n4a.org/consumerbrochures
“Find an Age-Friendly Community in Your Area” Tool — www.aarp.org

If You Are Isolated and Lonely Now, What Can You Do?

If you feel you are currently socially isolated and grappling with chronic loneliness, reach out to your family, friends and neighbors. Explore the resources described in this article to connect with others. There are lots of opportunities for you to get engaged in activities you will like; with people you will enjoy.

In addition, you may want to visit your primary physician and explain how you feel. Recognizing that you feel isolated or that you’re having trouble maintaining a social network that meets your needs is the first step to improving your quality of life.

4 WAYS TO SHARE HOLIDAY CHEER WITH YOUR SENIOR LOVED ONE DURING COVID

1. Postmark your love

Many seniors treasure holiday correspondence. Ask friends and family to send holiday cards and letters to your loved one.

2. Cook up connections

Discuss holiday meal plans with your parents or grandparents. Ask about their favorite seasonal recipes, then set up a time to cook them together via Zoom or FaceTime.

3. Caring through caroling

Tap into happy family memories by gathering around the phone or computer to sing traditional holiday songs together.

4. Deck the halls

For many families, decorating during the holidays is a beloved tradition. Reach out virtually for a crafting session to make wreaths, garlands, or advent calendars.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season!
Senior Connections, CAAA

Three Ways to Give This Holiday Season
Donations to the Empty Plate Campaign helps us provide essentials services to older adults in our community.
• Transportation • Meals • In-Home Care
• Social Engagement • Emergency Services
*) Visit our Website: seniorconnections-va.org
*) Mail Check: 24 E. Cary St • Richmond, VA 23219
*) Call/Email Angie Phelon: 804.343.3000
aphelon@youraaa.org

TeleBridges
A Telephone Reassurance Program

One of the most effective means of reducing isolation, victimization, and health concerns is contact through a telephone call.

To learn more about Senior Connections TeleBridges Program, contact Mrs. Shana S. Beverly, Volunteer Coordinator

804.343.3000
sbeverly@youraaa.org

PREVENT ISOLATION & LONELINESS AS YOU AGE

SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

I live alone.
I see or talk to my family members one or more times a week.
I see or talk to my friends one or more times a week.
I generally have a ride or the transportation I need to get to where I need to go.
It is difficult or impossible to leave my home without assistance.
I feel that I make a meaningful contribution to the world or people around me.
I often feel that I lack companionship.
I often feel left out.
If I had a problem and needed help or advice, I know someone I could rely on.
If I had good news or an interesting story to tell, I know someone I could tell.
Within the past year, I have suffered a major loss, like the death of a loved one.
I participate in weekly social activities.

Scoring 2
You are at risk for isolation but by becoming aware of the risk factors, you can take steps to avoid becoming isolated.

Scoring 3 or more
You may already be experiencing the negative consequences of isolation and would benefit from taking steps to reconnect address the barriers that may be causing your isolation.

Total answers circled in left column
Which purchases are worth the splurge?

By Andrew Rosen

Boats, name-brand clothing, iPhones — the list of luxury products available to consumers is endless. But which ones are worth their salt?

Defining “worth” is a deeply personal exercise. Some items deliver great performance and are arguably worth their price tag. Others are more about feelings, connection and experience.

While it’s not always necessary to splurge, there are many products and services that are not only higher in quality but will also save you in the long run.

Better service, lower cost

There is nothing better than finding a product or service that costs less and performs better than the old options.

For example, cable has become synonymous with continually rising rates, not to mention the taxes. Those who own a “smart” TV or a streaming device can replace cable with monthly subscriptions to Netflix, Hulu, YouTube TV, Amazon Prime and Disney+.

Streaming services offer a personalized experience, provide significantly more content for less money, and are always there when users want them. When it comes to finding better goods for less, Amazon Prime is a top contender. For a small monthly fee, consumers can skip the shipping costs or set up monthly auto-ship, get free music, e-books and video content, and get discounts at Whole Foods.

Warehouse memberships are another great value. Costco and Sam’s Club typically offer products for less money by selling them in larger quantities, plus the added perks of travel agents, car discounts, free shipping and more.

Better quality, better life

Admittedly, saving $3 on a box of 4,000 crackers doesn’t always seem like a home run. But sometimes, avoiding the lowest-cost option will hit it out of the park.

Paying up for products that improve quality of life can pay off in the long run. One example is a great mattress and pillow. Scientists continue to attribute orthopedic issues, stress, high cholesterol and many other ailments to quality of sleep.

More than ever, it’s apparent that a high-priced and better-built mattress can lead to improved sleep and health, superior performance at work, lower stress levels and better quality of life.

Other worthwhile purchases include electric toothbrushes and quality running shoes. As an upgrade from the humble manual toothbrush, an inexpensive electric toothbrush can prevent many unpleasant and expensive trips to the dentist.

A good pair of running shoes will last longer than a cheap pair, saving money on replacements. It will also prevent injuries.

A kitchen stocked with a few high-end tools will yield better results, less cleanup, less clutter and a happier dining experience. They can even make healthy cooking easier and save money on eating out. For instance, one study showed that consumers who cook at home eat more vegetables.

Beyond material goods, experiences can be worth spending more on. Taking time for self-care can relieve stress and boost quality of life. Massages, manicures and facials can alleviate pressure points and built-up tension. Once considered “luxury” services for the elite, they have become mainstream self-care measures.

Money spent on a vacation is well spent; new experiences in a relaxing setting can help you rest and recharge. Simple but effective self-care plays a vital role in better all-around wellness, leading to higher earnings and lower healthcare costs later.

Get what you pay for or more

What about those really expensive items? What is “expensive”? Typically, it’s simply viewed as “costing a lot of money.” However, economists define it as a price that makes consumers feel they are paying too much for what they are getting in return.

When consumers think they are getting what they paid for, then it’s a fair trade. They get a bargain when they feel they are getting more than what they paid for. Further, it can be more affordable in the long run to buy a quality product once than to buy a cheap product repeatedly.

Investing in better products and experiences is a good decision for those who have the means. A financial planner or advisor is yet another worthwhile investment, not only saving clients the amount of their fee, but turning that investment into a long-term dividend and maximizing buying power.

Working with a financial planner can help them understand what they value and take the first step toward investing in products and services that are worth their price.

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When life blows up your well-laid plans

By Liz Weston

Job loss, business failure, involuntary retirement, divorce, disability or the death of a breadwinner — these are just some of the ways our finances can force us to come up with a Plan B.

But the biggest task after financial loss may be dealing with your emotions after the future you had envisioned disappears.

People who lose a loved one expect to grieve. People who lose their financial security or a standard of living suffer “ambiguous loss,” where many elements of their lives are the same, but a major element is now gone, said financial therapist Edward Coombs of Charlotte, North Carolina.

“You know what’s happened, but it’s not like you get a funeral for it,” said Coombs, a certified financial planner and couples therapist. He’s a member of the Financial Therapy Association, a group of advisors who combine financial and psychological counseling.

Everybody’s grief is different

Acknowledgment that your grief is legitimate rather than trying to minimize what you’re going through, Coombs said.

Also, don’t expect grief to proceed in predictable stages. Psychological research shows that grief is more dynamic than that, and people may feel shifting emotions that can include sadness, despair, confusion, disorientation, fear, anxiety and even relief.

“A lot of the grief around the financial loss is going to feel kind of unexpected,” Coombs said. “Why am I crying now? Why am I angry now? Why am I disappointed or lethargic?”

This process won’t be quick, Coombs said. Our brains get used to our habits and routines. When those get dramatically disrupted, our brains need time to catch up.

“It takes time for the neural pathways to adjust and change, right? My brain is literally needing time to reorganize itself,” Coombs said.

You can help this process by discussing your emotions with someone you trust, said financial therapist Preston D. Cherry, a certified financial planner.

Cherry said writing can help. He writes poetry, but writing in a journal is also effective. Studies have shown that expressive writing — writing nonstop for 15 minutes or so each day without inhibitions about the traumatic event or experience — can help people deal with emotional fallout.

Writing can help us organize our thoughts and give meaning to what happened, which can help us break free of rumination or brooding.

Many of Coombs’ clients have problems with money that stem from childhood traumas, often because of a parent’s layoff or the loss of a family business.

“What they often end up seeing is the parent lose their sense of self, fall into depression and despair, and never make it out,” Coombs said.

Processing your emotions can help you avoid that fate.

Know when to get help

If you’re struggling, keep in mind that this is just one phase of your life and that it, like the current pandemic, will pass, Cherry said.

He also recommends regular “self audits” — taking time alone to reflect on what’s happened, work through your feelings and start to consider possible futures.

But when you’re feeling stuck or isolated, you may need to seek professional
Many ways to track down old friends online

Dear Savvy Senior,

I’m interested in tracking down some old friends I’ve lost touch with over the years. What websites can you recommend that can help me find them?

—Tracking Tom

Dear Tom,

Thanks to the internet, tracking down long-lost friends from many years ago is relatively easy to do and, in most cases, it won’t cost you a cent. Here are some tips and online tools to help you get started.

Remembering the details

Before you begin your search, a good first step is to jot down any information you can remember or find out about the people you’re trying to locate: things like their full name (maiden and married), age or birth date, last known address or phone number, old email address, names of family members, etc. These details can help you turn up clues while you search.

Social media and search engines

After you compile your information, a good place to start your search is at social media websites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. Also try search engines like Google and Yahoo.

When using search engines, type in the name of the person you’re searching for in quotation marks, for example, “John Smith.”

You can narrow your search by adding other criteria like their nickname or middle name, the city or state they may live in, or even their occupation.

People searches

If your initial search comes up empty, you can also use people searches like AnyWho.com, Intelius.com or WhitePages.com. These sites will provide a list of potential matches.

Because many people share the same name, these sites will also supply details to help identify the right person, perhaps including their age, prior hometowns, names of relatives, colleges attended or employer.

While these sites are free to use at a basic level, they charge a small fee for providing certain details, such as the person’s contact information. WhitePages, however, sometimes provides home phone numbers for free.

Niche websites

Here are a few other niche people-finding websites to help you with your search:

To look for old high school classmates, try Classmates.com. This site has contact information only for people who have registered with it. But even if your friend hasn’t registered, it could provide contact info for another classmate who remains in touch with your friend.

Another option is to check your high school alumni website. Not every school has its own site, but some do, and you can look for it by going to any search engine and typing in the name of the school with the city and state it’s located in. You can also search at AlumniClass.com, a huge hosting site for thousands of U.S. high schools.

If you’re looking for old college friends, look for an alumni directory on the school’s website. You might be able to access your friend’s contact info by completing an online registration. Or try calling or emailing your alumni relations department and ask them to pass on your contact info to your friend.

If you’re looking for someone you served with in the military, Military.com offers a free “Buddy Finder” service that has a database of more than 20 million records — visit Military.com/buddy-finder. You can also search for free at Glesearch.com, TogetherWeServed.com and VetFriends.com.

If you can’t find any current information about the person you’re searching for, it could be that he or she has passed away. To find out if that’s the case, use obituary databases such as Tributes.com and Legacy.com, which can search obituaries from hundreds of U.S. newspapers.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of The Savvy Senior book.

SAVVY SENIOR
By Jim Miller

Are you a senior citizen?
Are you worried about debt you can’t afford to pay?
Are debt collectors calling and sending you threatening letters?

Laws protect your Social Security and retirement income. It doesn’t need to be used to pay debt you can’t afford to pay. But what about the debt collector calls and demands?

Debt collectors can no longer communicate with a person represented by an attorney. HELPS is a national nonprofit law firm and charitable organization. We represent senior citizens who have debt they can’t afford to pay. We send letters to your debt collectors. This stops unwanted debt collector contact. They can no longer call you or send you demands. You can always call us with questions or concerns. We turn no senior citizen away that needs the help we provide.

HELPs can immediately protect you from harassing debt collectors and bring peace back to your life

Call HELPS now toll-free at 855-HELPS-US to learn more or visit us on the web at www.helpsishere.org
Don’t bank on bonds being safe right now

By Randy Kurtz

Today’s market environment requires that we talk candidly about bonds. While investors over the years have turned to bonds for safety, unfortunately bonds have never been riskier than they are right now.

Over long periods of time, bonds have generated lower returns and lower risk than equities. Bonds also have had low correlation with equities, which generates diversification return.

Generally, bonds are thought of as safe. Over the last 50 or so years, the 10-year U.S. government bond has produced average annual returns of around 7%.

Ah, the good old days. If you purchased a 10-year U.S. government bond on Oct. 1, 2020, the bond would have yielded 0.68%. In other words, over the next 10 years you would expect to get an average annual return of 0.68%. That’s about 90% less than the average returns over the past 50 years.

It’s also pretty close to zero.

At the beginning of this year, the U.S. bond yielded 1.88%. Year to date those same bonds have delivered total returns of around 7%. How? Well, the yield went down from 1.88% to 0.68%. When the yield goes down, the price of the bond goes up, and vice versa: When rates rise, bonds fall in price.

So, if you buy a bond for $100 and you get a 0.68% return for a year, you then will have $100.68. But did you really make money?

Where do we stand today, not only with nominal rates, but real rates? Certainly negative! The graph below shows the yield on the 10-year bond since 2018, as well as the real rate of return. The orange line indicates the real rates bond holders have been seeing, and the dark red line delineates between positive and negative returns.

If we ask what we can do, the answer is: Diversify.

If we buy international bonds (with comparably low yields) denominated in international currencies, and if the value of the dollar drops, these bonds may rise. The same goes for emerging market bonds, which have the added benefit of higher yields.

How about inflation-adjusted bonds? If inflation rises, these bonds may do well. Floating rate bonds may also benefit if rates rise.

The time for a plain old U.S. bond portfolio is gone. So, the composition of your bond portfolio should be changing just as dramatically as yields have changed.

Changing times require a new game plan. As such, all of the following sources of diversification should be considered:


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Bonds
From page 17
ed bonds like TIP for U.S. bonds and WIP for international bonds. Floating rate bonds like USFR. International currency bonds like BWX for developed markets and EMLC for emerging markets.

Take a higher cash position. At least cash won’t lose value if rates rise.

Why you shouldn’t reach for yield
To paraphrase Warren Buffett, we have to run the conservative side of the portfolio so that every check clears under any circumstance.

Thus, you might want to consider only owning government bonds (both U.S. and international) in the bond section of your portfolio.

What about corporate bonds or high-yield bonds or municipal bonds? The value of a bond is directly tied to its safety. In times of stress, safety — or lack thereof — is revealed. The graph below shows the performance of different types of bonds during the most recent time of stress, March 2020.

During just this three-week period, when people were most worried about the value of their investments, municipal bonds lost 13%, high-yield bonds lost 19%, and corporate bonds lost 20%.

 Granted, they have recovered most of their losses since then. This time around, the next scare, who knows? I recommend sticking with different varieties of government bonds.

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Watch out for scams via text
By Kiplinger Consumer News Service
According to the IRS, there’s a new stimulus check scam that you need to know about.

Thieves are sending text messages saying, “You have received a direct deposit of $1,200 from COVID-19 TREASURY FUND. Further action is required to accept this payment into your account. Continue here to accept this payment.”

The text then has a link to a fake website that looks like the IRS’s online “Get My Payment” portal. The idea is to trick people into disclosing bank account information under the guise of receiving a $1,200 stimulus check. [This type of scam is known as phishing.]

Unfortunately, if you visit the fraudulent website and then enter your personal and financial account information, you will actually be giving this private information to scammers and succumbing to identity theft.

Remember that neither the IRS nor any state agency will ever text you to ask for bank account information to make a stimulus check payment. In fact, they don’t send unsolicited texts or emails.

And they don’t call people with threats of jail or lawsuits, or demand tax payments via gift cards, either. Those are red flags that should warn you of a scam.

If you receive one of these phony text messages, take a screenshot of it and email it to the IRS at phishing@irs.gov. Also include:
—Date and time (including time zone) you received the text message;
—Number that appeared on your Caller ID; and
—Number that received the text message.

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Stand Up Straight and Feel Better
Discover the Perfect Walker™, the better way to walk safely and more naturally

It’s a cruel fact of life, as we age, gravity takes over. Our muscles droop, our bodies sag and the weight of the world seems to be planted squarely on our shoulders. We dread taking a fall, so we find ourselves walking less and less—and that only makes matters worse.

Well, cheer up! There’s finally a product designed to enable us all to walk properly and stay on the go. It’s called the Perfect Walker™, and it can truly change your life.

Traditional rollators and walkers simply aren’t designed well. They require you to hunch over and shuffle your feet when you walk. This puts pressure on your back, your neck, your wrists and your hands. Over time, this makes walking uncomfortable and can result in a variety of health issues. That’s all changed with the Perfect Walker™. Its upright design and padded elbow rests enable you to distribute your weight across your arms and shoulders, not your hands and wrists. Helps reduce back, neck and wrist pain and discomfort.

Its unique frame gives you plenty of room to step, and the oversized wheels help you glide across the floor. The height can be easily adjusted with the push of a button to fit anyone from 5’ to over 6’. Once you’ve reached your destination you can use the hand brakes to gently slow down, and there’s even a handy seat with a storage compartment. Its sleek, lightweight design makes it easy to use indoors and out and it folds up for portability and storage.

Why spend another day hunched over and shuffleing along. Call now, and find out how you can try out a Perfect Walker™ for yourself... in your own home. You’ll be glad you did.
Leisure & Travel

Italian cuisine reveres quality of ingredients

By Rick Steves

As we've had to postpone our travels because of the pandemic, I believe a weekly dose of travel dreaming can be good medicine.

Here's one of my favorite European memories. And, like so many, it involves eating in Italy — a reminder of the delicious experiences that await us at the other end of this crisis.

Spending a month in Italy, I thought of eating anything other than Italian food never occurs to me. Other than France, I doubt there's another country in Europe that could hold my palate's interest so completely.

One reason I don't tire of going local here is that this land of a thousand bell towers is also the land of a thousand regional cuisines. And I celebrate each region's forte.

Tuscany is proud of its beef, so I seek out a place to sink my teeth into a carnivore's dream. My favorite steakhouse is in Montepulciano.

The scene in a stony cellar, under one long, rustic vault, is powered by an open fire in the far back. Flickering in front of the flames is a gurney, upon which lays a hunk of beef the size of a small human corpse.

Like a blacksmith in hell, Giulio — a lanky, George Carlin lookalike in a T-shirt — hacks at the beef,opping off a steak ever few minutes. He gets an order, and then it's whop...leave it to cleaver.

In a kind of mouthwatering tango, he prances past boisterous tables of eaters, holding above the commotion the raw slabs of beef on butcher paper.

Giulio presents the slabs to my friends and me, telling us the weight and price and getting our permission to cook it. He then dances back to the inferno and cooks the slabs: seven minutes on one side, seven on the other. There's no asking how you'd like it done; this is the way it is done. Seven minutes on one side, seven on the other. Fifteen minutes later, we get our steaks.

In Italy, the cuisine is revered — and the quality of the ingredients is sacred. While French cuisine is famously enthusiastic about the sauces, for Italians, sauces highlight the delightful flavor of their favorite seasonal ingredients.

Italians like to say, “La miglior cucina comincia dal mercato.” (“The best cuisine starts from the market.”) They care deeply about what's in season and what's grown locally.

One night in Florence, I’m dining with my friend Cincia at her favorite trattoria when the chef comes out to chat with her. They get into an animated debate about the ingredients.

See ITALIAN CUISINE, page 21

Smoky Louisiana sausage has its own trail

By Todd A. Price

A thick, spicy pork sausage called andouille links together Louisiana’s River Parishes. An essential ingredient in gumbo, jambalaya and even seafood boils, andouille adds smoky depth to dishes like blackened catfish, jambalaya and even seafood boils, andouille adds smoky depth to dishes. Andouille links together Louisiana's River Parishes.

An essential ingredient in gumbo, jambalaya and even seafood boils, andouille adds smoky depth to dishes. Andouille links together Louisiana's River Parishes. An essential ingredient in gumbo, jambalaya and even seafood boils, andouille adds smoky depth to dishes. Andouille links together Louisiana's River Parishes.
Ways to get more bang for your travel buck

By Don Mankin

What does a travel writer do while waiting for the world to return to normal? Reminisce about past trips? Fantasize about future trips? Reorganize the sock drawer for the umpteenth time?

All of the above, plus reflect on what I’ve learned from my 14 years as a travel writer and almost 50 years as a professional psychologist. From this perspective, I have identified a few ways to enhance your travel experiences in a post-pandemic world.

Here are a few tips that will help you get more bang for your travel buck, have more fun on your trips, and possibly learn something about the world and yourself in the bargain:

Before the trip

Daydream. Remember your mother or your teachers telling you to stop daydreaming and get back to work? Well, they were wrong!

Besides being entertaining and helping you get through boring parts of your day, daydreaming can also help you plan for the future in general, and your trips in particular.

After learning as much about the trip as you can, daydream about it to make sure it’s something you really want to do. Imagine what you might be doing, where you will be doing it, and the conditions you might face (e.g., heat, rain, bugs, rocky trails, etc.). If it still seems like fun, do it. Otherwise, start looking for something else.

Daydreaming can also help you identify what to pack. Picture yourself engaging in daily activities. What are you wearing? What equipment or gear do you need? Also imagine being in your room in the evening. What will you need to have handy on the night table beside your bed?

Get specific information about possible challenges. General ratings, like “easy,” “moderate” or “difficult,” only tell you so much. Find out exactly what’s behind the rating of the trail or tour.

For example, how much will you be walking each day, on what kind of surfaces and grades? Are the accommodations “rustic” or “primitive,” and what specifically does that mean? Will you have a private bathroom?

Do research, ask questions and factor all of that information in to make sure the trip is for you.

Train to get in shape. If it’s a walking trip, put in the miles and break in your walking or hiking shoes before you leave.

If it’s a biking trip, find out how many miles you will pedal each day and, if you can, get on your bike several days a week before the trip.

Go to the gym. Hire a trainer if you have any concerns or doubts. Nothing will make your trip more miserable than blisters, back pain or a sore butt.

During the trip

Dig deep for underlying themes. Successful travel writers look below the surface for unifying themes, truths, angles and insights that tie their trip experiences together, transforming their articles into something other than a journal of activities. This enables them to gain a deeper understanding of destinations for a richer, more fulfilling experience.

As Christopher P. Baker urges in a recent issue of the Writer’s Digest, try to “get to the heart of your destination’s character.”

For example, on a recent cruise through the islands of eastern Indonesia, I discovered a more complex picture than the tropical paradise of lush, jungle-covered islands and reefs of colorful fish I expected.

Battle sites from WWII made it clear to me that “paradise” was in the eyes of the beholder and dependent on the context. For the Japanese and Allied soldiers who fought there, these islands were a hot, steamy hell.

This revelation transformed a fun trip of snorkeling, birdwatching and cruising into something more meaningful and potentially transformative. [See “Having peak experiences in Indonesia,” in our March 2020 issue on our website.]

Find time to reflect and take notes. The temptation on many trips is to fill your day with as much activity as possible. The problem is, you need time to think about what you are experiencing, especially if you are striving for a deeper, more impactful trip.

Make sure you write your thoughts and impressions down as soon as you can before they fade from memory or are displaced by subsequent thoughts.

Like all writers, I find that the process of writing something down forces me to think more. Often, I don’t quite know what I think until I try to express my thoughts in writing. Keeping a journal often elicits previously unrevealed feelings, memories, connections and insights.

After the trip

Write a story about your trip, publish it (and maybe get a free trip next time). You’ve got the photos, information and pages and pages of notes. Why not write a story about your trip?

At the very least, it will provide an opportunity to relive the trip in your imagination.

See TRAVEL WRITER, page 21

Bring the natural benefits of sunlight indoors.

Ever since the first human went into a dark cave and built a fire, people have realized the importance of proper indoor lighting. Unfortunately, since Edison invented the light bulb, lighting technology has remained relatively prehistoric. Modern light fixtures do little to combat many symptoms of improper lighting, such as eyestrain, dryness or burning. As more and more of us spend longer hours in front of a computer monitor, the results are compounded…and the effects of indoor lighting are not necessarily limited to physical well-being. Many people believe that the quantity and quality of light can play a part in one’s mood and work performance.

Now there’s a better way to bring the positive benefits associated with natural sunlight indoors.

A floor lamp that spreads sunshine all over a room

The Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp will change the way you see and feel about your living or work spaces. Studies show that sunshine can lift your mood and your energy levels. But as we all know, the sun, unfortunately, does not always shine. So, to bring the benefits of natural daylight indoors, use the floor lamp that simulates the full spectrum of daylight. You will see with more clarity and enjoyment as this lamp provides sharp visibility for close tasks and reduces eyestrain. Its 27-watt compact bulb is the equivalent to a 150-watt ordinary light bulb. This makes it perfect for activities such as reading, writing, sewing, needlepoint, and especially for aging eyes.

Experience sunshine indoors at the touch-of-a-switch. This amazing lamp is easy on the eyes and easy on the hands. It features a special “soft-touch, flicker-free” rocker switch that’s easier to use than traditional toggle or twist switches. Its flexible goose-neck design enables you to get light where you need it most. The high-tech electronics, user-friendly design, and bulb that last 10 times longer than an ordinary bulb make this lamp a must-have.

Here is a guarantee that no other lamp can make. If the Balanced Spectrum® bulb ever burns out, we’ll send you a free replacement bulb, all you pay is a small fee for shipping and handling. The Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp comes with firstSTREET’s exclusive guarantee. Try this lamp for 90 days and return it for the product purchase price if not completely satisfied.

Balanced Spectrum® floor lamp

Only $79.95 with FREE Shipping

Please mention promotional code 113982.

For fastest service, call toll-free

1-888-306-4952

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Italian cuisine
From page 19

“Arugula is not yet in season. But oh, Signora Maria has more sun in her back yard, and her chickens give her a marvelous fertilizer.”

Then the topic changes to the cuisine turmoil caused by erratic weather. Vignarola, the beloved stew consisting of artichokes, peas and fava beans, is on the menu before its normal season. Cincia, seeming traumatized, says, “Vignarola, how can it be served so early? I’ve never seen it on a menu before Easter.”

The chef, who only makes it for a few weeks each spring during a perfect storm of seasonality when everything is bursting with flavor, has to convince her that the season has changed and it’s on the menu because this is the new season.

Enjoying the commotion, I explain to Cincia that this is the kind of restaurant I seek out in Italy. It ticks all the boxes: It’s personality-driven — a mom-and-pop place — and run by people enthusiastic about sharing their love of good cooking. It’s a low-rent location, with lots of locals. The menu is small because they’re selling everything they’re cooking. It’s in one language, Italian, because they cater to locals rather than tourists. And it’s handwritten because it’s shaped by what’s fresh in the market today.

I tell her, “We have fine Italian restaurants in America, but even the finest cannot create the energy and ambiance that comes with simply being in Italy.”

Cincia then takes control, telling me to put away my notepad and stop being a travel writer. She says, “Only a tourist would rush a grappa or pull the fat off the prosciutto. Tonight, we eat with no notes. We eat my way.”

Reviewing the options, she pours me another drink and suggests that I totally relax. Then she turns to the chef and says simply, “Mi faccia felice” (Make me happy).

He does. And that night, along with enjoying a great meal, I added a new favorite word to my Italian vocabulary: indimenticabile (unforgettable).

Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This article was adapted from his new book, For the Love of Europe. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com.

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Travel writer
From page 20

and use that daydreaming muscle again. It might even be part of the legacy you leave behind for your grandkids, showing them just how adventuresome you are.

If it’s good enough, send it to your local newspaper or other community or special-interest publication (e.g., a food and wine magazine, a magazine for cyclists, kayakers, RVers, etc., or a newspaper for an over-50 audience). Spend some time thinking of a punchy subject line and a concise, compelling pitch in the body of the email.

If you don’t get a response in a few weeks, try again. If they publish it, they might even pay you (but don’t expect much — just enough in most cases to cover the cost of a good meal).

Most importantly, once you’re a published travel writer, you can ask businesses for free or reduced fees on lodgings, meals or other services on your next trip.

There are several key steps to follow to gain these perks:

1. Verify that an editor is interested in a story.
2. If they are, tell the hotel, tour operator, etc., that a publication has expressed interest in the story.
3. Also tell them about the publication. Make sure to include information on its focus (e.g., food, wine, cycling, hiking, active seniors) and its readership, including total circulation and characteristics of their readers (e.g., average age, level of education, socio-economic level).
4. Then ask the hotel, operator, etc., if they would be willing to “comp” you on the trip, or at least give you a media discount.

You are now on your way to becoming an actual travel writer. Take it from me, it may not be the best way to make a living, but it sure is a great way to live!

Don Mankin will be leading two trips in 2021 and beyond. For more information, visit explorerx.com/se-asia and quasarex.com/galapagos/don-mankin.
You can’t always lie down in bed and sleep. Heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches – and dozens of other ailments and worries. Those are the nights you’d give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in: one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises your feet and legs just where you want them, supports your head and shoulders properly, and operates at the touch of a button.

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Amateur artists honored by *Fifty Plus*

By Catherine Brown

From wood sculptures to paintings, artwork from the Richmond area poured into this year’s Celebration of the Arts amateur art competition sponsored by *Fifty Plus* and its sister publication, the *Beacon*. Our seven judges, experts in their categories, selected several local artists for honorable mentions.

**Mixed Media Honorable Mention**

Cathe Hart Kervan, Mechanicsville, Va.

As a child, Cathe Hart Kervan was always busy making crafts. That’s no surprise, given that she comes from an artistic family. Her mother was a watercolor artist, and her brother is an accomplished pen-and-ink artist who teaches art to high school students.

As a college student, Kervan studied crafts, with a focus on weaving, knitting, pottery and jewelry making. After graduating from Virginia’s Ferrum College, she started a career in PR and marketing, which enabled her to tap into her interest in photography.

“I was able to be artistic in my career,” Kervan said, “but my hands-on artwork was put on hold.”

When she retired 10 years ago, Kervan started making art again. “I played around with any kind of artwork that interested me,” she said.

Now, with a decade of experience, she has a new sense of self. “At 64 years old, I feel like an artist, and I’m going to call myself an artist,” Kervan said.

Kervan particularly enjoys mixed media, putting together different materials in a montage. The work that won her an honorable mention, “Blue Vase,” is a mixed-media collage.

“I start out with the background and then layer on top of that,” Kervan said.

“The trick is figuring out when to stop.”

Kervan’s inspiration often comes from the outdoors. “I’m attracted to spheres and spirally things,” she said. She’s also interested in the colors of nature, particularly the sky, sunlight and trees.

While she sometimes sells her work, she primarily makes art for herself or to give as gifts.

Kervan is also an avid photographer. She focuses on candid portraits of family and friends as well as close-up images of flowers, which appeal to her in part because of their circular shapes.

For Kervan, art is an escape. “I like to lose myself in whatever is forming in front of me,” she said.

**River Table**

By Jerry Harvey

Harvey said he spends 10 to 20 hours a week woodworking. The project that led to Harvey’s honorable mention recognition took about 20 to 30 hours to complete.

He spent much of the time processing the wood. “Most slabs are pretty rough,” Harvey said, “so I have to shape them, polish them, and put on the finish.”

For “River Table,” Harvey used Italian olive wood, which he divided in half. He filled in the space between the two parts of the slab with an epoxy resin that flows through the middle, curving and winding like a river.

While Harvey does woodworking more for fun than for profit, he sells some of his work at Art Works in Richmond. His wife, Pat, sells her paintings there as well.

In addition to woodworking, Harvey takes advantage of the opportunity to audit classes for free through John Tyler Community College. “I’ve audited 120 hours of classes over the last 10 years,” he said.

Harvey particularly enjoys taking classes in subjects he didn’t have the chance to study when he was preparing for dental school.

“Philosophy is my favorite,” he said, but he has also taken classes in art, history, ethics and religion. “Taking classes keeps my mind working,” Harvey said.

**Sculpture Honorable Mention**

Chris Ruch, Ebony, Va.

Much of the work Ruch creates is sold at craft shows (which have been put on hold because of the pandemic), via word of mouth or on commission. “I find custom work the most enjoyable,” Ruch said.

Ruch created one work his wife won’t let him sell: a beautiful wine and liquor cabinet made from an antique pipe organ from the mid-1800s. “That piece is staying in our house,” he said.

For this clock, Ruch used pine, walnut, red oak and Baltic birch purchased from Home Depot and his supplier in Wisconsin. He created it with the hopes of finding a buyer.

“My wife said we couldn’t keep it because we already have three grandfather clocks in our house,” Ruch said. Fortunately, he said, “My neighbor fell in love with it.”

To view all 600 entries in the Celebration of the Arts competition, visit the *Beacon*—Register for weekly door prizes.
A holiday gift: Garden myths debunked

By Lela Martin

As I grew up, my gardening mentor was our elderly next-door neighbor. She instilled in me a love for plants, although I don’t remember any of her aphorisms. However, I’ve become a Master Gardener, I’ve heard quite a few questionable adages from homeowners and other gardening enthusiasts. Master Gardeners only provide information that has been proven through non-biased studies.

This year, as a holiday gift to you, I’m countering some common gardening myths using university research.

Myth #1: A bleach solution is the best choice for disinfecting pruning wounds and tools.

Winter is a great time to clean your gardening tools. However, bleach is corrosive, pitting your valuable tools and damaging plant tissue. Additionally, chlorine bleach can damage your clothing and is hazardous to human health.

A better alternative is either alcohol (ethanol or isopropyl) or household cleaners such as Listerine®, Pine-Sol®, or Lysol®. Lysol in a spray can is my personal choice.

To protect your tools and reduce the spread of plant diseases, first remove the dirt and debris from your tools. Then disinfect your tools between cuts — or before pruning a different plant, at least. Wipe off any excess disinfectant between cuts.

Myth #2: If a gardening pesticide is organic, it must be safe.

Organic products may seem like a safer alternative, and some products such as insecticidal soaps are good choices. However, organic products can also be toxic. For example, the insecticide pyrethrum, derived from chrysanthemums, is toxic to praying mantises and butterflies. Pyrethrum can be effective against many common pests, but it is not a panacea.

Myth #3: Apply turf fertilizer early in the spring to encourage new growth.

Early spring fertilizing of turfgrass encourages top growth at the expense of root growth. That root growth is necessary for your turf to survive throughout the summer.

Fertilizer is also harmful to the Chesapeake Bay watershed through runoff from spring rains. Avoid combination “weed and feed” products in the spring. In Central Virginia, fertilize cool-season turf grass in the fall using the SON (September, October, November) schedule.

Myth #4: Add a handful of bone meal to planting holes before installing shrubs and trees.

Before you add any supplemental nutrients to your landscape, have a complete soil test performed.

Bone meal supplies high levels of phosphorus and calcium, which are not usually low in homeowners’ soil. High levels of phosphorous inhibit the growth of mycorrhizal fungi, which can be beneficial to many plants. This makes the plant divert its resources to root growth only.

Bone meal also can attract dogs, raccoons, coyotes and other critters who may dig up your newly planted trees and shrubs.

Myth #5: Newly planted young trees must be staked.

See GARDEN MYTHS, page 25

Letters to editor

From page 2

Dear Editor:

Since then I’ve volunteered at church and traveled to places I always wanted to see. Retiring was easy for me, and I hope others also find their niche.

Mildred Alexander
Via email

Dear Editor:

I just looked at your virtual expo information. WOW! It is unbelievable how many choices you have put together.

There are very many programs that my husband and I would want to hear, and there are some that are just for me. It will probably take until the end of January to listen to all the many choices.

I can’t imagine the amount of work you had to do — after you learned WHAT to do. I am certain people will appreciate having this to help pass hours in their days — and I mean days and days and days!

Barbara Scherr
Via email

Dear Editor:

[Commenting on the Virtual 50+Expo] Great information and video classes and speakers. Well done.

David Zink
Via website

Finally... a better mobility solution than Scooters or Power Chairs.

The Zoomer’s versatile design and 1-touch joystick operation brings mobility and independence to those who need it most.

If you have mobility issues, or know someone who does, then you’ve experienced the difficulties faced by millions of Americans. Once simple tasks like getting from the bedroom to the kitchen can become a time-consuming and potentially dangerous ordeal. You may have tried to solve the problem with a power chair or a scooter but neither is ideal. Power chairs are bulky and look like a medical device. Scooters are either unstable or hard to maneuver. Now, there’s a better alternative... the Zoomer.

My Zoomer is a delight to ride! It has increased my mobility in my apartment, my opportunities to enjoy the-out-of-doors, and enabled me to visit the homes of my children for longer periods of time. The various speeds of it match my need for safety, it is easy to turn, and I am most pleased with the freedom of movement it gives me.

Sincerely, A. Macon, Williamsburg, VA

After just one trip around your home in the Zoomer, you’ll marvel at how easy it is to navigate. It is designed to maneuver in tight spaces like doorways, between furniture, and around corners. It can go over thresholds and works great on any kind of floor or carpet. It’s not bulky or cumbersome, so it can roll right up to a table or desk- there’s no need to transfer to a chair. Its sturdy yet lightweight aluminum frame makes it durable and comfortable. It’s dual motors power it at up to 3.7 miles per hour and its automatic electromagnetic brakes stop on a dime. The rechargeable battery powers it for up to 8 miles on a single charge. Plus, it’s exclusive foldable design enables you to transport it easily and even store it in a closet or under a bed when it’s not in use.

Why spend another day letting mobility issues hamper your lifestyle? Call now and find out how you can have your very own Zoomer.

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Heritage

From page 5

focuses on the post-Civil War era and early 20th-century African Americans — little-known movers and shakers like Charles Russell, who designed the building housing the Independent Order of St. Luke, a national African American fraternal organization reinvigorated at the turn of the 20th century by pioneering businesswoman Maggie Walker.

Annual events

In 1996, the Elegba Folklore Society started celebrating Juneteenth, now their flagship event, staged annually (except for this past June, when the coronavirus made it too risky). It consists of three days of festivities, symposia and other activities to celebrate June 19th — also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day because it marks the official end of slavery in Texas.

On June 19, 1865, federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to take control of the state and free its still enslaved people. The Civil War had ended two months earlier, but slavery had continued in Texas.

The society’s winter celebration of Kwanzaa typically has performances, workshops, children’s activities and an African Market selling art and food. This year the weeklong virtual 2020 Capital City Kwanzaa Festival will stream on its website and Facebook page starting at 7 p.m. every evening. After a candle-lighting ceremony, the society will offer performances, talks, stories, showcases of Afrocentric fashion, workshops and more.

Within COVID-19 guidelines, Bell organized several “mini-family reunions” in neighborhoods featuring performances and conversations to reconnect people with their heritage and culture. The October program, titled “Opening the Roads to Our Future,” was meant to instill “self-pride, self-worth and empowerment,” she said.

The society’s work is especially critical now, Bell said, when “cries for social justice” are surfacing all over the country.

To learn more about the virtual Kwanzaa Festival or the Folklore society, visit efsinc.org or call (804) 644-3900.

Garden myths

From page 24

Research has shown that trees that are not staked develop larger root systems, bigger trunk diameter and greater trunk taper than their staked counterparts.

Small trees that are stable in the soil do not need to be staked. Only stake newly planted trees in high-wind areas or when the sapling has a limited root system.

If staking is required, use fabrics such as t-shirts or other flexible material, stake loosely, allowing the tree to sway somewhat in the wind, and remove the stake(s) after one growing season.

Myth #6: When mulching my trees, I should pile the mulch in a mound against the trunk of the tree.

Perhaps you’ve seen the “plunger” appearance of trees surrounded by a mound of mulch in both commercial and residential plantings.

Unfortunately, the practice of piling mulch next to the trunk keeps the trunk moist and causes bark to rot. This leaves the tree susceptible to insects, disease and burrowing rodents.

While mulching conserves soil moisture, reduces weed growth, and adds nutrients to the soil as it decomposes, too much mulch causes problems.

Organic mulch (such as shredded bark, pine needles or compost) should start two inches away from the trunk of a tree or shrub. The mulch should be no more than two to three inches deep over the planting area.

If in doubt about advice you’ve heard, you can always contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension. Happy holidays!

Virginia Cooperative Extension does not endorse the products mentioned and does not intend discrimination against other products which also may be suitable.

Lela Martin is a Master Gardener with the Chesterfield County office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension.
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Deadlines and Payments: To appear in the next issue, your ad text and payment must be entered by the 5th of the preceding month (for Baltimore and Howard County editions); by the 20th (for Washington and Richmond editions).

Cost will be based on the number of characters and spaces in your ad: • $25 for 1-250 • $35 for 251-500 • $50 for 501-750 (maximum length). The website will calculate this amount for you.

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