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FBI agent finds new career with kids

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Reflections from an Afghanistan veteran

The past months have been extraordinarily difficult for those with a personal connection to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. I recently watched a CNN reporter broadcast from a base in Andar, Afghanistan — a base that my soldiers and I built, and the base where I was wounded in 2006. Seeing it on the screen brought back a lot of memories, good and bad.

When we first secured Andar we were using an open space adjacent to the district center compound to land helicopters. Unbeknown to us, that open space was a cemetery. One day the elder approached me and said, “You’re landing helicopters in our cemetery, and this is deeply disrespectful.” We talked for hours.

Right as the villagers and elders were satisfied that we intended no harm and we agreed on a new place to land helicopters, I heard the distinct sound of a far-off Chinook helicopter. Despite my best efforts to wave them off, two giant Chinooks landed right in front of us in the cemetery, sandblasting the entire group of gathered elders in the process and effectively undoing all the goodwill I had just spent hours building.

Of the 847 days I spent serving in Afghanistan, every single one was like that day. A few steps forward, a few steps back. In my conversations with fellow veterans, their memories are about the same.

The question that keeps coming up is, was it worth it? Unfortunately, most are having a hard time answering that question. There’s a term for that: Moral Injury. Moral Injury is the mind’s response to actions or memories that are in violation of a person’s values and beliefs. Some might call it an injury to the soul.

For 20 years, the full weight of the War on Terror fell on the shoulders of less than 1 percent of us. When 2.7 million Americans voluntarily answered the call to serve, 7,057 never came home and another 30,177 came home only to take their own lives.

To the brave men and women who volunteered and to the families of the fallen: The sacrifices you and your families made were not in vain. What we’re witnessing today is not our failure. This is not our burden to bear. The fact is, you carried more than your fair share and you are stronger because of it.

It’s okay to not be okay right now. Let’s take some time to reconnect with old friends, remind ourselves about that time we were handed a mission, given no resources to execute the mission, and somehow figured out how to make it work. Take that problem-solving mindset into our next mission. Your country and your communities need strong leaders like you to tackle tough problems, and solving tough problems is what we do best.

For those who lost their lives either to our enemies abroad or the demons within, their names inspire us. They sacrificed their tomorrow so that we could have our today. We have an obligation to live up to their legacy and to make those sacrifices matter. What we’re seeing today should only strengthen our resolve to do so.

As we reflect as a nation on the current situation in Afghanistan and on the 20th anniversary of 9/11, I think it is more important than ever to remind ourselves of the unity that existed immediately following the 9/11 attacks. On 9/12 there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that we would prevail, there was no doubt that we were stronger together.

Now, 20 years later, we should focus our efforts on those elements that unify us, those elements of our history that make us stronger, those elements that define American exceptionalism.

Adlai Stevenson II said, “Patriotism is not a short and frenzied outburst of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.” I can think of no better way to demonstrate our gratitude for the sacrifices of our service members, veterans and their families than by reaffirming our commitment to service, to each other, to our communities, and to our nation.

Joseph Reagan, Director of Military and Veterans Outreach for Wreaths Across America, served eight years on active duty in the U.S. Army, including two tours to Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division. This column was originally posted on WreathsAcrossAmerica.com.

Letters to the editor

Readers are encouraged to share their opinion on any matter addressed in Fifty Plus as well as on political and social issues of the day.

Mail your Letter to the Editor to Fifty Plus, P.O. Box 2227, Silver Spring, MD 20915, or email to info@fiftyplusrichmond.com.

Please include your name, address and telephone number for verification.

Dear Editor:

What a fascinating and riveting interview with Diane Rehm [the subject of our November cover story] to start this year’s Expo tour for me [at beacon50expo.com]. I know of Ms. Rehm’s work but frankly had never delved into her show.

Your publisher’s interviewing technique was wonderfully professional and encouraging by allowing Ms. Rehm to complete her thoughts, especially on the difficult subjects covered.

Sheldon Lehner
Via email

Dear Editor:

Thank you for your excellent articles. Also, just got around to checking the Virtual Expo pages and videos. Very well done. I wonder if the pandemic is not a warning to the world about the need to stop all those falsities, tricks, schemes and cover-ups that individuals at all societal levels, and even within families, cause to each other.

And now that we’re all in masks, it’s like a warning: MUZZLE your hatreds, resentments, your jealousies and arrogant pride!

Marianne Lisenko
Via beacon50expo.com
Ex-FBI agent drives special needs children

By Diane York

Mike Mason is used to big jobs with plenty of responsibility. After all, he was the number-four man at the FBI, and later a senior vice president with Verizon, handling its security issues on a global level.

But his post-retirement gig is perhaps the most significant of all: driving a school bus for Chesterfield County Schools. It’s work he loves and considers as important as his past careers.

“In this job, I start each day with a happy heart,” Mason, 63, said in an interview with Fifty Plus.

After 23 years in the FBI, he left in 2007, feeling he needed a change. Not ready to retire, he took the job with Verizon as chief security officer. When he left there in December 2020, he still wanted to “turn the page” and try something new.

When he saw a news story this past January about a shortage of school bus drivers, Mason thought that could be what he was looking for.

Loves working with kids

You see, Mason, who lives in Midlothian, is the father of two grown sons: Matthew is a state trooper in Washington State, and Ben is a captain in the Marine Corps.

The proud father says, “My boys mean the world to me, and I have always wanted to do more work with kids” (though he attributes their success to their mother, Susan, a “wonderful woman”).

So he applied for a bus driver job and was hired by Chesterfield County. He then went through a training program to obtain his commercial driver’s license and learn how to manage a big yellow bus.

However, he said, “The real learning for me began when I started to work with the children.” In part, that’s because Mason’s passengers are all special needs youngsters.

As he puts it, “I have had to learn new ways to communicate, to find out what makes them sad, what makes them happy, how to relate with them, sometimes without language.

“Working with these kids, understanding them, has increased my capacity for empathy exponentially. What I enjoy most is making breakthroughs.”

Tough childhood, but strong values

Mason grew up in a one-parent, low-income family in Chicago. While attending a Catholic high school there, he worked in a grocery store, mowed lawns, pumped gas and washed cars.

When he graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Throughout his youth, Mason was taught that he was meant for higher things. He was close to his father, who worked hard as a truck driver for the Chicago board of education.

Although his mother was absent, his grandparents spent a lot of time with him and had a big impact on making him the person he became, he said.

Mason learned about honesty from his grandfather. The two of them went fishing one day, and Mike caught a northern pike, a tough fish to land. He was immensely proud of that catch and could not wait to show the fish to his friends.

But the legal length for a catch was 18 inches, and this fish was just shy of that mark. His grandfather told him, “I know you want it, but you must throw it back.”

And so he did.

When Mason was just nine years old, a neighbor, Audrey, showed she had confidence in him by engaging him to take care of her dog while she was on a trip. Every day, he had to enter her house, light the gas stove with a match, then cook an egg for the dog.

She insisted that he check that the gas was off every time he left the house, and he did. He remembers feeling proud of her trust in him.

During high school, Mason’s manager at the grocery store insisted on seeing his report cards, saying if he did not keep up his grades through high school, he couldn’t

See BUS DRIVER, page 15
Why a good night’s sleep boosts memory

By Andrew E. Budson, M.D.

Few things are as beneficial for your memory as a good night’s sleep. Let’s understand why.

To remember information, you need to pay attention to it. If you’re tired, you simply cannot pay attention as effectively as you would if you were well rested.

That statement seems straightforward, but it brings up another question: Why do you get tired?

You may feel tired and have trouble paying attention either because you’ve been awake too many hours and sleep pressure is building up, or — even if you’ve had a nap — because it is the middle of the night and your circadian rhythm (your internal clock) is telling you to sleep. In either case, you’ll have trouble paying attention, and thus trouble remembering.

How new info is processed

When you learn new information during the day, it is temporarily stored in the hippocampus, a seahorse-shaped part of your brain behind your eyes. The hippocampus has a limited storage capacity. If you exceed it, you may have difficulty adding new information — or you may actually overwrite an old memory with a newer one.

Fortunately, that doesn’t usually happen. Each night while you sleep, the connections between neurons (called synapses) shrink to reduce or eliminate the memories you don’t need — such as what you ate for breakfast last week and the clothes you wore yesterday. This selective pruning of synapses during the night prepares you to form new memories the next day.

Sleep also helps us consolidate the memories we want to preserve, transferring them from transiently accessible memories to those that can be recalled years later. Memories for facts and skills both show greater retention over a 12-hour period that includes sleep versus a 12-hour period while awake.

Much of this consolidation occurs during stage 2 sleep — a light sleep phase that typically occurs in the hours prior to awakening. This means that if you get up early without a full night’s rest, you may be impairing your ability to hold onto your memories.

What happens while you dream?

Although you dream in several stages of sleep, your most interesting and vivid dreams usually occur during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, so-called because while your eyes are moving rapidly, your body is otherwise paralyzed.

It is during REM sleep that your newly consolidated memories become interconnected with your prior memories, including those of your life as well as your library of facts and knowledge.

This consolidation of recent memories and your prior memories and knowledge is one reason you may wake up with a new and valuable perspective on a problem — or perhaps even a complete solution!

This actually happened to Dmitri Mendeleev, who was struggling for months with how the atomic elements should be placed in the periodic table. In a dream on February 17, 1869, he glimpsed where all the elements belonged and, after writing down what he dreamed, found only a single, small correction was needed.

Emotions are processed, too

Have you ever been terribly upset about something and, by the next day, it felt at least somewhat better?

Sleep can also strip off the emotions related to painful memories while still retaining the memory content. Thus, you’ll be able to remember what upset you without having to relive the full emotional intensity of the event.

What if you can’t fall asleep?

Melatonin isn’t a traditional sleeping pill, but it can help regulate your sleep cycle if that’s the problem. Acetaminophen can relieve little aches and pains that can keep you up at night.

All other sleeping pills, however, whether prescription or over the counter, sedate you and actually make your memory worse, both for what you learned earlier that day and what you’re trying to learn the next day! Non-pharmacological treatments for sleep are by far the best.

Caffeine blocks chemical receptors in your brain so that, temporarily, you cannot feel the sleep pressure. Thus, caffeine can enable you to be more alert, be more attentive, and remember better.

But as you probably know from your own experience, caffeine can only delay the mounting sleep pressure, which eventually leads to overwhelming tiredness.

The bottom line

Want to maximize your memory, whether you are studying for an exam, preparing for a client meeting or looking forward to your 50th reunion?

You’ll be more likely to remember the information for the exam, the documents for the meeting and the names of your classmates if you go over the material you wish to remember daily for several days, each followed by a refreshing seven to nine hours of sleep each night. Sleep well! © 2021 Harvard University. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Simple, low-cost, low-tech brain training

By Heidi Godman

We’re all looking for ways to boost our brain power. And fortunately, there are plenty of simple, low-cost, low-tech ways to help sharpen cognition.

“Low-tech, mentally stimulating activities, especially ones that are challenging, help our brains create new connections. The more connections we have, the more paths our brain has to get information to where it needs to go.

“This can help with improving cognition overall or in specific areas, depending on the activity,” said Dr. Joel Salinas, a behavioral neurologist and faculty member of the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies.

Try these activities

Mentally stimulating activities make you do a little cognitive light lifting; they require some work to process or produce information. These kinds of activities can include any of the following:

Learning a language. Bilingual people have greater mental flexibility and agility, and may have some protection from the risk of developing dementia, compared to people who speak one language.

Learning a second language later in life may even delay cognitive decline. To get started, listen to language recordings, take an online class, or download an app such as Babbel or Duolingo.

Listening to or making music. Music can activate almost all regions of the brain, including those involved with emotion, memory and physical movement.

Get in on this benefit by listening to new kinds of music, or by learning how to play an instrument. Check out songs from other countries, or start learning to play an instrument by watching free videos on YouTube.

Playing card and board games. Games strengthen your ability to retrieve memories (if you play Trivial Pursuit, for example) or think strategically (Monopoly or checkers).

Playing card games is helpful because it requires you to use a number of mental skills at once: memory, visualization and sequencing.

Traveling. Visiting a new place exposes you to sights and sounds that enhance brain plasticity, forming new connections in your brain.

You might not be able to travel due to COVID-19, but simply exploring areas nearby may produce brain changes. Consider driving to a town you’ve never visited before, or going to an outdoor park with unfamiliar terrain (perhaps mountains or thick forests) to gain new perspectives.

Watching plays, films, concerts or virtual tours of museums. Cultural activities stimulate the brain in many ways. While you may not be able to enjoy these activities indoors right now, it might be possible to experience them outside or online.

Choose something that requires a little effort to understand it, for example, a Shakespearean play or a foreign film (try to figure out what the characters are say-
Brain training
From page 4

If you’re watching a concert, choose one with complex classical compositions. If you’re looking at an online museum exhibit, try to pick up on the details the artist used to convey a message.

Doing word puzzles. Working on word puzzles (such as a crossword, Jumble or Scrabble) has been shown to help people improve their scores on tests of attention, reasoning and memory.

Try a different kind of puzzle each day (for example, a crossword one day, a Jumble the next), and increase the level of difficulty as puzzles get easier.

Maximizing benefits of brain training

Don’t limit yourself to one mentally stimulating activity. Some evidence suggests that the more of these activities you do, the more your risk for mild cognitive impairment will decrease.

And combining mentally stimulating activities with exercise, learning, or socializing may have an even more potent effect on cognition. For example:

• Get physical and dance while you listen to new music.
• Watch a video lecture about an artist before checking out an exhibit of the person’s work.
• Socialize by playing a board game online with friends during a video call.

Don’t think of these activities as brain-training chores. Just enjoy them because they’re fun and enhance your life. The fact that they sharpen your cognition is just an added benefit!

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Ed. Note: For this month’s crossword, see page 23.

And for a wide-ranging cultural experience at home, consider the “Billion Dollar Art Gallery” — a memory stick that contains images and details about more than 500 artworks from museums around the world that can be viewed individually or played as a video, accompanied by original music, on your TV or computer screen. $39.99; available on Amazon.

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Alcohol use is rising among older adults

By Catherine Brown

Recent studies have found that alcohol use among adults 60 and over has increased during the past 20 years, especially among women.

The University of Michigan’s 2021 National Poll for Healthy Aging, for instance, found that 20% of older adults drank four times per week; 27% had at least six drinks on at least one occasion in the last year, and 7% reported experiencing alcohol-related blackouts.

“As the Baby Boomer [population] ages, people in it are bringing higher levels of alcohol [use] with them,” Dr. George Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), said in an interview with the Beacon.

According to a 2017 analysis from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 20% of adults 60-64 and 11% of adults over 65 reported that they engaged in binge drinking.

For men, binge drinking refers to consuming five or more drinks at a time at least once in the past month; for women, binge drinking is characterized as consuming four or more drinks at a time at least once in the past month.

“As with adults as a whole, the gaps between men and women in alcohol use, including binge drinking, are narrowing for older drinkers,” Koob said.

**Aging magnifies ill effects**

The increase in alcohol usage among older adults can be problematic, particularly because negative impacts develop alongside — and can be magnified by — the changes that naturally occur because of the aging process.

The following age-related issues make alcohol misuse more dangerous for older adults:

- **Higher blood alcohol concentration.** Aging lowers the body’s tolerance for alcohol.
  
  “As we age, the amount of water in the body tends to decline,” Koob said. “Because alcohol is more concentrated in body fluids than in fat or muscle or bone, the reduction in body water leads to higher blood alcohol concentrations in older drinkers relative to same weight younger drinkers.”

  Alcohol also stays in the system longer for older adults.

- **Increased risk of falls.** The risk of falls increases as people age, even more so when they drink alcohol.
  
  In addition, the odds of being injured in a fall are “higher for older adults who drink than those who do not,” Koob said.

  The injuries sustained for falls while intoxicated tend to be more severe than injuries from falls that don’t involve alcohol.

  - **Negative impacts on the brain.** During the aging process, the brain begins to shrink, leading to a decline in cognitive functioning and memory. But drinking alcohol reduces brain volume, too. When those normal changes are combined with misuse of alcohol, the impacts on the brain are significant.

- **Health complications.** Alcohol use contributes to or complicates other health issues often experienced by older adults, including diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and liver problems.

  - **Interactions with medications.** Alcohol interacts in potentially dangerous or even fatal ways with many medications and herbal remedies used by older adults, including aspirin, acetaminophen, sleeping pills, pain medication, and medication for anxiety and depression.

  Koob also pointed out that it can be more difficult to detect alcohol-related problems in older adults. “If someone is retired or living alone,” Koob said, “their alcohol use might not impact job performance or their ability to maintain social obligations.”

  Koob advises doctors to consult with older patients about how much, how often, when and why they drink and to discuss the potential impacts of alcohol usage.

  **Read more about the risks of alcohol use among older adults on the NIAAA website:** bit.ly/alcoholagingbrain.

  If you cannot control your drinking, be honest with your doctor and family. Visit aarichmond.org or call (804) 355-1212 for an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting near you.

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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**Jan. 18**

**FREE TECH WORKSHOP**

In this free technology workshop at the Libbie Mill Area Library, learn how to organize your files and use basic Microsoft Office software. This event takes place Tues., Jan. 18 from 2 to 4 p.m.; registration begins Dec. 21.

For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/HLFileManagement. Call (804) 501-1940 with questions.

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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**Mondays**

**WOMEN’S CANCER SUPPORT GROUP**

VCU Health offers a free Zoom support group to provide a safe space for all women impacted by cancer. This event takes place on Mondays from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. To receive the link, contact Freda Wilkins, M.S.W. at Freda.wilkins@vcuhealth.org.

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Visiting aging relatives over the holidays

By Chris Orestis

As families reunite during the holidays, adult children who haven’t seen mom or dad for a while may notice unsettling things about their aging parents or other relatives, and questions will begin to swirl.

Are they experiencing health problems? Are they still mentally on top of things? Should the family start having conversations about long-term care?

Here are a few things to be on the lookout for as you gather for celebrations with aging relatives:

**Physical deterioration.** Be aware of potential signs such as significant weight loss, balance issues and falling, and loss of strength and stamina.

You might also see changes in activities of daily living. That includes such things as the ability to dress, eat, shower or use the toilet independently.

**Mental deterioration.** If your parent exhibits loss of memory or is confused about names, dates and locations, you might be tempted to blow that off as just a “senior moment.” And perhaps it is nothing more than that.

But be aware that cognitive deterioration is an important warning signal that you should be on the lookout for dementia and Alzheimer’s. These conditions can worsen quickly and can lead to physical breakdowns and safety issues.

**Lifestyle deterioration.** Maybe mom or dad was always insistent on observing the adage “a place for everything and everything in its place,” but now the home is in disarray. You may open the refrigerator to discover a house plant next to the milk, or find pots and pans in the bathtub.

Even more troubling, you might notice signs of physical damage because they crashed the car into a fence or the wall of the garage, or see burn marks on the kitchen wall from a fire. Remember: Long-term care is not only a matter of healthcare, but also a matter of safety.

**Start a conversation**

Most older adults prefer to be independent as long as possible, and they also want to avoid becoming a burden on their family, either physically or financially. As a result, they may try to sidestep discussions about their health, mental capabilities and the possibility of the need for assistance.

Family members, uncomfortable with broaching the topic, may be inclined to dodge these conversations as well.

For some people, a sudden event such as a fall, a stroke, advancing dementia or other health-related malady can bring on the need for long-term care. For others, it creeps up slowly. Then, over time, almost without realizing it, one or more loved ones have become caregivers.

Confronting the fact that a person has transitioned from being independent to dependent in one way or another is difficult.

Eventually, if it becomes clear that professional long-term care is needed, family members should discuss a plan for making that happen. After that, the conversation should take place with the loved one in question, who may be apprehensive or even resistant.

Emphasize positive aspects. Explain that this move will not only improve their health and safety, but there will be opportunities for social activities, games, art, entertainment and great food.

Ultimately, it’s important for the family to come together. Try to change the perspective about long-term care from a negative to a safe, healthy and enriching experience in the continuing journey of life.


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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**Tuesdays**

FREE VIRTUAL YOGA
Learn Feldenkrais method yoga in this free Zoom workshop offered by the Chesterfield County Public Library on Tuesdays in January from 6 to 6:45 p.m. For more information and a Zoom link, visit bit.ly/LearnFMY.
Contact Jesse Kelley at kelleyj@chesterfield.gov with questions.

**Jan. 17**

LEARN HULA DANCING
Exercise your brain and body while learning about hula dancing and culture at the Mechanicsville Library on Mon., Jan. 17 from 10:30 a.m. to noon. To register for this free program, visit bit.ly/HULADance. Call (804) 746-9615 with questions.

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You should take food poisoning seriously

Food poisoning is often overlooked because many think it is not as severe as other illnesses. However, in some cases, food poisoning can be life-threatening if not recognized and treated early.

Knowing how to recognize and prevent food poisoning can save you from unpleasant illness — and possibly an expensive trip to the emergency room.

What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

Common symptoms of food poisoning include upset stomach, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and/or fever.

You should seek prompt medical attention if you experience any of the following: bloody diarrhea; fever higher than 102 degrees; frequent vomiting that prevents you from drinking fluid; signs of dehydration (little or no urination, dry mouth or skin, dizziness when standing up); or diarrhea that lasts more than a few days.

Who is at higher risk of getting food poisoning?

—Adults 65 and older
—Children younger than 5
—People with compromised immune systems due to medical conditions or current medications
—Pregnant women

What are common foods that cause food poisoning?

—Raw foods of animal origin, including raw or undercooked meat, poultry, eggs, shellfish, unpasteurized (raw) milk and milk products such as cheese
—Raw fruits and vegetables

These are common sources of food poisoning. But keep in mind that any food can be contaminated in the field, during processing, or at any stage in the food production process.

How can I prevent food poisoning?

Always keep in mind the four easy steps to help you prevent food poisoning: clean, separate, cook and chill.

1. Clean
   Wash your hands often with plain soap and water for 20 seconds, especially when preparing food, handling raw foods, before eating, and after using the toilet.
   Wash surfaces and utensils thoroughly after each use with hot, soapy water.
   Wash fruits and vegetables — but not meat, poultry or eggs, because doing so can spread harmful germs around your kitchen.

2. Separate
   To prevent cross-contamination, use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for produce, cooked foods and raw foods.

3. Cook
   Cook food thoroughly and keep at the right temperature.
   Food must be raised to a temperature high enough to kill harmful bacteria and viruses; it’s best to use a food thermometer. Food color and texture are not accurate ways to tell if food is safely cooked.
   Keep food out of the temperature “danger zone” — 40 to 140 degrees F — that allows germs to grow rapidly.
   When microwaving, make sure food is heated to 165° or above.

4. Chill
   Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods and leftovers within two hours. If the outdoor temperature is warmer than 90 degrees, refrigerate within one hour.
   Thawing foods at room temperature allows germs to multiply quickly. Thaw frozen foods safely in the refrigerator, under cold water or by microwave.
   Knowing these facts can protect you and your loved ones as well as making food more enjoyable.

Finally, if you are not sure about the safety of a food item, remember: When in doubt, throw it out!

For more information and tips, visit cdc.gov/foodsafety.

Luan Ma is a fourth-year Pharm.D. student at VCU School of Pharmacy. He majored in chemistry with a concentration in biochemistry at Virginia Commonwealth University. His areas of interest include ambulatory care and geriatric pharmacy.

Write a letter to the editor.
See page 2.
Try a variety of cardiovascular exercises

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Dear Mayo Clinic: Heart disease runs in my family, so I try to eat a mostly Mediterranean diet and get plenty of exercise.

Lately, though, I feel stuck in a rut when it comes to my cardio workouts. Do you have any advice for exciting exercises to improve my cardiovascular health?

A: Eating well and exercising are key elements of a heart-healthy lifestyle, but choosing the right type of exercise and logging enough time are essential too.

Cardiovascular training has many benefits, including chronic disease prevention and improved quality of life. It should be a staple of your weekly routine.

Cardiovascular exercises can be a challenge, and sometimes boring, for many people. But you can add variety to your cardiovascular workouts in numerous ways.

Switch things up
Walking is certainly easy on the joints, but a cardio workout doesn't have to be mile after mile of pounding the pavement or walking a treadmill. Switching up the type of exercise you do and the amount of time you spend doing it can dramatically improve your fitness.

Getting 150 minutes of cardiovascular exercises each week is important, according to the American College of Sports Medicine. But it is important to remember that cardiovascular training is any activity that increases your heart rate for a set amount of time. So, if you are a walker, consider short spurts of walking mixed with jogging and sprinting.

Good options indoors or out
There are many options to explore when it comes to cardio workouts. Consider what you can do in the comfort of your own home, outdoors or in the gym. Swimming, cross-country skiing, stair-climbing and jumping rope are examples of exercises that will increase your cardiovascular rate.

Think of activities you can do both indoors and outdoors. For instance, cycling is a great exercise to get your heart pumping while putting minimal impact on your joints. When the weather isn't cooperating, a bike ride outside may not work, but a spin class might.

Cycling has many benefits for your body, too. You'll get an amazing cardio workout that challenges your legs and core muscles with minimal stress to your joints. If your side may not work, but a spin class might.

Another possibility is to try multiple activities within the same workout. For example, try the "10-10-10" workout. This is where you start on one machine and perform one exercise for 10 minutes. Then you move to a second machine and perform another exercise for the next 10 minutes. And then you finish with a third machine and perform yet another exercise for the last 10 minutes.

Changing machines and exercises helps the time pass quickly and makes your workout less repetitive.

Regardless of what new activity you try, don't forget to set small goals and work your way up. Don't force yourself to ride a bike for an hour the first time. It's important when starting any new exercise to ease into it to avoid injury.

There are many ways to add variety to your cardiovascular routine. When you try different activities, you'll find which workouts you like most and what works best for you.

— Compiled by Mayo Clinic staff

Mayo Clinic Q & A is an educational resource and doesn’t replace regular medical care. Email a question to MayoClinicQ&A@mayo.edu. For more information, visit mayoclinic.org.

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Dec. 18

CHRISTMAS IN JACKSON WARD
VQA Black Farmer’s Market and The Exclusive Blacklist celebrate the holiday season with a free vendor market, food vendors and live music in the heart of the Jackson Ward neighborhood. The event takes place Sat., Dec. 18 from noon to 7 p.m. at 10 E. Leigh Street. For more information, visit bit.ly/JacksonWardChristmas.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Jan. 12

EDMONIA LEWIS CELEBRATION
The National Museum of Women in the Arts is hosting a free virtual happy hour to celebrate the life and work of artist Edmonia Lewis. This event takes place Wed., Jan. 12 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/EdmoniaLewisNMWA.
Chicken and mushroom orzo “risotto”

By Family Features

Winter is a critical time to eat healthy foods, which can keep your immune system in tip-top shape to fend off viruses. Many fruits and vegetables support a healthy immune system.

Researchers have concluded there are a variety of micronutrients important for supporting a healthy immune system. They’re all familiar: vitamin A, B, C, D, E, iron, selenium and zinc.

You can get vitamin A from fresh fruits and vegetables like carrots; vitamin C from citrus, strawberries and tomatoes; and vitamin E from nut butters.

Eating salmon, tuna, egg yolks, mushrooms or fortified dairy products can help your body produce vitamin D. Zinc, iron and selenium can be found in whole grains, meat, nuts and beans.

Four of the nutrients necessary to maintain a healthy immune system (vitamin D, selenium and B vitamins and zinc) can be found in mushrooms. Try this healthy comfort dish made with mushrooms this winter.

**Roasted Chicken Thighs and Veggies with Mushroom Orzo Risotto**

*Recipe courtesy of Emily Weeks of “Zen and Spice”*

Cook time: 50 minutes

Total time: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Servings: 4

**Chicken:**
- 8 boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 16 ounces crimini mushrooms, quartered
- 3 zucchinis, sliced in half moons
- 3 large carrots, thinly sliced
- 4 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves removed and roughly chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced

**Orzo:**
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 16 ounces crimini mushrooms, finely chopped
- 1 cup uncooked orzo pasta
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/3 cup white wine or cooking wine
- 1/3 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

To make chicken: Preheat oven to 450° F. Pat chicken dry. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Melt butter in large skillet over medium-high heat. Sear chicken until browned, 4 to 5 minutes on each side.

In large baking sheet, spread vegetables. Nestle chicken into vegetables. Drizzle with butter and juices from pan. Bake 20 minutes until chicken is cooked through and vegetables are tender.

While the chicken and vegetables are in the oven, warm the broth in a small pot over medium-low heat.

Using skillet from chicken, add butter and olive oil over medium heat. Add onion, garlic and mushrooms. Cook, stirring occasionally, until onions soften, 3 to 4 minutes.

Add orzo and black pepper. Stir and cook 2 minutes. Add white wine and cook until evaporated, about 1 minute.

Add warm broth to orzo 2/3 cup at a time, stirring until liquid is absorbed. Repeat with remaining broth, waiting until last batch is absorbed before adding more. Remove from heat and stir in Parmesan.

Serve in individual bowls with chicken and roasted vegetables atop mushroom orzo risotto.

Find more ways to add mushrooms to meals at mushroomcouncil.com.

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*Are You A Veteran?*

Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center is a Long-Term Care & Short-Term Rehab Facility that opened in January 2008. This facility was built specifically for our Virginia Veterans. Located conveniently on the campus of the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, this state-of-the-art facility is owned and operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services.

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Meds that can cause hair loss (and a fix)

I was talking with a friend who said she is suddenly experiencing hair loss, and that it is very disappointing to her because it appears to be getting worse. She was leaning on me for advice because, she said, “I can’t look in the mirror anymore.”

She has tried all the expensive shampoos and color treatments, she has asked her doctor, and she has finally accepted the reality of losing her hair, when she is still a very pretty woman in her mid-70s. Basically, she’s given up hope for restoration.

Let’s try to understand the possible causes for hair loss. It’s not always because of advancing age, although that is one obvious reason.

Each of us sheds an estimated 100 hairs every day! That’s hard to believe, but it’s true. If you’re not growing new hairs, the hair loss becomes more evident.

So hair loss and hair growth are two different, dynamic things. You can’t stop the natural shedding process, but you do have some control over new hair growth.

If you can’t figure out the root cause of the hair loss, you are never going to solve it! Here are a few possibilities:

**Statin use**

People with elevated cholesterol sometimes take statin medications such as atorvastatin to help improve their ratios. A well-documented side effect of this category of medications is reduced production of thyroid hormone. And that can lead to hair loss.

This was exactly the problem with my friend. She told me she had been on a statin drug for about three years, and that’s when her problem began. Statins, through what I call their “drug-mugging effect,” lead to reduced hair growth and extra shedding.

The fix for statins is pretty simple. I suggest you talk to your physician and get a prescription for a thyroid hormone medication.

You could also try a good thyroid supplement to support thyroid hormone synthesis. Selenium supplementation may also be useful because statins are a drug mugger of selenium.

**Antibiotics and anti-fungals**

Many people today are being treated for infections such as Lyme disease, H. pylori, SIBO, or even acne.

Antibiotics and antifungals can interfere with your normal cycle of hair growth, and these are well known to cause hair loss beginning about two to four months into drug therapy. It’s often overlooked by doctors who have one goal in mind: treat your infection.

But since hair loss can be profound and frightening to the patient, I’m listing this category of medications so you can take action. The fix would include some high-quality probiotics and prebiotics, as well as some patience. Upon discontinuation of the offending drug, your hair should slowly begin to grow back.

**Collagen loss**

As we age, our ability to produce collagen diminishes. Because collagen protects the skin, and the layer of skin that holds the hair roots, it may help indirectly with age-related hair loss.

To be clear, collagen is not really in the hair, it simply supports the hair follicle. Collagen production goes down with age, so it’s one piece of the puzzle.

The fix for collagen loss: Consider collagen peptides, which go on to form collagen in the body. They can support healthy beautiful skin as well as hair, since the collagen peptides help build hair proteins and strengthen skin around your hair roots.

Autoimmune conditions are another cause for hair loss. There are several others, and if you’d like to learn more, I have written a comprehensive article on this topic, along with “the fix” for each problem. This article can be emailed to you if you sign up for my free newsletter at suzycohen.com.

Suzy Cohen is a registered pharmacist and author of The 24-Hour Pharmacist and Real Solutions from Head to Toe.
This is the season of many celebrations—multicultural, multigenerational, reimagined and resized due to COVID. But there are common threads that join them: the promise of connecting and the closeness of familiarity. It is an opportune time for welcoming stories, reminiscing, sharing important milestones and memories. And dreaming and preparing for the future.

The future can be the short term, next year scenario or five years from now. Healthy living and positive environments lay the threshold for it, starting with nutrition. Many families are focusing on balanced meals and portion control, along with robust-as-I-can walks before or after traditional feasts, cutting back on sugar and salt, and leaning into a myriad of seasonings versus heavily laden desserts and foregoing seconds and thirds. This issue of Engage at Any Age includes a spotlight on nutrition with a bonus recipe. For the gardeners out there, I hope that your “green crops” were abundant.

While some of us are moving a little slower, the imperative is to move. Mobility is key to aging well and there are an A to Z of ways safely to do so even in the winter months. Slow and careful is the plan. If you can form your own walking squad, take the lead.

This is the season of generosity and appreciation. Colleagues, confidants, friends and supporters of the late Dr. Thelma Bland Watson, executive director of Senior Connections, celebrated her storied leadership of the Agency. Her verve and unique style of “yes to every quest” guided us for nearly two decades. Her legacy will take us to the 50th year anniversary in 2023. One of her visions was to transform the perspectives about aging and the stereotypes perpetuated by ageism. She viewed older adults as “resilient” and “wisdom as an attribute to learn from.”

The movement to eradicate ageism is one picking up more understanding and strength each day. “Ageism” is a term that is being more widely known as Hollywood A-listers speak on unreal expectations of growing older under the spotlight, and audiences’ reactions to their “older self.”

There has been a sea change in policy, public perception, opinions and population demographics over a 50-year period. As we address aging positively, Senior Connections, through 24 unique programs and targeted services, enables older adults and those with disabilities to navigate life. We recently launched a pilot program for caregivers—and it has been met with great support from RVA.

Senior Connections, the Capital Area Agency on Aging clearly sees the future and it is definitely 50 plus!
Senior Connections, CAAA

Leftovers
from page B-1

Son also has some nutritionally stellar treats to foil them. Citrus is at its peak during winter, so stock up on juicy red grapefruits, easy-to-peel clementines and mandarins. Besides their ability to assuage a sweet tooth, they also pack plenty of vitamin C—just one serving contains all the vitamin C you need for the day. That’s especially good news since vitamin C is an antioxidant that can help boost immunity.

And big holiday dinners also contain healthy foods and plenty of vegetables if you’re strategic about your choices. Roasted turkey is an excellent selection and offers long-lasting satiety from protein without overdoing the fat if you stick to white meat and remove the skin. And veggies—especially steamed or roasted vegetables that boast the vibrant color of the vegetable instead of smothered in cheese or sauce—are great to plate.

Choose to Be a Little Naughty

It’s totally impractical to think that you’d pass up some of the most delicious offerings of the season, and if you did, there’s a good chance you’d feel a little deprived. The key to getting through the holidays without gaining a pound—and still enjoying your favorites—is a fine balance of give and take. Instead of noshing on the mass-produced grocery store sugar cookies, save your calories for a small slice of your sister’s legendary pecan pie. And what are the holidays without a little festive libation? If colorful cocktails (or even fancy coffee concoctions) are your seasonal favorite, keep in mind that drinks are sneaky places for calories (and fat) to hide.

Saw a Few Yule Logs

It turns out that the fabled long winter’s nap may be the secret to staying slim. Research from the University of Chicago reveals that sleep deprivation makes it harder to control appetite, since leptin (the hormone that signals when you’ve had enough to eat) levels drop, while ghrelin (the hormone that stimulates hunger) levels rise, creating a double-whammy diet buster. And, of course, when you’re sleepy you don’t feel much like being active to burn off all those extra calories.

So, to truly make this the most wonderful time of the year, take time out of the holiday rush to take care of your health—it’s the best gift you can give yourself, and the perfect way to start the new year “leftover” free.

B’S GREEN BEAN SALAD

Ingredients:

- 1 can Green Beans
- 1/3 of Onion
- 1/3 cup White Vinegar
- ¼ cup Sugar
- Vegetable Oil
- 2 tbs Water

Instructions:

Combine 1/3 cup white vinegar, ¼ cup sugar, 2 tablespoons water and 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in a pan. Bring to a boil and stir to dissolve sugar. Meanwhile, drain and rinse one can of green beans and add to heat-safe bowl. Very thinly slice 1/3 of an onion and add to the beans. Pour vinegar mixture over beans and onions and mix. Let sit overnight and enjoy!

Holiday Greetings

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners for you unwavering support

- Senior Connections
Holiday Cybersecurity Tips To Protect You

By Matt Bartles, IT4Causes Volunteer

The holiday season is when we catch up with friends and family and do lots of shopping! Unfortunately, it is also when financially motivated cyberthreats are at their peak. Here are some tips to make sure that your holidays are not disrupted by having to manage a security issue.

Fake Websites – Fake websites will try to draw you in with hard-to-get products and impossible discounts. Bad spelling, grammar errors and close-but-not-exact web addresses are indicators of a fake website. To be safe, always make sure you see a little padlock in the address bar of your browser before you enter any payment details.

Fake Apps – Shopping on your cell phone can be convenient when you are on the go. Knowing this, scammers have built fake shopping apps to infiltrate your smartphone, install malware or commit fraud. Use trusted app stores like Google Play or Apple’s App Store to avoid fake apps.

Phishing – Phishing can reel you in by using a familiar name or appearing as a legitimate institution on social media, texts, and email. These communications may have attachments that contain ransomware or links that send you to malicious website. Always make sure you know the sender, look out for pressure tactics, and avoid opening unexpected attachments or links. If you have any doubts about a request, call the person on a number you know (not one in the email) and verify their voice before following their instructions, especially if they ask you to send money orders or buy gift cards.

Public Wi-Fi – Cybercriminals may be able to obtain your personal and financial data via shared public Wi-Fi. In fact, they may even set up fake Wi-Fi hotspots in crowded public spaces to lure unsuspecting users and get their data. Try to do your online shopping from a private network or make your purchases in person.

Delivery Scams – Cybercriminals may attempt to pose as a FedEx or Amazon delivery agent via text or email, much like phishing. They will ask for your personal information to help resolve a non-existent issue with delivering a holiday package. Look out for oddly named senders and be aware that reputable companies don’t ask for sensitive information via email and text.

Use your Credit Card – Your credit card may be the safest tool to make online purchases. Credit cards prevent thieves from getting access to your actual money. Frequently check your credit card accounts on your bank’s website during the holiday season. Report anything unusual as soon as possible.

Cybercriminals are hoping that your guard is down during the busy holiday season. Keep these tips in mind as you spread joy. If you want to learn more or report a potential issue, please visit the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency at cisa.gov

Three Ways to Give This Holiday Season

Donations to the Empty Plate Campaign help us to provide essential 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

Senior Connections, CAAA
makes a great gift!

FIFTYPLUS — DECEMBER 2021
Senior Connections, CAAA
makes a great gift!

FIFTYPLUS — DECEMBER 2021
Senior Tech Career Support (STCS) Project*
July 1, 2020 – December 1, 2022

Serving individuals from the Eastern Shore, Richmond and Southwest Areas on Aging:

The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services’ (DARS) STCS Project is partnering with three Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to address the needs of low-income, unemployed individuals age 55 and older, who have multiple barriers to employment, which may include: disabling conditions, limited work experience, limited access to transportation, and lower levels of education and training.

The STCS Project targets populations of individuals (age 55 and older):
- With disabilities
- Currently served by Virginia’s Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) who are seeking unsubsidized employment
- Who do not qualify for SCSEP on the basis of income, but still need assistance
- Seeking services from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title IV – Adult and Dislocated Worker programs

The STCS Project's principal goals:
I. Assess and enhance project participants' access to technology.
II. Provide computer literacy training and skills attainment needed to search for and apply for employment.
III. Identify industry related credentials/certifications linked to high employment outcomes, and provide access to those training and certification opportunities.
IV. Enhance the participants' ability to access existing employment-related programs and services to meet the needs of older individuals seeking employment.

To find out more contact:
Richmond: Senior Connections, Capital Area Agency on Aging
Erika Payne, epayne@youraaa.org (804) 343-3021

Counties: Charles City, Henrico, Goochland, Powhatan, Chesterfield, Hanover, New Kent and the City of Richmond.

*The Senior Tech Career Support Project is fully funded through an $889,286 U.S Department of Labor – Employment and Training Agency grant.

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Senior Connections, CAAA

Caregiver Directed Support

Funding provided by a grant received through the Jenkins Foundation designed to acknowledge the important work of informal caregivers and to support them in the prioritization of their own needs.

This grant opportunity is designated for use by the primary caregiver who assists another person who is age 60 and older, and lives in Charles City, New Kent, Powhatan, Goochland, Henrico, Hanover, or Richmond city.

Some examples of ways in which to utilize this funding can be to pay for in-home personal care, transportation costs, a short-term facility stay, or other healthcare services or goods to enhance the emotional, psychological and physical health of the caregiver.

These funds are being directed to a primary caregiver assisting a partner, friend, or family member who needs assistance with at least 2 ADL’s or 1 ADL and a diagnosis of any form of dementia. This grant will provide $700 to each qualifying caregiver until funds are exhausted.

The Jenkins Foundation is focused on equitable access to primary health care, access to mental health care, and the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders. The aim and impact of their work is reflected in a more efficient health care delivery system and a safer healthier and more productive community.

http://www.jenkinsfoundation-va.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS GRANT OPPORTUNITY OR TO OBTAIN AN APPLICATION:
VISIT – WWW.SENIORCONNECTIONS-VA.ORG
CALL – DEE CARAS AT 804-343-3000
EMAIL – DCARAS@YOURAAA.ORG
Let someone know where your money is

By Lisa Brown

A few weeks ago, I received a call at 8:30 a.m. from a stressed-out woman in Florida. Her brother, a retired Delta Air Lines pilot, was in coma. Bills needed to be paid but no one in the family, including his wife, had any information about his savings, investments, debt or other finances.

She believed he had approximately $800,000 in investments. All he ever told them was that he “put his money with an adviser who specializes in working with Delta pilots.” After calling several financial advisers, they had yet to find any money.

Fortunately, they had found three local bank accounts, and her brother had signed a power of attorney document, which helped secure money from the banks.

But even that turned out to be a frustrating experience, since the woman and her siblings needed to work with three different banks to get access to the money or close the accounts.

Meanwhile, the bills were piling up and there wasn’t enough money available to sustain his expenses much longer. When he was admitted to the hospital in August, the relatives had no idea his health would deteriorate so quickly.

To provide some immediate help, I recommended his loved ones obtain his latest tax return. This document likely has the name and contact information of the accountant who prepared the tax return, if he had a professional provide that service.

In addition, the tax return will document his income. “If you find the income, you can find the assets,” I told her. That’s because earned interest, dividends, pension income and withdrawals from retirement accounts will be reported on the tax return.

I also encouraged her to call the Delta Air Lines human resources department. There could be a lingering life insurance benefit or 401(k) balance there.

Don’t let it happen to you

This is a heart-wrenching example of why everyone needs to have their estate plan updated and make sure their financial affairs are in order at all times.

In addition, someone — a spouse, siblings, adult children — needs to know all of the financial details and how to access the money, life insurance and other important documents. Sadly, in this situation, even the pilot’s wife had no knowledge of his husband’s financial affairs and accounts.

None of us wants to be caught in this situation. Here are some recommendations to consider taking now to ensure this situation doesn’t occur with you or a family member:

— Collect key financial documents. Ask your loved one to gather copies of the following documents:
  - Will, revocable trust and financial power of attorney;
  - Bank, brokerage accounts and Social Security statements;
  - Cost basis of all investments in taxable brokerage accounts or stock certificate form;
  - Website log-in credentials for any financial assets and insurance policies;
  - Estimate of monthly living expenses;
  - List of all beneficiaries for Individual Retirement Accounts, annuities and life insurance policies, including names, dates of birth and addresses;
  - A list of any other assets and debts, such as house, car and jewelry.

Reluctant to retire? 3 signs you’re ready

By Liz Weston

Many people don’t have much choice about when they retire. Illness, job loss or caring for aging parents can force someone out of the workforce, ready or not.

But some people have the opposite problem: They do have a choice, and yet they can’t quite bring themselves to quit working.

Some love what they do and never want to retire.

Others are paralyzed by fear of the unknown, financial planners say. They may worry about living without a paycheck, spending down the money they worked so hard to save, or figuring out how to structure their days in the absence of a job.

“A lot of the people I see are financially ready before they’re emotionally ready,” said Cathy Gearig, a certified financial planner in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

If you’re struggling, here are three signs you may be ready to retire:

You’ve faced your fears

Retirement is often depicted as an endless, stress-free vacation. In reality, retirement requires some potentially stressful “paradigm shifts,” or fundamental changes in people’s approach to life, said Barbara O’Neill, author of Flipping a Switch: Your Guide to Happiness and Financial Security in Later Life.

Instead of earning a paycheck, for example, retirees have to create one from their savings and other resources. If something goes wrong — the furnace dies, or their investments don’t do well — they can’t just earn more money to make up for any shortfall.

Those who have been diligent savers often struggle with the idea of spending their money once they’re in retirement.

“It’s really emotional for people,” said Janice Cackowski, a certified financial planner in Willoughby, Ohio. “They’re so used to seeing their account balances increase over the years [that] they find it really difficult to pull money out of their accounts.”

Other fears — such as being afraid of becoming irrelevant or simply being bored — can cause people to postpone retirement, according to some financial planners.

Gearig said some of her most successful clients, including business owners and top executives, have prioritized work to the point where they can’t imagine life without it.

“Honestly, the biggest fear I see is, ‘What am I going to do with myself if I don’t go to work all day?’” Gearig said.

Once you know what frightens you about retirement, you can begin to address those fears, financial planners say.

Your plan has been stress tested

If your fears are financial, you can hire a fee-only financial planner to review your retirement plan. Choose a planner who is a fiduciary, which means they’re committed to putting your best interests first.

Getting an expert review is a good idea in any case. The planner can help you maximize Social Security benefits, navigate Medicare or other health insurance options, decide the best way to take a pension, plan for possible long-term care, and figure out a sustainable withdrawal rate from your savings.

“This will be your only retirement. It’s paramount that you get it right,” said Adam Wojtkowski, a CFP in Walpole, Massachusetts.

Using sophisticated planning software, the advisor also can stress test your plan to see how it works in the event of a major market downturn, a surge in inflation, higher tax rates or the premature death of you or your spouse, said Shelly Ann Eweka, senior director of financial planning strategy for finance company TIAA.

Certified financial planner Michelle Gess...
Your accounts
From page 13

tant Documents: Tax and Financial.” If you refresh this package once a year, it should take less than one hour to maintain.
—Make certain key documents are signed.
These include current copies of a will, financial power of attorney, healthcare power of attorney and any trust documents. Put these documents in an envelope marked “Legal Documents.” A copy of the Social Security card, as well as birth and marriage certificates, can be placed there, too. This envelope only needs to be refreshed each time an update is made to the will or other legal paperwork.
—Make copies for advisers and others

Retirement
From page 13
ner of Houston runs her clients’ plans through various combinations of events. Then she runs a “maximum spend” test to see how much money they can spend before the plan fails and they run short of money.
“I’m really beating the heck out of these plans, and then [clients] can see hey, look, it still works,” Gessner said. “And if it still works, maybe [they] don’t have to be afraid anymore.”
You know what you’re retiring to (not just from)
Many retirees struggle, at least at first, to find a sense of purpose and a structure for their days. Having a plan for how you’ll spend your time can help, said Ian Weinberg, CFP of Woodbury, New York.
That plan might include a bucket list of travel and experiences you can start checking off. Or you could create a pie chart or schedule of how you want to divide your time among various pursuits: hobbies, volunteering, physical fitness, family time, travel and so on.
Retirement also can be unexpectedly lonely, especially if you’re single or your partner is still working.
If your primary social interactions were with coworkers, you may need to find

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Jan. 6
HOW TO BUY A USED CAR
If you’re looking to buy a used car in the new year, attend the Chesterfield County Public Library’s free Zoom workshop that helps you learn what to look for and what questions to ask before you buy. The workshop takes place Thurs., Jan. 6 from 7 to 8 p.m. Registration begins Dec. 23. For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/CCPLUsedCar. Email Jesse Kelley at kelleyj@chesterfield.gov with questions.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Dec. 21+
VIRTUAL FILM SCREENING
The Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore hosts a virtual screening of the film “A Starry Sky Above the Roman Ghetto” about an old photograph that sends Christian and Jewish students on a search for the truth. The film can be viewed between Tues., Dec. 21 at 7 p.m. and Thurs., Dec. 23 at 7:30 p.m. For more information and a link to ticket sales, visit bit.ly/AStarrySkyFilm. Call (410) 356-7469 with questions.

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Because each Perfect Sleep Chair is a made-to-order bedding product it cannot be returned, but if it arrives damaged or defective, at our option we will repair it or replace it. © 2021 Journey Health and Lifestyle!
Bus driver
From page 3
continue to work there. The manager told him, “There are better things waiting for you, better things than just this.”

Mason is grateful for all of the people who boosted him up so that, as he put it, “I could see over the rim of the bowl in which I existed at the time.” They believed in him, so he believed in himself.

Dream job at the FBI
During college and the Marines, he prepared himself for what had been a childhood dream: becoming an FBI agent. Investigating criminal cases and wearing a wire to go undercover in drug investigations was both scary and exciting.

He became a supervisor, and his upward trajectory continued: He was special agent in charge of the Sacramento division, assistant director in charge of the Washington field office, and executive assistant director of the FBI’s criminal, cyber, response and services branch.

Mason remains one of the four most senior African Americans in the history of the FBI.

Part of his new career choice stems from his philosophy of aging: “I don’t accept the conventional wisdom associated with aging. I exercise my body and mind,” Mason said.

To combine his philosophy of life and work, he is writing a book about how to navigate the working world. The title he is giving it is “Working in America, Spectator or Gladiator…You Decide.”

“You can’t wait for things to be perfect — to include the elimination of racism, sexism, homophobia and the other affictions of our society. You must get out there and learn how to navigate through those whitewater rapids today.”

More bus drivers needed
Mason pointed out that there’s still a need for bus drivers and anyone can step forward. Currently there are more women bus drivers than men.

“If you like to drive [and] if you like kids, you can do this,” Mason said. “This is an important, fulfilling job.

“Half of loving your work is the attitude you bring to it. Important work comes in all forms. We all contribute stones to build a cathedral.”

Starting pay for school bus drivers for Chesterfield County Public Schools is $20.21 per hour, and job benefits include healthcare and retirement benefits. Drivers earn bonuses up to $3,000 per school year in addition to monthly attendance incentives and quarterly safe-driving incentives.

The school system will help applicants earn their commercial driver’s license and pay them while they train. Apply to be a Chesterfield County Public Schools bus driver at mychesterfieldschools.com/apply-at-ccps or call (804) 748-1984.

Support for farms and housing in Virginia
By Emily Scott, Virginia News Connection
In central Virginia, permanent access to land is one of the biggest barriers to farming. A new land-trust model aims to secure both rural farmlands for affordable housing and agricultural practice for new farmers, while also acquiring land in urban centers to foster economic growth.

With support from the nonprofit Agrarian Trust and the Maggie Walker Community Land Trust in Richmond, the Central Virginia Agrarian Commons will focus on redistributing access to land to communities of color who’ve been historically denied land-owning opportunities.

Duron Chavis, board member of the Central Virginia Agrarian Commons and an activist from Richmond, said the model can begin to address racial inequity in the state.

“Who has the decision-making power over land?” Chavis asked. “Black and brown people are usually on the wrong side of that disparity. For an organization to step in and say, ‘Hey, we’re going to raise money to ensure that communities that have been historically marginalized are able to activate strategies for self-determination on land’ is very important.”

Davis noted the Commons is in the process of acquiring about 100 acres being donated in Amelia County, which will serve as the rural farming operation of the Commons.

The organization also launched a website this month and is working on fundraising on the rezoning process to turn the land into a working farm.

The Commons is also attempting to acquire land and commercial property in Richmond from which to distribute the agricultural products produced on the rural farmland.

Chavis pointed out people in Richmond aspire to farm but face challenges such as soil health from contaminants. He contended the Commons could change that.

“It has the potential to create inroads for marginalized communities,” Chavis explained, “where they can not only grow, but they also have access to commercial property, where they’ll be able to move into a space where the scale of produce that can be developed in the rural area can be brought into the city.”

Other Agrarian Commons farms have already been established throughout the country, including in West Virginia, Maine and New Hampshire.
Asheville, N. Carolina: Artsy and eclectic

By Barbara Ruben

Thomas Wolfe set his autobiographical novel Look Homeward, Angel in the sprawling Victorian boarding house he grew up in a century ago in Asheville.

Today, legions of tourists look toward this small western North Carolina city for its thriving farm-to-table restaurant scene, dozens of art galleries and quirky vibe.

Dubbed the Paris of the South, the city of 93,000 residents surrounded by the dusky folds of the Blue Ridge Mountains routinely lands on numerous best travel destination lists.

In 2021, USA Today named it one of 10 “beautiful North American mountain destinations you need to see.” Travelocity found it to be the top spot for socially distanced, family-friendly weekend getaways this year as well.

And in July, Money magazine declared Asheville one of the best cities in the world for beer drinkers, with the most breweries per capita in the U.S.

At 370 miles from downtown Richmond, Asheville is less than six hours’ drive from Richmond. Several airlines offer direct flights as well.

Start with art

Asheville is known as an epicenter of art in the South, with more than 25 art galleries downtown alone.

Past and present merge in Woolworth Walk, a 1938 F. W. Woolworth store reborn in 2001 as a showcase for 170 local artists, with everything from pottery to photography to jewelry for sale. A reconstructed 1950s soda fountain offers original menu items, such as egg creams, ice cream sodas and club sandwiches.

A mile and a half from downtown Asheville, the River Arts District stretches along the French Broad River, where once churning mills now house more than 200 artist studios.

A multi-million-dollar redevelopment project completed last spring includes a two-mile greenway along the river, with a paved sidewalk and bike lanes dotted with public art.

Here the North Carolina Glass Center offers free glassblowing demonstrations, as well as walk-in sessions to create your own glass ornament, paperweight or cup.

The Wedge Studios, housed in a brick former warehouse, is comprised of three stories of painters, illustrators, sculptors and folk artists. If you work up a thirst, the first floor is the Wedge Brewing Company, with more than a dozen beers to choose from.

Asheville’s art extends to its architecture. The city is home to the most Art Deco style buildings in the Southeast outside of Miami.

Built in this style of the 1920s and 30s are City Hall, with its fanciful pink and green tiled octagonal roof, and the S&W Cafeteria Building, with soaring arched windows topped with terra cotta and blue tiles. Today, the building houses a newly created food hall with offerings from a number of local chefs.

Downtown residential streets in the Montford Area Historic District are lined with early 20th-century bungalows and Arts & Crafts style houses, along with 19th-century Victorians. Some have been turned into bed-and-breakfast inns.

Thomas Wolfe’s yellow boyhood home is located downtown and is open for tours. His novel presented a realistic and not always positive portrayal of the town and its residents. Though names were changed (the city was called Altamont), the uproar caused the 1929 book to be banned by the local library.

Wolfe’s mother owned the house, which she operated as a boarding house, and she and Wolfe lived among the 19 boarders for about 10 years.

Holiday opulence

Asheville’s most famous architectural spectacle by far is Biltmore, America’s largest home. It’s decked out for the holidays starting in November each year.

The estate sprawls across 8,000 acres about six miles from downtown Asheville. Built by mega-millionaire George Vanderbilt in the 1890s, the castle-like building features 250 rooms, including 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms and 65 fireplaces.

Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, created the estate’s numerous gardens, including a conservatory and a rose garden featuring more than 250 varieties. In the spring, the gardens bloom with one of the largest azalea collections in the country.

This time of year, a holiday theme blooms across the estate, which also includes hotels and stores. In all, there are more than 100 decorated trees, 10,000 ornaments, and 100,000 twinkling lights.

The house, with a 35-foot Fraser fir in the banquet hall and 1,000 poinsettias, opens in the evening for candlelight tours, with lit fireplaces and live music. Biltmore Christmas decorations are on display through Jan. 9.

You don’t have to be a millionaire to enjoy Biltmore, but this opulence doesn’t come cheap. Evening holiday tickets start at $119; daytime at $106. Both include audio tours. Tickets at non-holiday times...
Asheville

From page 16

start at $76. There are no senior discounts.

A local food mecca

If you work up an appetite from exploring, Asheville is home to more than 250 independent restaurants and no fewer than 14 farmers markets.

Restaurants offer far more than Southern cooking, focusing on fresh, local ingredients, including such Appalachian traditional produce as ramps (wild onions), serviceberries (dark purple berries that grow on trees, melding the taste of blueberry and strawberry), apples and wild mushrooms. Meat is often sourced from local farms, and goat and cow cheeses from nearby dairies.

Here are few of the standouts: The Market Place features American farm-to-table cuisine, leaning heavily on meat dishes with local produce that range from $18 to $40. It’s open for dinner only on weekdays, and for brunch and dinner on Saturdays and Sundays.

A vegetarian option is the Laughing Seed Café, with salads, sandwiches and pizzas; many have vegan and gluten-free options. Most items are $15 to $18.

To fully appreciate Asheville’s stellar views, enjoy the sunset while dining at one of the city’s many rooftop restaurants. One option is the Montford rooftop bar that tops the DoubleTree Hotel at the edge of downtown. In addition to a variety of drinks, it offers a selection of flatbreads, salads and desserts that can be enjoyed alongside a 180-degree view of the mountains that grow a deeper blue as the sun slowly sinks behind their ridges.

If you go

Buncombe County, where Asheville is located, currently requires masks to be worn at all public indoor locations. Some Asheville businesses may require proof of vaccination, particularly restaurants that offer indoor dining.

Round-trip flights on American Airlines or Delta start at $336 from Richmond.

The Blue Ridge mountains offer a beautiful backdrop for Asheville. If you can’t get enough of their misty, gentle peaks, consider driving one way on the Blue Ridge Parkway, often cited as one of America’s most beautiful drives. It connects to Skyline Drive, which can be accessed in Shenandoah National Park and has a few exits in Asheville. But beware that the twists and turns of the parkway and the 45-mile-per-hour speed limit make this a two-day trip.

And because Asheville is nestled in the mountains, expect some snow this time of year. The annual average is 10 inches, but in some years it gets a year’s worth in just one storm, sometimes in December. Asheville has a variety of hotels and B&Bs. While there are somewhat cheaper chain hotels a couple miles from the center of the city, consider staying downtown so you can walk to many restaurants and galleries. There’s not a lot of street parking downtown, but there are plenty of garages. DoubleTree prices start at $154 per night.

If you’re looking for luxury with historic ambiance, the Omni Grove Park Inn, built of massive granite stones in 1912, fits the bill. Guests have included presidents ranging from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama as well as such varied stars as Michael Jordan, John Denver and Harry Houdini. The Grove Park Inn has an annual national gingerbread house competition. Room rates start at $464/night.

Tourist information is available at exploreasheville.com and romanticasheville.com.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Jan. 15

RICHMOND SYMPHONY FAMILY CONCERT

The Richmond Symphony Orchestra presents a Dreams of Freedom family concert featuring the narrative “My Hero, Martin” by Morgan Avery McCoy, Inc. and performed by 12-year-old violinist Amaryn Olmeda. The performance takes place at the Carpenter Center on Sat., Jan. 15 at 11 a.m. Tickets cost $10. For more information and to buy tickets, visit bit.ly/RSDreams.

Jan. 4

CONTROVERSY/HISTORY

The Valentine Museum hosts its 11th season of community conversations exploring the challenges faced and ways to move forward as a community. The Tues., Jan. 4 event is titled “Free to Believe” and takes place from 5:30 to 7 p.m. For more information, visit bit.ly/ControversyHistory or call (804) 649-0711 for more information.

Jan. 13

WILTON HOUSE LECTURE

As part of its annual lecture series, Wilton House Museum presents architectural historian Jeremy Musson, who will discuss the social and architectural history of Wilton House in Wiltshire, England. This free virtual event takes place Thurs., Jan. 13 from 6 to 7 p.m. For more information and to register, bit.ly/WiltonLecture. Call (804) 282-5936 with questions.

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Friday, December 31 at 7:00 p.m.

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Call today to RSVP or schedule a private tour!

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Tips for taming the most hostile airport

In your day-to-day life, you seldom encounter an environment as hostile as that of a big airport. Even if your home airport is, like mine, small and friendly, you’ll likely encounter big-field hostility at your destination, connecting point, or both.

Fortunately, you can help avoid some of the worst hostilities with a little forethought — and usually a few extra bucks.

**Parking.** If you plan to park your car at your home airport for the duration of your trip, consider an independent airport parking facility. They’re usually cheaper than long-term parking at the airport’s lots, and they generally offer smoother transport to/from the terminal.

Check Airport Parking Reservations (airportparkingreservations.com) or The Parking Spot (theparkingspot.com) to see what’s available at your airport.

**Baggage check.** Where available, curbside baggage check can help you avoid a long schlep to the check-in counter and long lines when you get there. If it’s available, the cost — typically $1 to $3 per bag — is often a good value.

**Check-in.** These days, most airlines allow you to check in online and avoid lines at a counter.

Use it.

**Lounges.** Unless you’re on a business or first-class ticket, lounge access isn’t free; typically, annual programs cost $400 or more, and one-time access can cost from $25 to $50. But that fee includes access to a comfortable setting with good Wi-Fi, attractive meal/snack spread, and as much as you want to drink.

Still, a lounge program is one of the several hassle-reducing possibilities priced to make more sense to a frequent flyer than a once-or-twice a year leisure traveler.

If you’re serious about an annual program, consider one of the premium credit cards that include a lounge program as one of several important benefits. AmEx Platinum ($695 per year) and Chase Sapphire Preferred ($550 per year) offer the widest range of lounge options. A primary member can take up to two guests at no extra charge.

Occasional travelers should check Lounge Buddy (loungebuddy.com) for single-use passes to a lounge at any airport you visit. Prices start at $25 and may include guests.

**TSA.** As with lounges, the two programs that do most to ease the hassle of security screening are priced to be more attractive to road warriors than occasional travelers.

At most big airports, security puts you through two different choke points:

- Clear, run by a private company, helps you bypass the first choke point: screening your boarding pass and ID to get into the actual screening area. This is usually the worst security line.

- Pre-Check, run by the government’s TSA, (generally puts you at the head of the line for the document ID review, and then) puts you in usually a fast lane through security. (No need to take off shoes, take out laptops, etc.) Enrollment costs $85 for five years and requires a personal verification interview.

Pre-Check works through airlines: Once you have a “trusted traveler” number, you submit it to each airline you fly, and when you actually take a trip, a pre-check entry OK is printed on your boarding pass.

If you travel outside the U.S., you may want to enroll in Global Entry, a program that allows you to bypass what are often extremely long lines at incoming customs and immigration stations. It costs $100 per year (and includes Pre-Check). It also requires an enrollment interview and a trusted traveler number. Check cbp.gov/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry for details.

Several premium cards cover the cost of Global Entry or Pre-check. AmEx Platinum credits the entire cost of Clear, and several cards credit part of the cost.

Seize the savings on Medicare Part D! Get started with helpful info, savings tips, enrollment help & more.

Visit your local Walgreens or walgreens.com to gather additional information on your condition and items to help you keep active and healthy!

Walgreens.com/Medicare

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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Jan. 9

**WRITING WORKSHOP**

The National Cathedral hosts a reflective writing workshop with playwright, director and artist Mary Hall Surface on Zoom on Sun., Jan. 9 at 4 p.m. For more information and to register for the free virtual workshop, visit bit.ly/NCDCReflectiveWriting. Call (202) 537-6200 with questions.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

Jan. 15

**GELLMAN ROOM CONCERT**

The Richmond Public Library hosts pianist Naho Bessho in a free concert in the Gellman Room on Sat., Jan. 15 from 2 to 3 p.m. For more information, contact Lynn Vandenesse at (804) 646-7223.

**Ongoing**

**AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE**

The American Red Cross is struggling with its lowest blood supply in over a decade. If you are eligible, please consider donating blood or platelets. Visit redcrossblood.org for more information.
Christmas Mother program spreads joy

By Diane York

Much of Blanche Moore’s life has been about helping others. Her parents both believed in giving to others, and they started encouraging her to volunteer when she was just eight years old.

“My heart is full when helping others,” Moore said.

For her devoted volunteer work, Moore was named this year’s Henrico Christmas Mother — the honorary leader of a long-time program that provides low-income families and individuals with gifts and food items for the holidays.

December is a busy month for the Christmas Mother program, which dates back to 1942. While her position involves year-round responsibility to generate community awareness of the program and encourage donations, Moore says the most exciting time of her year is early December.

That’s when it all comes together, and she can watch parents “shop” for the holidays in the program’s free warehouse. First, parents choose new books for their child, then clothing, toys (organized by age), and finally a food basket based on the number of people in their family.

Moore, who has volunteered with the program for six years, recalls helping a single mother with six children go through the warehouse.

“She said to me, ‘You have no idea, no idea what this means to me. You have helped me provide for my children.’ She wrapped her arms around me and cried,” Moore recalled.

But the Christmas Mother Program is not just for children. People age 65 and older, or disabled adults, can apply if they live at or below the federal poverty level. Persons in these categories will be assisted in choosing new bedding, clothing and a food basket.

Origins of the program

During World War II, Mittie McGraw Nelson, a teacher in Varina, Virginia, created a way to spread joy to needy families on Christmas.

Nelson asked her students, their parents and friends to collect and donate clothes, toys and canned goods. The items were then distributed to local families in need.

Nelson’s program later grew to cover all Henrico County. Today, there are Christmas Mother Programs in Richmond, Chesterfield-Colonial Heights and other cities and counties, which help thousands of families.

While the Henrico program is funded by donations, it is also assisted by Henrico County, which provides storage space for gifts and food, as well as help from county
Poinsettias are tropical flowers that are native to Mexico and Central America. The ancient Aztecs cultivated this plant and believed it to be a symbol of purity. Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, collected and introduced the “Mexican fire plant” to the Bartram Botanical Garden in Philadelphia in 1828. However, it was a Philadelphia nurseryman, Robert Buist, who saw the potential of the newly introduced plant, which was later named after Poinsett.

Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous, an Ohio State University study found. However, their milky sap may cause skin irritation and nausea in people with latex allergies. So, keep it away from children and pets.

Caring for your plant
Place your plant where it can receive six hours of bright, indirect sunlight daily, but do not let it touch a cold windowpane.

During daylight hours, keep the plant between 65 and 75° F. If possible, keep the plant a little cooler at night, but no lower than 60°. Drafts (either hot or cold) can cause premature leaf drop. Make sure the pot has a drainage hole. Check the soil daily; if the surface is dry to the touch, water until soil comes out of the drainage hole. For an 8” diameter pot, you will need approximately 20 fluid ounces of water at a time.

When shopping for poinsettias, check those cyathia; select a plant with little or no yellow pollen showing to enjoy your poinsettia when it is in bloom.

Consider other shades
You can find poinsettias around the holidays to fit into almost any decorating scheme. They range from creamy white to pink to maroon, including the traditional bright red.

Since traditional red and green don’t work well in my own home, I look for a salmon and cream variegated variety called ‘Marble Star.’

If your plant wilts, water it right away, and then water again five minutes later. Your poinsettia will also thrive with daily misting. However, do not fertilize a poinsettia when it is in bloom.

Poinsettias today come in many shades other than red, including cream, pink, salmon and maroon. Cream-colored leaves are sometimes spray painted blue or purple.

Flower” (i.e., bract) forms vary as well, with some resembling roses. Some varieties have bracts with patterns in red and white, pink and white, or green and white— even bright orange.

You will also find unusually colored poinsettias, such as blue or purple, in garden centers. These are cream-colored varieties that are spray painted. They are also sometimes sprinkled with glitter. My experience is that these are typically shorter-lived than the natural plants.

Lela Martin is a Master Gardener with the Chesterfield County office of the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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Christmas Mother
From page 19

employees and police. The school system gathers the food for donation.

Finding time to help others
Through her career — while working for companies such as IBM, GE, Job Corps and Henrico County Public Schools, and caring for her two children — Moore found time to volunteer at multiple charities.

Some of the organizations Moore has been involved with include Senior Connections — The Capital Area Agency on Aging, and First Shiloh Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, where she worked with youth and finance ministries.

She attends St. Peter Baptist Church in Glen Allen and assists with its evangelism ministry, missions and homeless outreach.

In 2015, Moore retired from her position with Henrico County Schools, where she worked with the Title I program — a federally-funded program designed to improve academic achievement of disadvantaged students.

With more free time, she began looking around for volunteer work. A friend of a friend suggested she contact the Henrico Christmas Mother program.

In the six years since she started volunteering with the program, Moore has held several leadership positions with its managing council — a group of volunteers who speak to groups to encourage donations and collect the toys, clothes and food that are distributed.

Moore has also worked as recording secretary, historian and co-chair of the boards committee. But she was “totally shocked” and pleased when asked to be this year’s Christmas Mother.

She started working on the project last February. “Being Christmas Mother is very time consuming,” she said on a Henrico County podcast in November.

For example, in the past month alone Moore has spoken about the Henrico Christmas Mother Program at Rotary, Rustian and Lion’s Club meetings, at the Junior Achievement Cotillion, the Dominion Club, Ridge Baptist Church, and several women’s club meetings.

Moore wants to increase the program’s visibility so that more Henrico citizens become involved. This year’s goal is to serve 1,700 individuals. She is eager to present the program to any interested group.

She and her husband, Dr. Roland Moore, have lived in Henrico County for 48 years. Both are alumni of Virginia Union University.

They have two children and four grandchildren who range in age from 6 to 21. Her 16-year-old granddaughter is excited about becoming a volunteer and helping Moore in her new role.

“There’s a lot of dignity in the way that we handle giving to our clients,” Moore said on the podcast. “When you see them come to the warehouse to receive what we give, they are just so thankful.”

How to apply or help out
Applications for the program’s benefits are available at many Henrico County agencies, schools and libraries. You can download an application at henricochristmasmother.org or leave a voicemail at (804) 236-9741.

The Henrico Christmas Mother program is also seeking additional volunteers and donations. Call (804) 236-9741, visit henricochristmasmother.org or its Facebook page at @HenricoChristmasMother, or write to the group at P.O. Box 70338, Henrico, VA 23255.

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. 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 orcumbersome, 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. Its 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, its 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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The Carpenters and their music still shine

By Andrew Dalton

“Every sha-la-la-la, every wo-o-wo-o still shines,” the Carpenters sang in “Yesterday Once More,” their hit 1973 tribute to the songs of the past.

It could be the tagline of a new book on the work of Richard and Karen Carpenter, which seeks to set aside the noise surrounding the duo and focus on their harmonic creations.

Carpenters: The Musical Legacy (Prince- ton Architectural Press), coming 50 years after the duo’s earliest hits, was co-written by Richard Carpenter along with Associat ed Press journalist Mike Cidoni Lennox and Chris May.

Carpenter has passed on many retrospective projects, after facing decades of questions about his sister’s inner life and her death in 1983 from heart failure, a complication of anorexia, at age 32. This was a chance to do something different.

“It was the focus on the music itself, that’s primarily it,” Carpenter told the AP as he sat at the piano in his Southern Cali fornia home. “It touches on things that we hadn’t touched on before or that if we had, it had been ignored.”

It has the heft and visual history of a coffee table book, but it’s also a nearly note-for-note musical biography of the pair that goes back to their childhood lives in New Haven, Connecticut, where Richard Car penter found the seeds of the group’s sound in his father’s records and a toy jukebox.

Early influences

He cites some unexpected influences, including another man-and-woman duo, Les Paul and Mary Ford, whose early experimenting with vocal overdubs and layered harmonies electrified him.

“It made a profound impression on me, that ooh-ah, ooh-ah. I was maybe 5 or 6,” Carpenter said. “I had no idea how all this was done. I just knew it was different and that I really liked it. And many years later, of course, it came up in my mind while I was arranging a lot of things that I wrote the harmonies for.”

He credits a less famous name with a well-known sound, choral arranger Judd Conlon, whose work appeared in Disney’s “Peter Pan” and “Alice in Wonderland.”

“His arranging style for multi-vocals was tight,” Carpenter said. “They were very close harmonies, which had a great big ef fect on me.”

The book makes clear that their elaborate, multi-layered recordings were made while the young duo maintained a stagger ing schedule of touring and television appearan ces.

Turning a jingle into a hit

Carpenter’s ear for finding hits, often in unlikely places, was as essential as his ear for creating.

He found “Superstar,” the Carpenters song probably most beloved of younger generations, when he heard Bette Midler sing it on “The Tonight Show.” He came across “We’ve Only Just Begun” in a bank commercial before they made it a hit.

It gives an accounting of nearly every rainy day and Monday they spent in a hectic 1970, the year “(They Long To Be) Close to You” became their breakthrough hit.

Somehow amid it all they recorded their third album, 1971’s “Carpenters,” known to fans as the tan album and regarded by many as their best.

The Carpenters were often derided as makers of schmaltzy throwaway hits. But the book argues they were great creators of fully formed albums, with an incredible run of records between 1970’s “Close to You” and 1973’s “Now & Then,” the perfect album that solidified their global stardom.

“We had so many hit singles, and usually right in a row, that we tended to be dismissed again by our detractors as a singles band,” Carpenter said. “We sold millions of albums.”

When he heard them, he knew just what to do with them.

“If the song hit me, whether it was one of mine or say one that I’d heard, like ‘We’ve Only Just Begun,’ or ‘Rainy Days and Mondays’ or ‘Superstar,’ if the song had it, my arrangement just took place immediately,” Carpenter said.

And he knew a song was useless if it didn’t match his sister’s stunning alto voice.

“I could give you a list of songs that I heard on the radio that I went right out and bought and yet knew would not work for Karen and me,” he said. “That we were brother and sister just had a whole lot to do with it.”

He also reconsidered his musical catalog on the forthcoming “Richard Carpen ter’s Piano Songbook.” He reimagines several of the band’s biggest hits for solo piano on the album slated for a January release.

Amid all the looking back, Carpenter recently made his first visit in some 30 years back to what was once the studios of A&M Records in Hollywood. It now belongs to Jim Henson Company and the Muppets, who have changed it very little.

It was an emotional trip.

“We spent so much of our lives there that it was just like returning home,” he said.

—AP

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