Veterans get hooked on fly fishing

Veteran Robert Misiaszek shows off his catch. Misiaszek, whose military service left him with post-traumatic stress, participates in Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, a nonprofit that rehabilitates disabled veterans and active service personnel through the sport of fishing.

Photo courtesy of Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

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Better elections

Long-time readers of Fifty Plus and the Beacon know I am not one to share my political views. For this reason, our publications do not endorse candidates for public office.

But I do like to share my thoughts and feelings about important matters of the day, and I think it’s fair to say that a number of different issues pertaining to our elections are very much in the news today — from voter registration, to gerrymandering to the potential for fraud.

However, the two ideas I want to talk about are different, and probably not ones you’ve heard a lot about — if at all. But I feel these recommendations should be deeply important to voters everywhere, and ultimately will have a much greater positive effect on the future of our country if they are widely implemented.

I am speaking about open primaries and ranked-choice voting. Let me explain.

Unlike Virginia, which has open primaries, in Maryland and D.C., (and eight other states), primaries are “closed.” That means only voters who have registered in advance as either Democrat or Republican can vote in the primary, and they can only vote for candidates from their party.

Independent voters — who constitute a growing percentage of voters and are the largest or second-largest group of voters in nearly half of the states — are shut out from closed primaries entirely.

That might sound reasonable at first glance. If independent voters aren’t members of a party, why should they help elect that party’s representative?

Because primary elections in “safe” legislative districts effectively decide the general election winner as well!

The winner of the largest share (known as a plurality) of votes in a closed primary may actually represent only a small minority of a county’s, district’s or state’s voters: those who a) registered for the winning party, b) voted in the primary, and c) voted for the winning candidate in the primary.

As a result, if there are a number of candidates in the primary, the winner of the general election may represent as few as 14% or 16% of all voters.

For example, in both Montgomery County, Md. and Washington, D.C., there have been general election winners in recent races who won no more than that proportion of a closed primary’s votes.

Not only does this feel unrepresentative, it also can have the effect of boosting the chances of the most partisan or extreme candidate. How?

If, in a group of multiple primary candidates, there are several centrist candidates but only one who possesses extreme views (and who has a small but loyal following), voters who prefer moderate candidates will likely split their votes among several, allowing the more extreme candidate to win the primary (and often the general election) despite having won only a modest plurality of primary votes. (And yes, this can and does happen in national elections as well as local ones.)

Which brings me to the issue of ranked-choice voting.

In elections like I described above, a plurality of voters chooses the primary winner. That is, the candidate with more votes than any other candidate wins, even if they are only selected by 14% of voters.

In ranked-choice elections, voters don’t just vote for their favorite candidate. They rank their top candidates in order of preference: first, second, third, fourth and even fifth choice.

If your first choice ends up in last place, that candidate drops out of contention and your vote automatically goes to your next choice. This continues for all voters until one candidate wins over 50% of the vote.

In effect, votes are tabulated as if the voters were called back for a series of run-offs, and the winner is the first candidate to get more than half of all votes (albeit the second- or third-choice votes from some voters).

This ends the problem in many primaries of voters agonizing over who should get their vote. Should it be their true favorite, or the one who they think has the best chance of winning? With ranked choice voting, they can vote for their favorite, but also have a say in choosing the winner should their favorite not make the cut.

This method is likely to lead to more moderate or centrist elected officials. That’s because candidates in a ranked-choice election will be more likely to address the concerns of a broader array of voters if they know they can’t win the election with votes from only a small base.

While Virginia state law requires open primaries, winners are chosen by plurality, rather than ranked choice. So, while I admire Virginia for allowing all voters to truly participate in primary elections, I think its leaders also should give serious consideration to ranked-choice voting.

In a column of this length, it’s impossible to address every aspect of these proposals, or even to bring up all the counter-arguments (and, of course, there are counterarguments).

If you are interested in learning more, I recommend searching for these two topics at the following balanced sources: Ballotpedia.org and ncsl.org (National Conference of State Legislatures).

I think in many ways the future of our country may depend on making these changes in some form. Knowing that our votes count — and that a truly representative government results from our elections — seems to me the only way to inspire more Americans to care about elections and take the time and trouble to vote.

I am also interested in hearing your opinion on these topics. Please email your letter to the editor to info@fiftyplusrichmond.com, or submit it on our website at fiftyplusrichmond.com/contact-us.

Thank you.
Wounded vets find fishing can be healing

By Glenda C. Booth

Tony Escalona’s head was “rattled,” he said, after he suffered several concussions during 31 years of U.S. Army service all over the world, including tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As he wound up treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder at Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center, a counselor urged him to go upstairs and learn about fly fishing, a sport new to him. A volunteer from Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing took him fly fishing, and he was hooked.

Today, Escalona, 60, is the program lead for Project Healing Waters at McGuire. He teaches fly tying, rod building and fly casting. Twice a month, he takes groups of veterans on fishing trips to help them heal.

Military service, especially in combat zones, can leave lifelong physical and psychological scars. Many veterans, both disabled and not, come home troubled and find the transition to civilian life difficult.

Many of the Vietnam veterans Escalona sees are still dealing with the trauma of that war. “It does not go away,” he said.

The origins of fly fishing as a therapy for veterans go back to 2005 at Washington, D.C.’s Walter Reed Army Medical Center. There, wounded veteran-in-patients fished a pond on the property and found it to be therapeutic.

Shortly thereafter, the nonprofit Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc., was formed, establishing programs nationwide for service members and veterans with disabilities in Department of Defense hospitals, Warrior Transition Units and Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and clinics. All services and equipment, including fishing trips, are free to eligible participants.

Fly fishing as therapy

Fly fishing provides sport, camaraderie and therapy. Out on a stream, veterans learn about insects, how to “read” the water, and how to find where fish hide.

For the latter lesson, Escalona uses a mnemonic trick—a strategy he learned in the Army when he struggled with memory challenges after several head injuries. “Military people, they are a special group,” he said. “They paid their dues. I want to help them. Some are very grateful. That makes my day.”

Brian Trow, who runs Mossy Creek Fly Fishing and guide service in Harrisonburg, has volunteered with Project Healing Waters since 2006. He’s helped veterans with compromised limbs build fly rods and wade out into a stream on one leg.

Fly fishing is well suited for healing veterans, he maintained, because it requires concentration and coordination.

“It’s a sport of observation,” he explained, because anglers must look for riffles and rapids, and pay attention to temperatures and fish behavior. “It takes all of your mind to engage.”

At the same time, Trow said, “There’s no score in fly fishing. A good day is gauged individually, not by how many fish you caught or how big it was.

“The camaraderie is always there. You never age out.”

Veterans volunteer, too

Another veteran-centered nonprofit connects former military people with local community service projects. The Mission Continues (TMC) has more than 65 service groups (called “platoons”) across the country, enlisting 93,600 volunteers for more than 8,000 projects.

As TMC’s Richmond platoon leader, Jessica Hladky has regained the sense of purpose and team spirit she had in her 13-year Army career when she was deployed to Germany, Korea, Texas, New York and Iraq.

She loves bringing veterans together to give them another way to serve their country again, especially in underserved communities.

“It is service for a cause higher than yourself,” she said.

In Richmond, they’ve staffed food drives and delivered food boxes. Her group also helped the Peter Paul Development Center create a community vegetable garden.

This year Hladky’s platoon members are taking up their shovels again to level the land in Evergreen Cemetery, a historic African American burial ground, in preparation for restoring it.

Bonding with other veterans “is almost like a little family,” Hladsky said. “Mission Continues has the same feel as when I was in a military unit — that family feel — and it gives me another opportunity to serve my country.”

As for Escalona, the fly fishing instructor, he also finds his volunteer work with veterans enriches his life.

“I’m passionate about fishing. I’m passionate about veterans,” he said. “I’ll do this as long as I can.”

For more information, visit projecthealingwaters.org and missioncontinues.org.
If the events of the past two years have left you feeling emotionally deflated, you're not alone. Cheer has been in short supply during the pandemic, and you may be in serious need of a mood boost.

Yet while this slice of time may have been unusually stressful, people often struggle to find happiness even in normal times. This is why the field of positive psychology first emerged in the 1990s.

It sought to answer the questions: Why is it sometimes hard to be happy? And is there a way to help people improve their mood and life outlook?

The answer to the second question is yes. You can do a lot to improve the quality of your daily life and feel more fulfilled.

Test out this recipe for improved happiness, which includes a mix of three physical and emotional strategies.

Try each of these options for a week. Assess whether one or more of these positive steps increased your happiness — and then keep doing it!

Get out and get active
Fresh air and exercise are a powerful mood-lifting combination. Take the opportunity to get outside and get moving.

Regular exercise can help to improve both your health and your mood. Aerobic activity like walking, biking or running releases mood-boosting hormones that can reduce stress and confer a sense of well-being. Also, when your muscles contract in a repetitive pattern, as they do when you are walking, swimming or doing activities such as yoga, it bumps up levels of a chemical in your brain called serotonin, which is what many antidepressants are designed to do.

Higher levels of serotonin are associated with better mood. In fact, one study found that just 90 minutes a week of activity provided mood improvements similar to an antidepressant. When combined with medication, exercise can even help mood disorders that have been resistant to other treatments.

How much movement should you strive for? Research shows that ideally you should try for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise five days a week, or a vigorous 20 minutes three times a week. But if you can’t do that much, remember that some is always better than none. Even a quick 10-to-15-minute walk can elevate your mood, at least in the short term.

Appreciate small daily pleasures
Little annoyances can spoil the best day — you misplace your keys, stub your toe or encounter a grouchy coworker.

But the reverse is true as well. Studies show that taking the time to appreciate small, pleasurable moments can make you feel happier.

Focus on small daily events the same way you would big ones like a wedding day, the birth of a child or a relaxing vacation. After all, it’s those little moments that

By Kelly Bilodeau, Harvard Health Blog

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Can COVID bring on a case of shingles?

Dear Savvy Senior:

How effective is the shingles vaccine, and what is the CDC’s recommendation for getting it? My older brother and sister, both in their 50s, got COVID a few months back, followed by shingles. Do you know if there is a connection between these viruses, and would the shingles vaccine have protected them?

—Scared of Shingles

Dear Scared:

Great question! Many healthcare professionals across the country have been urging their older patients to get the shingles vaccine (in addition to the COVID-19 vaccinations) during the pandemic because getting COVID-19 can indeed increase your chances of developing shingles. And the more severe case of COVID you get, the greater your risk for shingles.

The reason for this is because when you contract COVID-19, your immune system becomes compromised as it fights the virus, which gives shingles — a virus that already exists in your body if you’ve had chickenpox — a chance to reactivate.

What happens is the chickenpox virus that most people get as kids never leaves your body. It hides in the nerve cells near the spinal cord and, for some people, emerges later in the form of shingles.

One out of every three Americans will develop shingles during their lifetime. While anyone who’s had chickenpox can get shingles, it most commonly occurs in people over age 50, along with people who have weakened immune systems. But you can’t catch shingles from someone else.

Early signs of the disease include pain, itching or tingling before a blistering rash appears several days later, and can last up to four weeks. The rash typically occurs on one side of the body, often as a band of blisters that extends from the middle of your back around to the breastbone. It can also appear above an eye or on the side of the face or neck.

In addition to the rash, about 20 to 25% of those who get shingles go on to develop severe nerve pain (called post-herpetic neuralgia, or PHN) that can last for months or even years. And in rare cases, shingles can also cause strokes, encephalitis, spinal cord damage and vision loss.

The shingles vaccine

The vaccine for shingles, called Shingrix, provides much better protection than the old shingles vaccine, Zostavax. Manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline, Shingrix is 97% effective in preventing shingles in people 50-69 years old, and 91% effective in those age 70 and older.

Shingrix also does a terrific job of preventing nerve pain that continues after the rash has cleared — about 90% effective. Because of this protection, the CDC recommends that everyone age 50 and older receive the Shingrix vaccine, which is given in two doses, separated by two to six months.

Even if you’ve already had shingles, you still need these vaccinations because recurring cases are possible. The CDC also recommends that anyone previously vaccinated with Zostavax be revaccinated with Shingrix.

You should also know that Shingrix can cause some adverse side effects for some people, including muscle pain, fatigue, headache, fever and upset stomach.

Shingrix, which averages around $235 for both doses, is covered by most private health insurance plans, including Medicare Part D prescription drug plans, but there may be a cost, depending on your plan. Contact your insurer to find out.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of The Savvy Senior book.
Q: While at the pharmacy recently, I was asked if I had any allergies. Why should that matter?

A: Lots of confusion surrounds the term “allergy.” The term can be used to describe seasonal allergies with symptoms of sneezing and itchy, watery, red eyes experienced during certain times of the year. It can also be used to define food or medication allergies, which could include a rash or even life-threatening reactions.

First, what is an allergy? According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, an allergic reaction occurs when the immune system reacts to a normally harmless substance. This substance is called an allergen.

Exposure to an allergen causes production of antibodies. Antibodies can be compared to an alarm that alerts the body to something present that should not be there. These antibodies, or alarm signals, travel throughout the body telling cells to release chemicals to attack the allergen. This chemical release causes symptoms that can include many different body reactions, some minor and some severe.

Allergy symptoms can include hives, red or itchy skin, swelling, throat tightness, wheezing, trouble breathing, and sometimes tingling in the hands, feet, lips or scalp.

The most severe presentation of an allergic reaction is anaphylaxis, which involves multiple parts of the body and requires immediate medical treatment.

**Allergens in drugs**

Drug allergies are seen after being exposed to a particular medication. The most common drug allergies are to antibiotics, aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications and anticonvulsants.

At the pharmacy, not only do allergies to medications need to be considered. There is also the possibility for an inactive ingredient in a medication to be an allergen. Some inactive ingredients can trigger food allergies if they contain the specific proteins found in that food item.

According to a review published by the American Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, food allergy symptoms are rarely caused by taking medications because not enough protein from the allergen is present to trigger a reaction. However, for many patients with severe allergies, specifically those patients who experienced anaphylaxis, it is best to avoid their allergens even in small quantities.

**Allergies can change with age**

With food and drug allergies, the severity of the reaction can change as a person ages. Some people can even outgrow an allergy altogether or develop a new allergy later in life.

### Food allergies with potential triggers found in medications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Inactive ingredient</th>
<th>Medication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Lactose</td>
<td>Found in many tablets, capsules and inhalation devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lactulose</td>
<td>Lactulose solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Egg protein/ovalbumin</td>
<td>Probiotics and vaccines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Protamine</td>
<td>NPH insulin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fish oil</td>
<td>Fish oil supplements and some multivitamins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crustacean shellfish</td>
<td>Glucosamine</td>
<td>Arthritis supplements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>Wheat starch</td>
<td>Found in many tablets and capsules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy</td>
<td>Soy lecithin</td>
<td>Some inhalers such as Atrovent and Combivent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>Peanut oil</td>
<td>Dimercaprol injection, progesterone capsules, valproic acid capsules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree nuts</td>
<td>Rosen (pine nuts)</td>
<td>Fluoride tooth varnish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below lists some medications that could contain potential food allergens for the most common food allergies in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC): milk, eggs, fish, CRUSTACEAN SHELLFISH, WHEAT, SOY, PEANUTS, TREE NUTS.
What do they mean by male menopause?

By Howard LeWine, M.D.

Q: Do men go through a phase of menopause similar to what women experience?

A: Like women, men experience a drop in sex hormone levels as they age. But in men, the pace of these changes is quite different.

In women, levels of estrogen — the primary female sex hormone — remain high for many decades. Then, around age 50, the levels plunge over a period of about five years.

The lower levels of estrogen cause the physical and psychological changes of menopause, including the cessation of menstrual periods. When a woman enters menopause, it’s easy for her to tell.

For the vast majority of men, the change is much more gradual. Levels of a man’s main sex hormone, testosterone, begin to drop as early as age 30.

Instead of plunging within a few years, testosterone levels drop slowly (about 1%) each year for the rest of his life. This change is so gradual that many men don’t notice the effects for several decades.

So, the question remains: Do the progressively lower levels of testosterone cause symptoms in a man, the way lower levels of estrogen do in a woman? There is no doubt that they can, but it can be hard to tell.

There are situations when a man might experience an abrupt fall in testosterone because of an injury or illness, chemotherapy or radiation treatment, or certain medications. Extremely low levels can clearly cause loss of muscle mass and bone strength, increased body fat, drop in energy, less interest in sex, and erectile dysfunction.

In these cases, the term “male menopause” could be applied, and testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) may improve the symptoms.

However, in the average man, linking testosterone levels to symptoms is tricky, and it’s hard to predict which men with low levels can benefit from TRT. Testosterone levels vary among men of the same age, and men experience testosterone deficiency symptoms at different levels. In fact, many men with low levels have no symptoms.

If you’ve experienced changes that could be related to low testosterone, speak with your doctor. He or she will first want to explore whether your symptoms are related to another cause — such as overuse of alcohol, a thyroid problem or depression.

The next step is to measure your blood level for total testosterone. Because levels fluctuate throughout the day, the test should be done in the morning and repeated at least once to ensure accuracy.

Most laboratories use 300 to 1,000 nanograms per deciliter as the normal range for total testosterone. Based on your results and your symptoms, you and your doctor might discuss TRT. But keep in mind that your testosterone level and how you feel may not be connected.

Howard LeWine, M.D., is an internist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School. Visit health.harvard.edu. © 2022 Harvard University. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.
When is it time to get cataract surgery?

By Julie Corliss

Starting around age 40, the lenses of your eyes start becoming cloudy, a condition known as cataracts. In many people, cataracts eventually become so dense that their vision becomes blurry or distorted. By age 80, more than half of Americans will have developed a cataract or had cataract surgery.

This surgery — a quick, safe procedure that involves replacing the clouded lens with a clear plastic one — offers a very effective cure. But unless your eye doctor advises otherwise, you may not need to have surgery right away.

“Most cataracts progress very slowly and can be safely observed until you feel you need better vision — for example, if you have difficulty reading or seeing street signs,” said Dr. Laura Fine, a cataract specialist and clinical instructor in ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School.

One of the most common early symptoms of cataracts is poor night vision, especially in the rain or when driving. People often complain of seeing glare or starbursts from headlights when driving at night, she added.

Coping with early cataracts

In the early stages of cataract formation, you might notice a slight decline in your vision, but not so much that it affects your day-to-day activities. In some cases, the lens simply thickens, causing nearsightedness, rather than becoming opaque. When that’s the case, the following tips can help:

• See your eye doctor for a new eyeglass or contact lens prescription.
• Put brighter lightbulbs in the lamps around your home, especially the ones you use to read or do other close work.
• Reduce glare by positioning lights directly behind you, pointed on the task (such as on the book you’re reading).
• Use magnifying lenses to read or work.
• Place contrasting colors — such as a dark blanket on a light chair — around your home to help you see better.

Vision may be blurry in the first few days after surgery but gradually will improve. More than 95% of people who undergo cataract surgery end up with visual acuity of 20/40 or better. Still, most people will likely continue to need glasses for reading or driving.

Letters to editor

From page 2

Those who do are actively participating in and understanding of the “Black Lives Matter” theory. They are willing to do their part to promote positive changes that will reflect a real, measurable equality in the current system that has been oppressive to African Americans.

Again, thank you, Ms. Ellis, for your honesty.

Pauline M. Adams
Richmond

Dear Editor:

I applaud Ms. Carolyn Ellis’ honesty concerning racial issues in this country. It takes courage to speak the truth knowing that you may not be popular [discussing] a topic that has been swept under the rug and denied for centuries.

Thank you, Fifty Plus, for putting a spotlight on “What a Racist attitude is.” Maybe my white brothers and sisters will stop being so defensive and ready to have that talk with people of other races about their fears and get knowledge to bring about change.

I also enjoy Fifty Plus and wish it was available in more places. Thank you for your publication.

Julie Ganzie
Via email

[Ed. Note: Thank you for your letter. As for our distribution, we invite readers to recommend other locations around the Richmond area where we may distribute free copies of Fifty Plus. Please email or call us with suggestions, and let us know to whom we should speak for approval.]

Dear Editor:

While visiting with our granddaughter in northern Virginia, I enjoyed reading Bob Levey’s essay, “In praise of politically active voters” (in the March Greater Washington Beacon).

I strongly agree that the political arena can be a vital part of the lives of seniors. It is for me. In fact, voting is not enough for me. I also engage as an unpaid climate educator and climate activist.

Forgive my frankness, but at age 65 it seems pointless to fill my house with more possessions. My values flow from that seeming pointless to fill my house with more possessions. My values flow from that
Amazon’s Alexa can get you a doctor 24/7

By Tom Murphy and Anne D’Innocenzo

If there is no doctor in the house, Amazon’s Alexa will soon be able to summon one.

Amazon and telemedicine provider Teladoc Health are starting a voice-activated virtual care program that lets customers get medical help without picking up their phones.

The service, for health issues that aren’t emergencies, will be available around the clock on Amazon’s Echo devices. Customers can tell the voice assistant Alexa that they want to talk to a doctor, and that will prompt a call back on the device from a Teladoc physician.

The program, announced this spring, marks Amazon’s latest expansion into healthcare and another push by the retail giant into a form of care that grew rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Telehealth now is something that patients have gotten used to and may come to expect as an option for their care,” said Lori Uscher-Pines, a senior policy researcher with Rand Corp. “Before the pandemic, there might not have been this much awareness that this was a service that was available.”

Disrupting healthcare

Amazon already dispenses prescription drugs and is expanding an Amazon Care program it launched in 2019 that offers teledmedicine visits with an option to send a care provider to the patient if they need an in-person visit.

The company’s latest healthcare expansion comes as several competitors, including Walmart, CVS and Walgreens, also beefed up their medical offerings. They are adding care clinics or virtual programs to make it easier for patients to find regular help in the fragmented U.S. healthcare system.

Insurers and employers that pay medical bills are pushing for this as a way to improve health and cut down on hospital stays or other big medical expenses.

“Healthcare is a huge industry of enormous value, and it is ripe for disruption,” said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail. “And Amazon views itself as a disruptor.”

Used in British hospitals

Some hospitals already use Alexa as a voice assistant in patient rooms. In Great Britain, Alexa works with that country’s National Health Service to help answer medical questions with advice from the country’s official website.

The service will be available for customers who create an Alexa voice ID. After telling the voice assistant that they need to talk to a doctor, people will be connected to a Teladoc call center and then get a call back from a physician.

The calls are audio-only for now, but the companies say they expect to add video soon. In some cases, doctors will be able to prescribe medications.

Customers can get a call back the same day, but that may depend on the availability of doctors in the state where the patient is located, Teladoc spokesman Chris Savarese said. He noted that the ongoing pandemic may lead to longer wait times.

The cost for a visit can vary depend on the patient’s coverage. Without insurance, the calls will cost $75.

Savarese said Amazon will not be able to access, record or store the content of the ensuing call.

Won’t replace in-person visits

Telemedicine in general grew rapidly when the pandemic first hit the United States and patients wanted to hunker down at home instead of visiting the doctor’s office.

Virtual visits have since leveled off a bit as office visits have widely resumed. But Uscher-Pines said research shows that patients remain interested.

Many want telemedicine available when they need its convenience, not as a replacement for in-person care.

“Most people don’t want that to cannibalize their in-person care,” she said. “They still want those options.” —AP

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

April 27

INTRO TO SMARTPHONES

Learn how to use a smartphone, including accessing WiFi and installing applications, in a class at the Ettrick Recreation Center on Wed., April 27 from 10 a.m. to noon. You can bring your smartphone to class or learn about different types to consider when purchasing one. For more information and to register, visit chesterfield.gov/parks or call Tiffani Davis at (804) 706-2596.
Beer-braised chicken with root veggies

Recipe from Seasonal Roots

Did you know that the grocery store isn’t the only place to get fresh produce? A growing number of companies, such as Imperfect Foods and Seasonal Roots, will deliver a basket of fresh fruits and vegetables to your house every week.

With these subscription-based services, you can receive fresh-picked local produce — and, in some cases, unique, artisanal products like coffee or cheeses — at your door. There’s no excuse to avoid eating your fruits and vegetables!

Some produce delivery companies, like Imperfect Foods, help prevent food waste by sending “ugly” produce that is of high quality but may not get sold at your nearby grocery store because of its appearance. And because local produce doesn’t have to travel far, its carbon footprint is smaller than the produce you’ll find at the grocery store.

This recipe from Seasonal Roots incorporates seasonal rutabaga and parsnips into a delicious and satisfying meal.

**Beer-Braised Chicken with Rutabaga & Parsnips**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 chicken breasts, skinned and boned
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- ½ rutabaga, peeled and cut into ¾-inch cubes
- 1 tablespoon and 1½ teaspoons unsalted butter
- 4 parsnips, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- ¾ teaspoon caraway seeds
- ¾ cup beer, preferably wheat beer (hefeweizen)
- ¾ cup unsalted chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1½ teaspoons fresh tarragon, chopped
- 1½ teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- 3 tablespoons chopped scallion
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Remaining 1½ teaspoons butter

**Directions:**

Heat oil in large, high-sided skillet over medium-high heat. Sprinkle chicken with pepper and ½ teaspoon salt. Cook chicken until browned on one side, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from skillet.

Add rutabaga and 1 tablespoon of butter to skillet. Cook, stirring often, until caramelized; 5 to 6 minutes. Add parsnips, onion and caraway seeds. Cook, stirring occasionally, until browned, 3 to 4 minutes.

Add beer, chicken stock and mustard. Bring to a boil over high heat. Return chicken to skillet and reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer until a thermometer inserted in thickest portion of chicken registers 165 degrees, about 10 minutes.

Remove chicken from skillet, cover to keep warm. Continue cooking vegetables uncovered until tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Stir in tarragon, vinegar, scallion, remaining ½ teaspoon salt and remaining 1½ teaspoons butter. Serve and enjoy!

Residents of RVA can sign up for Seasonal Roots with an initial fee of $50 and an annual renewal fee of $35. Customizable weekly boxes range in price from $26 to $42; weeks can be skipped if you choose.

Learn more at seasonalroots.com. In addition, Imperfect Foods (imperfectfoods.com) and Misfits Market (misfitsmarket.com) serve many Virginia ZIP codes with customizable boxes of food. Weekly fees range from $25 to $45.

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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**May 9**

**YOUR DNA**

Learn about the science of DNA in this free virtual event hosted by the Chesterfield County Public Library on Mon., May 9 from 7 to 8 p.m. Registration begins April 25 at 9 a.m. For more information, visit bit.ly/CCPLEventDNA or call (804) 751-2275.

**April 28**

**THE PRINCESS OF ALBEMARLE**

In this free lecture presented by the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, historian Jane Turner Censer shares what she learned while writing her recent biography of poet Amélie Rives. This free event takes place Thurs., April 28 at noon. Tickets are required to attend in person at the Museum, but they are not required to view livestreamed on YouTube or Facebook. For more information, visit bit.ly/PrincessofAlbemarle or call (804) 340-1800.

**GARDENING HELP**

Do you have questions about gardening? Visit the West End Branch library on Wednesdays from 4 to 6 p.m. to talk to a master gardener. For more information, call (804) 646-1877.

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Stiff muscles? Don’t stretch; strengthen

By Lauren Hubbard
Dear Mayo Clinic:

I am a very active person. I visit the gym and run regularly. Although I have been able to avoid any major injuries, I find myself constantly stretching my hamstrings. It seems no matter how flexible I get, they still feel tight. What else can I do?

A: Having an active lifestyle is important to achieving long-term health and wellness, so congratulations on maintaining regular exercise — and avoiding injuries. Stretching has probably helped protect you from injury.

Stretching is an important component of any exercise program. Most aerobic and strength training programs inherently cause your muscles to contract and tighten. Stretching can increase flexibility and improve your joints’ range of motion, helping you move more freely. Stretching after you exercise also can boost circulation.

It is not uncommon to see patients like yourself who have a constant urge to stretch their hamstrings — a muscle on the back of the thigh that bends the knee. These patients state that they feel the desire to stretch frequently to get rid of a sensation that their muscle feels tight or stiff.

This type of stretching, known as static stretching, is when we passively hold a muscle in an elongated position in attempts to lengthen it from its previous state.

More often than not, this type of stretching only provides short-term relief, and then the tight sensation comes right back. The reason for this has to do with how your body is triggering pain and with the way your nerve and pain pathways work.

Studies have shown that this feeling of stiffness does not always correlate with lack of mobility or flexibility in the affected area. Instead, the stiffness is a message from the nervous system alerting the brain on the current state of your body.

In essence, your body is hurting, so the nervous system is sending this message in hopes of getting your attention to slow your movements.

In some cases, the sensation of tightness and stiffness may signal an injury, but usually it is only an alert from the body in an attempt to help you avoid potential injury.

How (and why) we feel pain

Pain nerves do not exist in the body. Instead, the brain is creating discomfort in that area. Instead, the nervous system is creating pain sensations at that location.

Relating this back to stiffness, this sensation is simply a constant message being sent from the nerve endings about that muscle, and the brain is deciding that the message could potentially be harmful. As a result, the brain is creating pain sensations in that area.

Over time, however, when the affected area of the body is strengthened, the nervous system becomes less concerned about injury because it no longer perceives weakness as a potential threat.

Patients with hamstring issues often get more long-term relief from tightness with specific stability exercises as opposed to stretching alone. Consider adding activities such as squats or dead lifts.

When stretching can help

Be aware that there is another common pain generator that often sends people to physical therapy: the piriformis muscle. This muscle is beneath your glutes and works to turn your hip outward.

Pain in this muscle can create a constant grabbing sensation in the glute, and can cause you to have a sore lower back and hamstrings. Typically, this can be treated with stretches where you pull your knee up toward your opposite shoulder.

In general, when you’re stretching, keep it gentle. Breathe freely as you hold each stretch for around 30 seconds. Try not to hold your breath.

Don’t bounce or hold a painful stretch. Expect to feel tension while you’re stretching. If you feel pain, you’ve gone too far.

When strengthening is key

Remember that the sensations felt in your body are your brain’s attempts to tell you to strengthen, move or behave in a different way. These sensations serve to drive your behaviors and do not necessarily correlate with the actual biomechanical state of the body.

As a result, perceived stiffness does not always mean that the muscle is tight or needs to be stretched. Oftentimes, the muscle needs strengthening to help bring stability to the tissue. You may find a guide to stretching useful: see bit.ly/basicstretches.

If you’re continuing to experience tension or pain, and stretches do not relieve this tension or pain, consult with a physical therapist, orthopedist or sports medicine specialist. These healthcare providers can identify the underlying cause of your constant feeling of tightness and, if necessary, provide you with individualized strengthening exercises to improve your symptoms.

— Lauren Hubbard, D.P.T., Physical Therapy, Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, Florida

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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Write a letter to the editor. See page 2.
You can’t always lie down in bed and sleep. Heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches—and dozens of other ailments and worries. Those are the nights you’d give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in: one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises your feet and legs just where you want them, supports your head and shoulders properly, and operates at the touch of a button.

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA
Full Foods, Full Nutrition

If it’s true that the coming of Spring always brings change and new life, it has been especially true for me this year. As you read this, I will just be completing my first month as the Executive Director of Senior Connections!

What a month it has been...one filled with new faces and names, different ways of doing familiar tasks, and much excitement about what the future holds for both myself and the agency I am so fortunate to serve. It’s always something of a challenge to come to a new place. One generally wonders how they’ll fit in, will they connect with the people who are already there and share both history and relationships with one another.

In my case, I also have the daunting task of following in the footsteps of a most impressive leader. As many of you know, Dr. Thelma Watson led Senior Connections with vision, skill, and grace for the better part of twenty years. Our entire shared community has been, and is, the beneficiary of all that she put into this work. We all have cause to be thankful. Dr. Watson’s light shines not only on the roads she forged, but on the paths that lie ahead.

I am very much looking forward to traveling down these new paths with our staff, volunteers, and the wonderful people we serve. Together, we’ll find challenges and innovative ways to meet them. We’ll honor traditions and create new ones as well. We’ll embrace those who have gone before and welcome new ones as you come. I am so blessed to have this opportunity to be part of, and provide leadership for, Senior Connections. I am looking forward to our journey together and the new life it brings.

Beth Ehrensberger, RD, MPH

Ever feel like no matter what you eat, it seems impossible to tame the rumbling in your stomach? Filling up on fiber and protein-packed choices can make a noticeable difference in your mealtime satisfaction. By adding in these strategic foods that make you feel full, you’ll not only have better control over your hunger, but also the number of calories you eat.

Fill Up on Fiber

Since fiber adds bulk to food, it does the job of filling you up as well as slowing the rate of digestion. The result? You’ll feel full sooner than you would have with a lower fiber choice. Foods that make you feel full like whole grain pasta, bread, crackers and cereal can be a good place to start building your fiber repertoire. Produce picks like whole fruit (instead of juice—which is missing fiber) at breakfast, bean soup at lunch and vegetable sticks for a snack can be quick and easy additions. Besides filling you up, fiber can do a lot more for your health: research indicates that a high fiber diet is a healthy way to reduce the chance of developing type 2 diabetes.

Power Up with Protein

If you're always fighting an empty feeling, you may not have enough protein in your diet. Many people are surprised to learn that of the three macronutrients, (protein, fat, and carbohydrate) protein provides the highest level of satiety. Armed with this bit of nutrition science, you can structure more satisfying meals from protein foods that make you feel full. Lean cuts of beef and pork, as well as fish, eggs, nuts and poultry are satisfying selections that work with most any diet. And don’t forget that beans are not only loaded with protein, but filling fiber, too—a hunger-trumping double-whammy.

Recipe:
Oven Roasted Carrots

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Wash and peel carrots. Cut off top and bottom ends. Cut carrots into 1 ½ inch “chunky slices.” Toss carrots in a bowl with a bit of olive or other cooking oil to lightly coat. Then, place carrots on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and roast for about 20 minutes, until golden around the edges and fork tender.
About Making Healthcare Decisions

By Laura Pilati

My grandmother, Marianne, was only 70 years old when she was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia. Marianne was our family matriarch, the host of every holiday gathering, the woman who cherished every occasion to celebrate. The first Thanksgiving after her diagnosis, she stumbled for the word for the holiday. I remember my mom talking to me about it later, completely devastated over this latest development. It was the first of many symbolic moments of forgetting.

Marianne’s dementia symptoms rapidly escalated. Within three years, my grandfather could no longer care for her at home, and she was placed in a skilled nursing facility. Like many families who experience a dementia diagnosis, my grandmother had never established power of attorney for herself before she lost capacity. My grandfather, mother, and aunts eventually ended up in court to pursue guardianship, a long and stressful process that is typically reserved as a last resort for cases where an individual can no longer make decisions for themselves. Although my family was able to maintain the role of guardian, the fact that it had to be done was part of a larger problem—a lack of conversation about what my grandmother wanted.

I’d like to say that my family’s story ended well, with everyone rallying around my grandmother and her peaceful passing. It was anything but.

National Healthcare Decisions Day was founded in 2008—the same year Marianne received her dementia diagnosis. It is an initiative to encourage individuals to express their wishes regarding healthcare and for providers and facilities to respect those wishes, whatever they may be. I’m proud to share this mission in my work at Honoring Choices Virginia, where I endeavor every day to help families avoid the outcomes that my own experienced.

When it comes to advance care planning, many are familiar with advance medical directives, living wills, or Power of Attorney (POA). But how many have thought deeply about the real-life implications of a serious medical condition, for themselves and their loved ones? How many have sat down with those who matter most to them and helped them prepare to act in such a scenario? While it’s somewhat easy to create an advance medical directive, these are questions that many don’t even know where to begin with.

At Honoring Choices Virginia, we train facilitators to help individuals with these questions. How to choose—and prepare—your health care agent, how to reflect on your own experiences, values, and beliefs, and how to apply these to medical decision making, even if you can’t speak for yourself. The result is often a thoughtful, solid advance medical directive that captures an individual’s medical instructions, preferences, and relevant background. Although it’s possible to complete an advance medical directive on your own, a facilitator is trained to recognize potential conflicts or red flags that could come up in a medical setting, and will help you carefully reflect on additional considerations or implications for your documented wishes. They help equip your health care agents and loved ones, too. Attorneys and medical providers, while certainly well qualified to help you complete an advance medical directive, often don’t have the time to guide individuals and their families through these reflective conversations beforehand.

No matter what your stage of life, health condition, or family situation, we all have unknown medical futures. Helping others to know us and the things that matter most to us is the best way to not only ensure that we have voice in our medical care when we cannot speak for ourselves, but to safeguard our most treasured relationships from the stress of these scenarios. Stories like my own are common, but in many cases, avoidable. Had my family had the knowledge and resources I have now, I like to think our story could have been very different.

Have questions, need support? Call Honoring Choices Virginia anytime at 804-622-8141 or email us at honoringchoicesvirginia@ramdocs.org. We provide free assistance and support with advance care planning needs to all Virginians, including:

• Helpline/technical assistance for individuals, families, and POAs regarding medical decision making in the absence of patient capacity
• Advance care planning and document review appointments
• Educational and planning tools for advance care planning
• Community education and workshops

Volunteering and Health

For decades, research has distinctly suggested that volunteering our time results in positive health outcomes in our bodies, minds, and spirits, such as reducing stress and improving mood. In short, when we do good, we feel good.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteerism can even support our own cognitive health. As our brains are engaged in volunteer activities from which we derive purpose and joy, we meet new people and deepen existing relationships that sustain us at any age. Volunteering can also contribute to “Ikigai” or sense of purpose, the Japanese term referred to often in The Blue Zones.

During the pandemic, volunteer opportunities have changed. It’s important to consider how best to comfortably re-engage with volunteer opportunities that bring such joy! If you’re interested in volunteering your time, the Longevity Project for a greater Richmond would be happy to help you! To connect with us please email info@longevityrva.com
Richmond Area Non-Profits Work to Disable the Stigma of Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

Every person who has children and grandchildren wants nothing more than to see those children and grandchildren succeed in life and realize their full potential. However, for parents and grandparents with children on the Autism spectrum, these hopes can easily be stifled by fear and apprehension. They may wonder if there is a place in society for them to flourish and to use their gifts and talents to benefit the community. Fortunately, as we honor Autism Awareness Month this April, there are a number of organizations in Greater Richmond that are working to not only help these individuals in their own lives, but to transform the perspectives of the community and defeat the negative stigmas that exist around those on the Autism spectrum.

Better Employment Opportunities

It is natural for the parents and grandparents of individuals on the Autism spectrum to experience a great deal of stress as they begin the process of preparing their child for adulthood. Holly Peele, the Career Academy Director at Northstar Career Academy, understands this time of stress and has made it her life’s work to help individuals in this situation. “At Northstar Academy, we believe that it is important to be creative and think outside the box,” says Peele. “When we work with employers in the business community, we get them to focus not on the individual’s Autism, but on the fact that people are grounded in doing things one way.” An example that Peele gives to illustrate this point is the situation with one of her clients on the Autism spectrum who she was able to help find a job at a restaurant. “It was his job to do the morning prep work” Peele says. “Whereas other individuals would get bored and try to cut corners with this type of work, my client loved routine tasks and this was a perfect fit for him.”

Improved Socialization

The area of socialization and relating to others is another challenge for those on the Autism spectrum. Catherine Pall, the Program Director at Richmond Autism Integration Network (RAIN), has seen numerous success stories with her organization’s clients in the area of socialization. “We’ve seen clients go from being really shy to becoming social butterflies” says Pall. Pall recounts a story of one of her clients who had become very shy and withdrawn. When she begun working with her, the client told Pall that her increased shyness was brought on in part due to the fear caused by the pandemic. However, after a few months at RAIN, this client became one of the most outgoing individuals in the program. Pall opines that this is one of her favorite aspects of her work. “I love seeing individuals gain social skills and becoming generally comfortable around others” says Paul.

Transforming the Perspectives of Others

Not only is it important to find ways to help those on the Autism spectrum, it is equally important to help transform the perspectives that individuals in society, including potential employers, have about the skills and abilities of persons on the spectrum. Jennifer McDonough, the Project Director at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), has made this her life’s work. McDonough works with individuals on the spectrum as well as employers to match individuals who have different skills and abilities with the jobs in which those skills are needed. She explains that one of the best aspects of her role is changing the way that people perceive those who have Autism. “If businesses are able to make a connection, they will be able to find people with a great deal of skills and abilities who really want to work” says McDonough. McDonough remembers one of her clients whom she helped get a job at a local hospital pharmacy. At the pharmacy, this client utilized his attention to detail in order to ensure that the medications on the shelves had not yet expired and deliver medications to departments. His efficiency helped cut wait times and readily available. An important aspect is the designation of a Durable Power of Attorney to enable the designee to speak for the care receiver in the event they are unable to speak for themselves. This is often a hard decision to have with a loved one and may feel better when the conversation is inserted during a non-stressful time within a usual interaction. Once completed, the care receiver can feel assured that their wishes will be enacted, the caregiver can truly serve as the advocate they want to be, and both can feel less stress knowing that when an unexpected event occurs, it will not be experienced as a crisis. Caregivers do not want to be left with guilt or regret because they are wondering if they made the right decision. Regardless of age, have this important conversation earlier rather than later.

The Time is Now

Parents and grandparents with children on the Autism spectrum can take comfort in knowing that not only are there more resources than ever before, but that perspectives that society has towards individuals on the spectrum are improving as well. “For job seekers, the time is now” says McDonough. “In my 25 years working with individuals on the Autism Spectrum, I have never seen these individuals find more employment opportunities than at the present time.” This Autism Awareness Month, let’s continue to support those on the Autism spectrum as well as the organizations that are dedicated to supporting these individuals. For more information, please see the following resources:

VCU Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
(804) 828-6984
rrtc@vcu.edu

Northstar Academy
(804) 747-1003
contact@northstaracademy.net

Richmond Autism Integration Network (RAIN)
(804) 754-0000
info@richmondautism.org

Caregiver’s Corner

By Dee Carus, Caregiver Support Specialist

April is the month to explore Healthcare Decisions and I’d like to focus attention on this important topic as it relates to caregivers. It is critical for all caregivers (informal, family, and professional) on the support team to know the preferences of the care receiver that will shape medical decisions or advance directives. These decisions must be communicated to those involved in the care, and this information must be documented and readily available. An important aspect is the designation of a Durable Power of Attorney to enable the designee to speak for the care receiver in the event they are unable to speak for themselves. This is often a hard decision to have with a loved one and may feel better when the conversation is inserted during a non-stressful time within a usual interaction. Once completed, the care receiver can feel assured that their wishes will be enacted, the caregiver can truly serve as the advocate they want to be, and both can feel less stress knowing that when an unexpected event occurs, it will not be experienced as a crisis. Caregivers do not want to be left with guilt or regret because they are wondering if they made the right decision. Regardless of age, have this important conversation earlier rather than later.

For assistance in completing a simple will, advance directive, and POA, contact Senior Connections at 804-343-3000 and ask for information about Senior Law Day.

For resources on how to have the conversation and documents, go to: www.HonoringChoices-va.org
If you are over 65, it’s especially important to protect yourself from COVID-19.

Get vaccinated today.

Learn more at vaccinate.virginia.gov or call 877-VAX-IN-VA
Law & Money

TIPS for investing in a time of inflation

Many investors are looking for conservative investments that will protect them against inflation. The recent fall in the stock market has many investors on edge, so they are looking for safe investments that will provide some protection of their asset base.

There are a few investments that investors expect will provide them some protection, namely Series I savings bonds (see “A good time for inflation-protected bonds” in the February Beacon), and mutual funds and exchange-traded funds that invest in Treasury Inflation Protection Securities (TIPS).

Series I bonds and TIPS are designed to protect investors against increases in inflation because their returns are linked to the consumer price index (CPI). Unfortunately, some investors in TIPS via mutual funds and ETFs have found the value of their underlying shares recently dropped significantly in value as interest rates have risen.

That’s because, in general, for bond funds there is an inverse relationship between prices and interest rates. That is, when interest rates go up, the prices of bonds, and bond funds and ETFs, go down. (See more at "Some bond alternatives to consider now," on page 23.)

Be careful where you buy

Note that there is a distinction between buying TIPS directly from the Treasury at TreasuryDirect.gov and buying TIPS in the form of shares from mutual funds or ETFs.

You can purchase TIPS from the Treasury for terms of 5, 10 or 30 years. You may hold them to maturity or sell them before maturity. Your principal will increase in value based on the CPI. At maturity, you are paid either the adjusted principal or the original price, whichever is higher.

Interest is earned twice a year at a fixed rate which is applied to the adjusted principal. So, if your principal increases because of an increase in the CPI, the interest earned would also increase.

However, the interest is taxable in the year earned — even though you won’t receive the interest until maturity if you purchase the TIPS directly from the Treasury.

You could also purchase TIPS mutual funds and ETFs from a financial institution, but they would not have fixed 5, 10 and 30-year terms. (Instead, the fund’s return would reflect a mix of the maturities of the TIPS it purchases.)

The advantage is that you would actually receive the interest paid semi-annually. However, there is a major disadvantage: You no longer have the protection of principal if you get when you purchase TIPS directly from the Treasury and redeem them at maturity.

When you purchase shares in the form of mutual funds and ETFs, there is no maturity date. Your shares will fluctuate in value, and when interest rates increase your shares will likely fall in value.

Recent investors got burned

This has already happened this year, and I have received mail from investors complaining about the recent fall in prices. Many of them were under the false impression that, because TIPS returns are based on the CPI, their principal would also be protected and they would be receiving a positive return.

That has not been the case for short-term investments in TIPS mutual funds and ETFs in 2022, so these investors are facing unanticipated losses.

The bottom line is that investors in TIPS who want to be sure their principal is protected should ONLY purchase TIPS directly from TreasuryDirect.gov and should hold them to maturity. For example, the total return of 10-year TIPS in 2021 was 5.5%.

Most investment advisers expect the Federal Reserve to continue increasing interest rates, so I could go at my own pace. I could even replay any class if I thought I had missed something.

What’s more, some professors talk rather slowly, and I could speed up the playback and get through an hour’s lecture in 45 minutes.

Some courses require you to pass a quiz before going onto the next lecture, but others allow you to skip the quizzes. Since I don’t want a certificate, sometimes I skip the quizzes. I can usually complete a six-week course in a couple of weeks.

Being loose with how I take the courses means I probably miss something, but at the end I know more than when I started, and that fits my goal of learning something new every day.

For example, I’ve taken a course on Financial Markets from Robert J. Shiller, a noble laureate at Yale; a course on Cybercrime from the University of Maryland; a course on Ancient Israel from New York University; and I just completed a course from Tel Aviv University called “The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem.” All for free!

Almost endless choices

When I first came across MOOCs, there weren’t a lot of choices. Since then, the idea of MOOCs has gained traction.

Search “MOOC platforms” and one result will be a list of the top 10. Just put any one of them in your web browser and then go bonkers choosing from the hundreds of courses you might want to take. (The platforms I have used are Coursera and edX.)

The list of courses seems endless: music, math, astronomy, computer programming, taxes, cinema, art, culinary, biology, history.

You can also search by subject to find courses. Just to make the point, I looked up something I thought kind of obscure: a “mooc course on how clocks work.” I got a list of possibilities!

Before COVID, I audited at least one course at Howard Community College every semester to keep my brain working. Since COVID, I’ve used MOOC courses as a substitute.

Currently I’m into ancient Middle Eastern history. Without the MOOC classes, I’d have never thought to travel there. Now I’m finding it fascinating and contemplative.

Whether you’re still working or retired, you can reward yourself by learning something new or reviewing a subject you haven’t thought about in a while. And you can do it at your own pace at no cost.

I keep thinking about going back over algebra. I use equations every day, but can no longer figure out where two trains traveling in opposite directions at various speeds would meet — and I don’t see how I can possibly go on without knowing how to do that!

Even after my life gets back to a post-pandemic normal, I’ll keep making use of the learning opportunities made available in MOOCs. Try it; you’ll like it.

Visit edx.org or coursera.com for a list of their free classes. You can also search for a specific university’s free courses at their website (for example, Open Yale Courses at oye.yale.edu; Professional and Lifelong Learning Courses at pil.harvard.edu, etc.). Note: some courses on these sites do charge for tuition.

Take a free course at Harvard from home

By Cal Sefer

The first time I heard about MOOCs, I thought it must be some kind of hybrid cow. The name caught my attention, so I did what I always do when I want to know about something: I Googled it.


About 45 colleges in the United States and nearly 140 around the world offer online courses that you can either audit for free, or pay a modest fee of about $40 and get a certificate. (There are online courses from major universities that offer credit and degrees too, but for this article I’m writing only about free or certificate courses.)

Learning for fun

I’ve taken several MOOC courses just to learn something. Most were recorded lectures, so I could go at my own pace. I could even replay any class if I thought I had missed something.

I’d have never thought to travel there. Now I’m finding it fascinating and contemplating a trip.

Whether you’re still working or retired, you can reward yourself by learning something new or reviewing a subject you haven’t thought about in a while. And you can do it at your own pace at no cost.

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Visit edx.org or coursera.com for a list of their free classes. You can also search for a specific university’s free courses at their website (for example, Open Yale Courses at oye.yale.edu; Professional and Lifelong Learning Courses at pil.harvard.edu, etc.). Note: some courses on these sites do charge for tuition.
Considering a pet? Be aware of the costs

By Roxanne Alexander

Animals are just plain cute and can bring so much joy to your life. But like children, they are not cheap — especially if you care for your pet properly.

Whether you choose to adopt a pet from an animal shelter or buy one from a store or breeder, there are several costs to consider over the life of your pet.

The first one is the acquisition cost. You can adopt a dog for around $60 to over $200, depending on the shelter (this usually includes having them spayed/neutered and vaccinated), but I have seen French bulldog puppies through breeders for $7,000.

There are so many advantages to having a pet. They can bring such unconditional love and companionship. The purpose of this article is not to discourage you from loving and caring for your pets, but to allow you to consider over the life of your pet.

Some additional costs to think about are:

**Food and toys**

Food can be quite expensive, especially if you have a larger animal. Dog owners should plan on budgeting $120 to $550 per year for food per pet, according to Petfinder. For cat owners, the estimate is only a smidgeon lower: $120 to $500.

I have friends who cook chicken and “people food” for their dogs. This can be as expensive as feeding another human. Your pet may need some toys, a bed and possibly a crate for training. If you have a cat you may need to purchase something they can scratch.

A couple of toys can easily cost $50, a dog bed $35, and a cat scratching post $30 or more depending on how fancy you want to get. And don’t forget the kitty litter, which could add up to $70 to $150 per year, Petfinder reports.

**Training costs/property damage**

Puppies like to chew, and kittens like to scratch up furniture. This can be frustrating and costly, especially if the puppy ravages your expensive shoes.

The average cost for dog training is about $50 per hour, but obedience training can run $200 to $600 per week. A private dog trainer can run up to $150 per hour.

**Pet insurance/healthcare**

If your pet has known health issues based on their breed, it may make sense to either get pet insurance in advance or set aside cash for large vet bills.

Pet insurance can range from as low as $10 per month to higher than $100 per month. Keep in mind many insurance companies will exclude “typical” conditions associated with a breed.

Healthcare and vet bills can be a wild card depending on your pet. Keep in mind that if something serious comes up, a week in a veterinary hospital could mean a bill of $10,000 or more.

With regular dental cleanings (easily $30 or more each time) and periodic vaccines, heartworm pills ($58 to $159 per year) and flea and tick prevention ($150 to $200 per year), even routine care adds up fast.

**General liability insurance**

Some condo associations require you have liability insurance if you have a pet in case it bites or destroys property. This can increase your insurance costs. About 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year.

If you own your home, your homeowners insurance policy often will cover dog bites, but it pays to verify. Some companies exclude covering certain breeds. In those

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Problems with bond funds

Bonds issue at par value of $1,000, and by buying a bond you are in effect loaning a corporation or some form of government your $1,000.

There is a length of time you have to leave it there, until it reaches what is known as its maturity date, which can range from one year to 40-plus years.

There will be a set interest rate for that length of time. So, if interest rates rise (causing bond prices generally to fall), you can hold your bond until it matures and still get your $1,000 back.

A huge issue is that most people don’t hold their bonds directly anymore; rather, they hold bonds through mutual funds.

And when you hold bonds in mutual funds, there are two problems: There is no set interest rate, and there is no maturity date. So when interest rates rise and your bond prices fall, there is no date in time when you can get your $1,000 back.

Other investments to consider

To avoid getting trapped while the outlook on bonds is not all that bright, here are two alternatives that can provide more security and a decent rate of return:

Fixed annuities and fixed index annuities: Fixed annuities, sold by insurance companies, offer long-term tax-deferred savings and monthly income for life.

They involve an upfront payment by an investor for a series of guaranteed income distributions from an insurance company. The insurer guarantees the buyer a fixed interest rate on their contributions for a specific period of time. The value of the buyer’s principal, even if interest rates rise, stays the same.

You can also choose a fixed index annuity, where your principal is protected and the return is tied to a market index, like the S&P 500. If the market is down, the worst you can do is zero gain, and it will still have a participation rate on the upside.

For example, if we have a 50% participation rate and the S&P 500 is up 12%, then 6% would be credited to your account on your anniversary date, and that new value is locked in and can’t drop below that value because of a market decline.

Annuities often generate more income than bonds of similar maturity purchased at the same time. Also, each annuity payment consists both of return on investment and a portion of the original premium. Only the annuity’s return on investment is taxable, while the premium portion of each payment is returned tax-free.

And because annuities aren’t priced daily in an open market as bonds are, they are better than bonds at holding their value while generating a more predictable cash flow.

Real estate investment trusts: This is the best-known bond alternative, created in the 1960s to provide investors a way to invest in funds that own, manage and/or finance income-generating real estate.

The REIT investment space is enormous; investors can target specific real estate segments and diversify across different segments. They get 90% of profits.

REITs are tax-advantaged as dividends and trade like stocks. And unlike bonds, which pay a fixed amount of interest and have a set maturity date, REITs are productive assets that can increase in value indefinitely.

Many REITs have dividend yields between 5% and 10%. Be careful, though — many REITs are not liquid if you need access to your money in the short term.

Alternatives to bonds do offer higher yield potential. But remember, that comes with more risk and/or higher cost.

It’s wise to work with an adviser to go over your options as you assess your portfolio. Differentiate between safe and risky assets, and structure your portfolio in a way that makes the most sense for you.

Dan Dunkin contributed to this article. © 2022 The Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.
Con artists target people who owe taxes

By Rivan V. Stinson

With tax season under way, the IRS is once again warning taxpayers to be wary of “Offer in Compromise” scams.

These promotions claim that they can help taxpayers pay back taxes for just “Pennies on the dollar.” But victims often end up paying the promoters thousands of dollars in fees and still end up owing money to the IRS.

While the IRS’s Offer in Compromise (OIC) program allows taxpayers to request a reduction in unpaid taxes, the guidelines are strict and only a small percentage of applications are approved.

To be eligible for the program, you must be up-to-date on your tax returns and have received at least one bill from the IRS. You’ll be required to provide supporting documents, including a breakdown of your expenses.

The IRS will then review your income and the assets you own, such as equity in your home, to determine whether you’re eligible to have some of your tax debts forgiven. If it determines that you can afford to repay your taxes in full through an installment program, it will likely reject your offer.

You can find out if you pre-qualify for the OIC program by going to irs.treasury.gov/oic_pre_qualifier. The IRS charges a $250 application fee, but waives it for low-income taxpayers.

Bank officer impersonators

Consumers also need to be on the lookout for con artists who claim to be fraud officers from their bank. Here’s how it works:

You receive a fraud alert via text or email asking you to verify a purchase you didn’t make. Respond “no,” and you’ll receive a phone call from a fraud impersonator requesting personal information, such as your username and password, in order to “catch” the scam. The imposter then uses that information to drain your account.

Never give out sensitive information over the phone or send money to people you don’t know.

If you’re not sure whether a call is legitimate, hang up and contact your bank directly. While your bank may ask you to verify your identity or account information, this usually happens when you initiate the call.

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Pet costs

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cases, and if you are a renter, you should look into personal liability coverage and/or umbrella insurance.

A colleague informed me that her condo association requested an analysis of her dog’s poop so that the culprit can be identified if a dog’s poop is not cleaned up!

Grooming

This can cost up to $100 per visit depending on the size of the pet and your location. Not all dogs require grooming, however.

Grooming

This can cost up to $100 per visit depending on the size of the pet and your location. Not all dogs require grooming, however.

Travel/pet sitting

If you travel frequently or work outside your home, factor in the costs of someone taking care of your pet when you are away.

Having a dog walker come by during the day can easily cost $20, depending on where you live. Doggy day care can be $25 per day and $40 for overnight. If you travel frequently, these costs can add up quickly.

Future planning

Many people have set up trusts for their pets. Since your pet is likely part of the family, what if something happens to you? Do you have plans in place for the pet after you are gone?

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Throughout the ages, there have been many important advances in mobility. Canes, walkers, rollators, and scooters were created to help people with mobility issues get around and retain their independence. Lately, however, there haven’t been any new improvements to these existing products or developments in this field. Until now. Recently, an innovative design engineer who’s developed one of the world’s most popular products created a completely new breakthrough . . . a personal electric vehicle. It’s called the Zinger, and there is nothing out there quite like it.

The first thing you’ll notice about the Zinger is its unique look. It doesn’t look like a scooter. Its sleek, lightweight yet durable frame is made with aircraft grade aluminum. It weighs only 47.2 lbs but can handle a passenger that’s up to 275 lbs! It features one-touch folding and unfolding — when folded it can be wheeled around like a suitcase and sits easily into a backpack or trunk. Then, there are the steering levers. They enable the Zinger to move forward, backward, turn on a dime and even pull right up to a table or desk. With its compact yet powerful motor it can go up to 8 miles an hour and its rechargeable battery can go up to 8 miles on a single charge.

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Fun in the sun: South Padre Island, Texas

By Victor Block

“Fish. Party. Repeat.”

Those words, printed on a sign hanging on the wall of a restaurant in South Padre Island, Texas, refer to two of the most popular pastimes there.

SPI, as the locals call it, and Port Isabel, perched at the other end of a causeway that connects the two, have outstanding beaches, a long list of both land and water activities, and intriguing historical tidbits that add color to the setting.

The resorts are well known to “Winter Texans” — people primarily from the Midwest who spend several winter months soaking up the sun, and fun, in those twin towns on the Gulf of Mexico at the Lone Star State’s southern extremity.

At first glance, both communities present the atmosphere of many beachfront locations. Hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops abound. Colorful golf carts are a popular mode of transportation. The favored attire gives new meaning to the words “casual clothing.”

But much more awaits those who find their way to this inviting destination within a seashell’s throw of Mexico, which has a strong influence on the local culture.

More than just fishing

Sunbathers, bike riders, surf fishermen and vacationers have long been attracted to the sand that stretches in an unbroken line from White Sands Beach in the north to Pearl at its southern end.

Fishing is by far the favorite pastime for both residents and visitors. Anglers seek their dinner in the flats of Laguna Madre Bay, which separates SPI and Port Isabel, by surf casting off beaches, dropping a line from a pier or trolling the offshore depths of the Gulf.

So productive are the waters that the advertising of one charter boat captain offers “Guaranteed fish. No fish — no charge.”

The popularity of that activity also becomes clear in other ways. One is the fact that streets on SPI are named after swordfish, tarpon, marlin and other denizens of the deep. In some sports bars, along with TV sets tuned to the usual athletic events, there are others beaming fishing programs.

Fortunately, for visitors to the area seeking other activities, a lengthy catalog of options includes many that are water-related.

For starters, there’s kayaking and canoeing, snorkeling and sailing, searching along a beach and loping along a beach on horseback.

Nature attracts fans to the South Padre Island Birding, Nature Center & Alligator Sanctuary, a good place to observe a variety of native wildlife.

An observation tower, blinds and a 3,300-foot-long boardwalk provide close-up sightings of some of the 350-plus species of birds that have been seen in the area. During my visit, a wall chart that lists recent identifications included colorful monikers like marbled godwit and semipalmated plover.

Another expedition took my wife, Fyllis, and me on a Breakaway Cruises dolphin watch excursion in Laguna Madre Bay. Captain Bob pointed out the first one as soon as we left the marina.

Whenever someone spotted a telltale fin, or better yet a dolphin leaping out of the water, a collective “oooh, aaah” echoed among the passengers.

Adding to the enjoyment, and education, was inspecting at close hand various specimens that a net had dredged up from the bay floor. Among sea life we examined were a stingray, several small fish and shrimp.

Shrimp a large draw

It’s no surprise that shrimp were found there because those crustaceans have been the source of an industry that has thrived in the area since the middle of the 19th century. Today, Texas consistently ranks among the top three producing shrimp states, along with Alaska and Louisiana.

The trawlers typically drag their nets along the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico for as long as three weeks at a time, working at night, since shrimp are nocturnal. When not at sea, trawlers may be spotted docked at several locations in Port Isabel.

Also not surprising are the variations on shrimp dishes served at local restaurants, which augment the Tex-Mex cuisine on many menus. Dishes using shrimp that were new to me included tacos, quesadillas, omelets, Eggs Benedict and even a BLT sandwich.

The story of shrimping is among many told at the Port Isabel Historical Museum. Exhibits there portray the area’s past, beginning with the Spanish exploration period and moving on to the arrival of Native Americans, the Civil War and colorful tales of border folklore. The museum is housed in an 1899 building that in the past served as a dry goods store, post office and railroad station.

Port Isabel is also home to a landmark lighthouse that was completed in 1853 to
**Texas**

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guide ships bringing supplies to U.S. military posts. During the American Civil War, it was used as an observation tower by both Confederate and Union forces. Of 16 lighthouses along the Texas coastline, this is the only one that’s open to visitors.

The importance of Port Isabel’s role during the United States-Mexican War (1846-1848), following annexation of Texas by the U.S., and the American Civil War comes alive at the Walk of Generals. It consists of 21 medallions set in sidewalks surrounding the lighthouse that commemorates the 21 military men who served and fought in the area during those conflicts. Among the men so honored are Generals Thomas Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant and Zachary Taylor (12th President of the United States).

**Local art scene**

Both Port Isabel and SPI also lay claim to being art appreciation destinations, though in a non-traditional way. Any flat surface inside or outside a shop, restaurant, home or other building can serve as a palette for paintings, usually depicting sea life.

There are two “trails” that visitors may follow. The Sea Turtle Trail leads to 10 colorful, hand-painted fiberglass replicas of those reptiles as they’ve never been seen before. The largest, named Tank, covers the entire front of a building. Images on Miracle’s shell depict the challenges of turtle life, from emerging as hatchlings to avoiding predators in the deep oceans.

More than two dozen sandy creations comprise the Sandcastle Art Trail, supporting SPI’s claim as Sandcastle Capital of the World. Along with traditional castles, the creations include a singing mermaid and wildlife (such as pelican, alligator and dolphin) that frequent the area.

In addition, a tent-like structure called the Sandcastle Village houses an eclectic collection of works. Santa stands not far from Neptune; an enormous butterfly dwells a nearby iguana.

If seeing sand animals isn’t your thing, perhaps world-class fishing or relaxing on celebrated beaches is. They’re among the many treats that await those who visit SPI and Port Isabel, Texas, a welcome wonderland in any season.

**If you go**

Flights from Richmond to Harlingen, Texas, start at $530 on American Airlines. The Harlingen airport is about an hour from the coast, as is the Brownsville airport.

Accommodations include the selection expected at a beach resort destination. Typical of the budget hotels in SPI is La Copa Inn, a beachfront property with a pool, restaurant and fitness room. Rates begin at $90; lacoparesort.com.

Fyllis and I opted for a three-bedroom Airbnb condo with a full kitchen, balcony and use of a swimming pool shared with occupants of the three other condos nearby.

Many restaurants in SPI and Port Isabel are similar in decor (casual) and menus (lengthy). Ceviche is a common appetizer, sometimes touted as the best in SPI, all of Texas and the world.

Many seafood restaurants offer to “cook your catch” for reasonable prices. Because entrees, like Texas, are oversized, Fyllis and I usually shared one and, at times, an appetizer, which was enough for two hungry people.

Jake’s Restaurant is a typical local eatery which has been “serving fun since 1982.” Specialties include fish, shrimp, oyster and chicken baskets with sides ($10.95-$12.95) and a bountiful seafood platter with sides ($23.95); Jakekisspi.com.

For more information visit sipadre.com and portisabel-texas.com.

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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**NEW ART NOW**

Metro Richmond Artists at Artworks are presenting their “New Art Now” show from Sat., April 22 to Mon., May 2. Artworks, located in Manchester, is free and open to the public Tuesday through Sundays from noon to 6 p.m. To learn more, visit artworksva.com or call (804) 291-1400.

**VIRTUAL GALLERY TOUR**

In this free virtual event, get a 30-minute tour of the Virginia Museum of Fine Art’s new exhibition, “Elegance and Wonder: Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection.” For more information and to register, visit bit.ly/EleganceandWonder.

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**Bring the natural benefits of sunlight indoors.**

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

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Philly may bring out your inner wanderer

By Don Mankin

I learned the art of urban wandering in Philadelphia, the city I grew up in.

The French have a word for it: A flâneur is someone who strolls, rambles or saunters almost randomly through city streets, observing people and places, looking for the novel, the interesting and the unexpected.

Flâneurs will peek down a street and change course, pulled in by the architecture, the look of the people, the hidden parks, the stores that support the neighborhood, or a café where others take a break from their own explorations and perambulations. Sometimes it’s simply the way the sunlight filters down through the trees.

The keys to successful flânerie are spontaneity, serendipity and discovery. As the feet wander, so does the mind, revealing observations, memories and insights.

When I was growing up, my father, a great wanderer in his own right, would lead me through the narrow streets of what is now known as Old City — the historic district near the Delaware River, where in 1681 William Penn founded the “greene country town” now known as Philadelphia.

I reluctantly left the city behind 45 years ago when I moved to Los Angeles. As a travel writer, whenever I visit a city, I spend a day or two exploring it on foot. But after all these years, my favorite place to explore is still Philly, especially the Old City and the Society Hill and Queen Village neighborhoods to the south.

Their narrow, tree-shaded streets, many of them cobblestone, are lined with restored 18th- and 19th-century townhouses, small parks and squares, hidden courts and mews, and a restaurant scene that is as creative and lively as it gets.

Time travel to a quieter era

On a four-day visit last November, my wife and I chose to stay in Society Hill, just south of Old City, a neighborhood of historic row houses built 200 to 300 years ago.

The streets, buildings and squares look much as they did when Ben Franklin walked these very same streets more than 250 years ago.

Our apartment, rented from Airbnb, was in a classic townhouse in the heart of Society Hill. Horse-drawn carriages clip-clopped past our door.

Across the street, visible from our living-room window, was the historic Hill-Physick House, former home of the “father of modern surgery,” who treated the elite of Philadelphia society as well as several of the founding fathers.

Also visible from the window was Delancy Street, a cobblestone street with some of the most faithfully restored 18th-century Federal and Greek Revival-style townhouses in the neighborhood.

After a day of wandering through the neighborhood, we headed a few blocks north to the Historic District to check out the most historic sites of all: Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the Betsy Ross House and Elfreth’s Alley, a narrow passage lined with restored houses built between 1720 and 1830. The website of Visit Philadelphia calls it “the nation’s oldest continuously inhabited residential street.”

On subsequent days, we explored South Street and Queen Village, just three short blocks south of our apartment. In my youth, South Street was a rundown commercial district where I would go to buy cheap, invariably ill-fitting suits.

In the 70s and 80s, it turned into a hippie, bohemian, punk haven, and then evolved into the tourist destination it is today, overflowing with “exotic” boutiques, tattoo parlors, headshops, hipster bars, and inexpensive places to eat. Its lively street scene is perfect for peoplewatching.

How to be a flâneur

If you are planning a visit to Philly, find a place to stay in or close to the Historic District and bring a reliable pair of walking shoes. Get a good map, take a look at it to get an idea of where you are going, then put it away and just wander.

Check the map from time to time to orient and guide your wanderings, but let your heart, not the map, be your guide. If a street looks interesting, go down it. If a café looks like a good place for a break, take a seat. If a house strikes your fancy, don’t be shy: Stop, stare, take a photo.

And don’t be afraid to eat one of those gigantic cheese steaks. The worse that can happen is a good case of heartburn and a grease-stained shirt — the mark of a genuine, fully-fledged Philly flâneur.

For more information see visitphilly.com.
Exquisitely crafted furniture as sculpture

By Catherine Brown

Housed in a Tudor Revival mansion on Monument Avenue, the Branch Museum of Architecture and Design is posthumously exhibiting the work of local artist Sam Forrest, who created unique works of furniture as graceful as they are functional.

Forrest, who passed away last May, learned his craft in the late 1960s at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI, which later became Virginia Commonwealth University) from Alan Lazarus, the founder of the woodworking department there.

Lazarus, in turn, had been trained by Wendell Castle, the father of the studio furniture movement, whose followers hand-crafted individual pieces of furniture in their studios, blending sculpture with functionality. Lazarus pioneered the stack lamination technique to create furniture, bonding wood together to mold it into sculptural shapes.

The exhibition, titled “Atavistic Memories: The Studio Furniture of Sam Forrest,” showcases Forrest’s role in the movement. “We wanted to focus on [Forrest’s] really important lineage in the American studio fur-

The swooping wooden creations of the late Sam Forrest are on display at the Branch this month. Forrest, who died last year, spent 50 years creating furniture for local families.

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The truth behind gardening proverbs

By Lela Martin

Many gardeners rely on a proverb, an almanac or their grandmothers for gardening advice, while Master Gardeners are trained to convey information that is research-based.

Here are a few adages with a little bit of scientific discussion to clarify the level of their validity:

April showers bring May flowers

This saying can be traced back to English poet Thomas Tusser, who wrote in the 1500s, “Sweet April showers do spring May Flowers.” In England, the jet stream lifts northward at the start of spring, bringing weather swings and more rain. The jet stream in the U.S. also moves north in spring.

In Central Virginia, April and May are tied for second as the rainiest month after August. Additionally, increasing air temperatures by about 10°F during April, combined with warming soil temperatures, do indeed stimulate the budding and blooming of flowering plants.

One bad apple can spoil the whole barrel

Is this how you remember the saying? If you grew up hearing The Osmonds sing “One Bad Apple” by George Jackson, you might think the saying is “one bad apple don’t spoil the whole bunch, girl.” So, which is it?

In fruits such as apples, tomatoes and bananas, ethylene gas is produced internally to stimulate ripening. Ethylene triggers a complex process that ends in rotting, with more ethylene being released into the surrounding air. This spurs the ripening of nearby fruit, setting off a chain reaction that, with time, spoils it all.

Adding sugar to the soil will make your tomatoes taste sweeter

Tomatoes do not get their sweetness from the soil. Instead, sweetness is determined by the variety of tomato, as well as plant photosynthesis. Typically, the sweetest are cherry and plum tomatoes.

Ants help peony flowers open

Peony buds often have ants on them because ants are attracted to the sugary secretions produced by the plant. While ants do nothing to contribute to the flower opening, they keep away other insect pests in exchange for peony nectar.

Eliminate white grubs this year, no Japanese beetles next year

The larval form of the Japanese beetle is a white grub in the soil. Treating for grubs may reduce the number of grubs in your lawn. Unfortunately, Japanese beetles can fly 10 to 15 miles, so they will come from other yards.

Furthermore, the beetles release an aggregation pheromone that tells other Japanese beetles where to find food. Because hanging traps contain this pheromone, they see GARDENING, page 22

FROM PAGE 23
ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD

| TARTS | PAVE | WIRE | ALINE | UPON | OVER | CANITA | PROTOTYPE | FRUIT | SOD | RIDGETO | THE | LINDO | OGA | AB | BED | BOWN | OF | THE | USE | SO | ROSTADDDATE | TIME | SHARE | AMINO | AKIO | ENOT | TAST | BYAD | BREA | RIO |

Yes, April showers do bring May flowers, though tulips tend to bloom in April.
Woodworker
From page 20

nature movement, which is something a lot of people don’t know about him,” said Sharon, executive director of the Branch.

Discovering inner talent
Sam Forrest was born in 1936 in nearby Mathews County. In 1968, after a stint in the Navy and work as a parole officer, Forrest used the money remaining from his GI bill funds to study in RPI’s woodworking program.

It didn’t take long for Forrest to develop an obsession with designing and making furniture. In fact, after a year of taking classes, he left RPI to begin his career.

“I discovered this talent I never knew I had,” Forrest told reporters from the Richmond Times-Dispatch in 2015.

At different periods of his life, Forrest had studios throughout Virginia, including in a carriage house in Churchhill, in an abandoned rock quarry in Louisa County, in an old Richmond gas station, and at Hyco House in Mathews County, where he lived from 2019 to the end of his life.

Forrest worked primarily by hand, using no nails, to create one-of-a-kind pieces, many of which have undulating curves that seem impossible to create out of wood.

“The work synthesizes the amorphic and geometric, bringing harmony to straight and curved lines, reflecting humanity’s dual nature,” Forrest wrote in his 2014 artist statement.

An adventurer by nature
In the early part of his artistic career, Forrest engaged in a lively bohemian community that centered around the Village Cafe. He spent time with like-minded artists and friends from RPI, including sculptor Rubin Peacock, who helped put together this exhibition, and bestselling author Tom Robbins.

In the late 1970s, Forrest had grown weary of making furniture and set a goal to circumnavigate the world. The first time he attempted the feat, he made it only as far as Mississippi. The second time, he got to Mexico City, and the third time, he made it to Egypt.

Finally, in 1984, on his fourth try, he successfully made it around the world and documented the journey in an unpublished memoir, “The Sailor’s Sample.”

Forrest also traveled through Europe and Asia, and worked as a designer for a well-known Chinese design company, Gold Mantis.

After his travels, Forrest returned to Virginia and to making furniture, setting up a studio in Richmond’s Carver neighborhood, where he was living at the time.

Politically active
Though he created art alone, he was interested in the public welfare. He ran for city council unsuccessfully in 1990, and served as an active member of the Carver Community Association.

Forrest often shared his thoughts with City Hall, and on numerous occasions earned the title “Correspondent of the Day” from the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

“He was opinionated,” Forrest’s son, Bo, told the Beacon. “He was a lightning rod. No, he was like lightning itself.”

While the Branch Museum’s exhibit hints at Forrest’s larger-than-life personality, it aims primarily to encapsulate the spiritual tenacity and structural process of a man engaged in the delight and dilemma of the resistance of wood, according to the exhibition wall text.

During his lifetime, Forrest created hundreds of works. “About 200 significant pieces are in private collections in the Richmond area,” Bo Forrest said, “and about 80 pieces are in my collection.”

Though Forrest’s furniture has been shown in major museums, “Atavistic Memories” is the first solo exhibition of his work.

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design building was designed by John Russell Pope, who also designed the National Gallery of Art and Richmond’s Union Station, now the Science Museum of Virginia. It is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. “Atavistic Memories” is on view through April 17. Admission is free. Parking is free at the adjacent First Baptist Church parking lot.

For more information, visit branchmuseum.org or call (804) 655-6055.

Gardening
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just attract Japanese beetles.

The best control is to go out in early morning and pluck the beetles feeding on your plants, dropping them in a bucket of soapy water.

Nothing grows under a walnut tree
The black walnut (juglans nigra) produces a chemical called juglone that remains in the soil beneath it and destroys or deters plants from competing with it.

This is called allelopathy. Some other plants, including fescue grass, have lesser degrees of allelopathy.

Plants most susceptible to the black walnut’s toxicity include birch, pine, azaleas and plants in the nightshade family, such as tomatoes and potatoes. Some native plants that tolerate juglone and can grow under black walnuts include asters, ferns and Virginia bluebells.

Abundance of acorns means a bad winter
This has not been proven. When you see a mast crop (large number) of acorns, it simply means that the oak tree had a good growing season.

Many proverbs have to do with when to plant or harvest. Phenology (not to be confused with phrenology) is the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially how climate is related to plant and animal life.

Plant potatoes (or beans) on Good Friday
First, the date of Good Friday changes each year. Second, the weather on Good Friday is variable from year to year.

A better rule of thumb is to plant potatoes (or beans) once the risk of frost has passed. In Central Virginia’s Zone 7, the last frost date typically falls between the end of March and mid-April.

Corn should be knee-high by the Fourth of July
This is one my mom, who grew up on a Kentucky farm, used to say. Years ago, if corn plants were knee-high in early July, they would be growing at a good rate.

However, with advances in agricultural technology and plant genetics, in most years corn should be waist-high by July Fourth.

The earlier saying morphed in 1942 to corn will grow “as high as an elephant’s eye.” This comes from the lyrics of “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” from the musical Oklahoma!

Sweet corn plants can reach six to eight feet or more in height by late July or August. Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo says an elephant’s eye is about six or seven feet high. Maybe Oscar Hammerstein II knew something about farming!

You should garden by the moon
The basic idea behind this belief is that the moon’s phases affect plant growth. According to this thinking, it’s considered best to plant crops that grow underground (such as potatoes and carrots) on the days during the dark of the moon or its waxing (the time between the full and new moon).

Conversely, crops that produce edibles above ground (such as beans and broccoli) supposedly should be planted on days during the light of the moon or its waning (the time between the new and full moon).

Additionally, as the moon’s gravitational pull causes tides to rise and fall, the theory is that it also affects moisture in the soil.

While gardening by the moon may not be lunacy, it has not been supported by research.

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

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