

Senior Living



Fiber artist breaks through boundaries

INSIDE

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PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Rose Kong leads the Golden Gate Park Tai Chi Class in a variety of movements. The group meets at Spreckels Lake in Golden Gate Park on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Ancient exercise brings modern health results

By Peggy Spear

Like many people, Steven Messino, a 68-year-old from Montara, just south of San Francisco, had a COVID-19 problem. “I just let myself go ... I used to run marathons, and during the pandemic, I just sat around and put on weight,” he said. “Suddenly, I wanted to get my health back.”

Several friends had urged him to try tai chi, the ancient Chinese art of balance and strength. Messino knew about a free class in Golden Gate Park and decided to try it.

“It’s saving my life, literally,” the software engineer said. “We are constantly moving, twisting and turning ... I’m exhausted after the end of a three-hour session,” he said. “But suddenly, I’m full of energy. That’s the ‘chi,’ or energy, at work.”

Messino is not the first to discover the Spreckels Lake tai chi class, nor will he be the last. The class has been immensely popular for years, instructor Rose Kong said. She has led this free class for 10 years, after its founder, “Sifu” — a term meaning teacher — Bill Chin, an instructor at City College of San Francisco, retired. She stopped the class during the pandemic but it returned last summer.

Tai chi has been a popular activity for years in the Bay Area, and for centuries in its native China, Kong said.

“At the most basic level, tai chi is movement, which everyone needs in order to maintain flexibility, muscle mass and tone, regular bodily functions and to some extent body awareness,” she said. “Tai chi movements reflect self-defense purposes, but certain ones coincidentally also have specific health benefits.”

For example, one called “Wave Hands Like Clouds” is said to gently massage the internal organs and thus help general well-being, from rotating the core of the body around its center line and vertically flexing and retracting the soft tissues of the core, like the pumping of pistons.

Meanwhile, overall blood circulation is improved by staying loose while doing the movements, avoiding force and tension, Kong said.

“Breathing fully while practicing allows us to capture nature’s qi (energy) to supplement our own, which dwindles throughout life from our stresses, both bad and good,” she said.

The less physical benefits of tai chi are just as important.

“Hopefully thoughts of looseness, balance, deliberation and flow in tai chi practice carry over to the attitudes with which we try



Clockwise from top left: Participants go through tai chi movements at Spreckels Lake; Terry Forman, left, and Bonnie McGregor practice tai chi, which is the ancient Chinese art of balance and strength; Rose Kong leads the class on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

to make life run smoothly,” Kong said.

She adds a caveat: Tai chi alone will not ensure well-being; attention must also be paid to the other factors which underlie stability in life, like healing for illnesses, eating nourishing food, having shelter and prudent living.

But the benefits for older adults are many, and as Messino looks around the class, he sees that there are probably only 30

Details

Golden Gate Park Tai Chi Class: 8:30-10:30 a.m. Saturdays and Sunday, Spreckels Lake, <https://bit.ly/2Yu0yXo>

percent under 50.

He himself has set a goal to live to be 100, something he said Kong laughs at.

“She doesn’t badger us in class. She lets us work at our own level,” he said.

Despite students like Messino’s dedication, Kong said that

older adults today are a “mixed bag.”

“Some are robust and live the slogan ‘60 is the new 40,’ while others aren’t. But the same can be said for the younger generation,” she said.

Aging is marked by decline, sooner or later, Kong said.

“For example, the rate of loss of muscle mass is said to increase, leading to weaker arms and legs, which can be countered by eating more protein. But at the same time we require physical exercise, such as tai chi, so that the protein becomes toned-up muscle instead of fat.”

Similarly, she said, a higher rate of loss of calcium from bones, which endangers hips, arms, legs or joints during falls, can be helped by weight-bearing

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Cover photo: Fiber artist Consuelo Jimenez Underwood works in her Gualala home studio.
 Photo by Laura Morton



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Weekly classes practice ancient Chinese art

From page S2

exercises such as tai chi, where body weight is constantly and slowly shifted from one foot to the other.

There is another major plus for older adults: Tai chi helps improve cognitive abilities.

"You have to remember movements, the series of them, like a dance," Messino said. "It really tests memory skills."

Kong agrees with that, while mentioning other benefits.

"Tai chi emphasizes balance, through teaching optimum body posture and footwork and awareness of movement to ease those falls," she said. "Some of the movements in tai chi involve coordination of arms and legs all moving differently at once, and combined with flowing one movement into another, it works the brain like any brain teaser."

Ironically, the movements of tai chi, which look so flowing and

beautiful, were originally developed to train fighters and martial arts masters. But that doesn't mean the ancient exercise is not beneficial to everyone, no matter their age, Kong said.

"For older adults and others who are less robust, movements can be softened to be more doable until hopefully they gain strength, while tuning up their internal workings through the combination of breathing and relaxation and opening of their bodies," she said. "Progress is slower, and requires a larger time commitment, but the point is to keep moving. The overall potential of tai chi for older adults, considering all the benefits mentioned, is to mellow the decline."

Well, that's hard to tell someone like Messino, who gets so energized after his tai chi classes.

"I feel like painting the house," he said. "I feel healthy again."

Other exercises for older adults

Golden Gate Park Tai Chi Class instructor Rose Kong said there are other Eastern (and Western) exercises that may be easier for older adults to manage or start with, that all inspire movement, energy and positive thoughts. Here are some of her suggestions:

- » **Qigong:** An exercise done in sets in which specific body movements are repeated and direct the "chi flow, including Eight Brocades and Taichi 18-Movement Qigong. "These tend to be shorter sequences than tai chi and seem more accessible," Kong said.
- » **Short tai chi sets:** These classes also might be an option. Check senior centers or recreation departments.
- » **Hula:** This ancient dance is fun and healthy for all ages.
- » **Line-dancing:** Yes, line-dancing of any sort. Booty shaking is encouraged.
- » **YouTube:** While not an actual exercise, this platform has many exercise training programs for all ages and levels. "Because older adults today have such a varied group of capabilities and attitudes, there is no one-size-fits-all (exercise)," Kong said. "Recreational movement, as long as one enjoys it enough to keep it up, is healthy on its own."



Rose Kong leads the Golden Gate Park Tai Chi Class at Spreckels Lake on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

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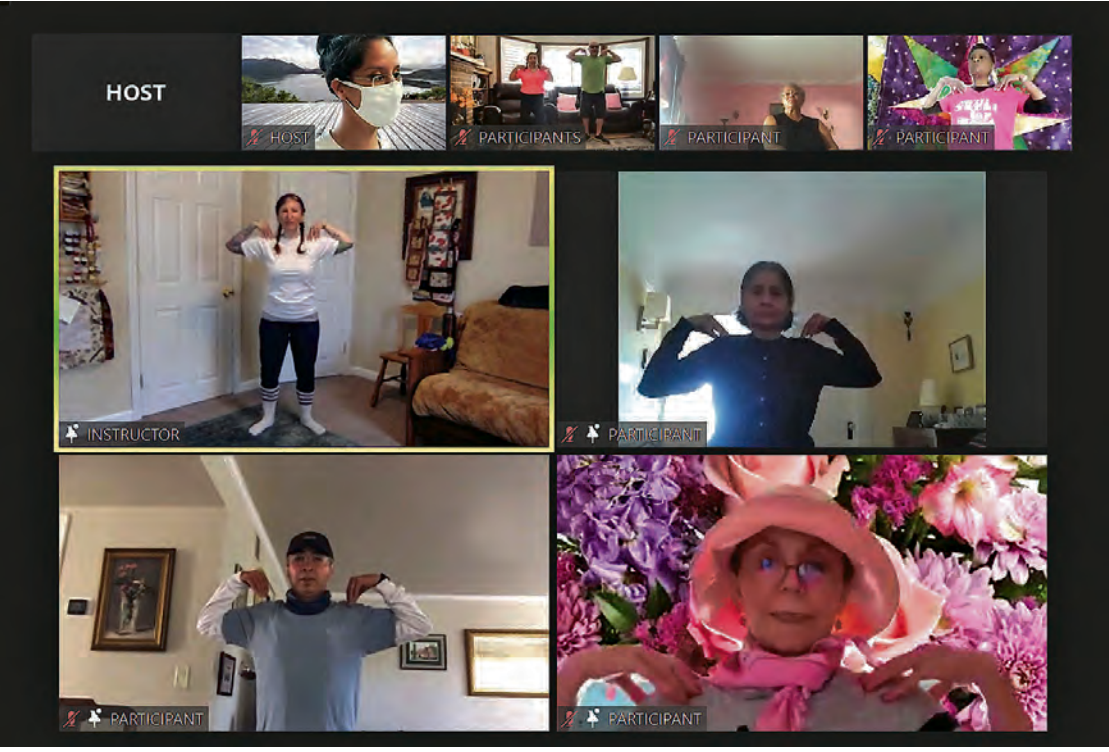
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Above: The Fall Prevention program at Always Active includes 12-week classes that are currently held over Zoom twice a week. They are hosted in English, Spanish and Cantonese. Right: Staff at Gathering Thyme, a herb store, create flower essence with plants from their Petaluma garden.

Putting a focus on health to live longer, better lives

By Carey Sweet

Contemporary Americans can plan on living longer than they did a century ago — about 30 years longer, according to the 2021 Century Summit report by The Longevity Project and the Stanford Center on Longevity. That means a lifespan of about 47 years at the beginning of the 20th century has burgeoned to more than 78 years today, with people living to 100 becoming more and more common.

To reach that goal, older adults are increasingly taking charge of their health, both physical and mental, with the hope that they can enjoy longer and better lives. Some of the most important considerations are proper exercise, nutrition and medical care.

Taking care of ourselves doesn't have to be expensive,

either. City and state programs exist around the Bay Area that can keep us happy and healthy for little to no cost. Holistic medicine is another approach, offering affordable nutritional supplements and lifestyle approaches to enhance wellness.

ALWAYS ACTIVE

The first time Joan O'Connor fell down, she blamed it on San Francisco's famously ragged sidewalks. She had long suffered trouble with her knees, and when she tripped on a jutting concrete edge 18 months ago, she crashed and injured her head.

She tripped a second time this past February, hit her head again and was whisked by ambulance to the hospital for a CT scan. That was enough for her — at age 74, she already had endured two hip and two shoulder

» **“Chronic disease is on the rise, and many people are turning to holistic health care for answers to their complex problems.”**

Cheryl Fromholzer, Gathering Thyme founder

replacements — and she decided to seek help for the inevitable body and balance changes of aging.

A friend mentioned Dr. Christian Thompson, the founder and director of the Fall Prevention program at Always Active, a free service offered by San Francisco's On Lok 30th Street Senior Center. Funded by private donations, the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services and On Lok, a nonprofit organization that helps older adults live independently, the service assists San Francisco residents aged 60-plus to improve physical health, mobility,

stability and quality of life.

The 12-week classes — currently held over Zoom for an hour twice a week — are hosted in English, Spanish and Cantonese. The English program is led by Susan Sullivan (who also happens to be a ukulele teacher) and shows participants how to increase flexibility, strengthen muscles, improve balance and boost health and wellness. Activities start gently, such as sitting and standing up in repetition for a minute or so, then increase in pace as the classes go on.

“It gets to be a workout,” O'Connor said. “But it's not intense, like going to a gym.

And it's so liberating to just be in my living room, and not have to take Muni anywhere.”

O'Connor found the program so valuable, in fact, she has just wrapped up her second course series.

“I could have graduated to the maintenance group,” she said. “But Susan tells us to take our time, and I felt like the starter classes really met me where I am right now.”

There has been a mental benefit to the Zoom gatherings during COVID-19 as well.

“It's become a community that gives me joy during a difficult time,” O'Connor said, of her 15 classmates. “It helps with isolation. I really look forward to our time exercising together. Susan's way of being so supportive, respectful and compassionate is inspiring, and having the schedule structure has really



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Details

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Always Active: 415-550-2265, www.alwaysactive.org
Leah's Pantry: 650-351-7780, www.leahspantry.org
Gathering Thyme: 1332 Fourth St., San Rafael, 415-524-8693, www.gatheringthyme.com

helped me transition to getting older.”
Discovering tools to manage her well-being has brought O'Connor a new sense of personal power for her future, she noted.
“As we age, we must decide whether we are going to keep moving and pushing ourselves, or abandon our bodies,” she said. “But giving up would be a straight shot to a nursing home.”

LEAH'S PANTRY

Last fiscal year, Leah's Pantry served 335 clients seeking support with nutrition education and counseling on how to prepare easy, nutritious meals for their families and themselves.
Hosted in collaboration with the San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services, the free seminars are open to city residents enrolled in either a DAS-funded service or home-delivered meal program. Currently operating in a mix of virtual and in-person workshops, classes anchor around the core “Nutrition Education: Food Smarts” curriculum, where students learn about wellness diets, how to plan balanced, budget-friendly meals and participate in healthy cooking demonstrations.
“Diabetes and high cholesterol management are the most reported concerns,” Leah's Pantry Registered Dietitian Anna Ng said. “But we can address them with budget-friendly foods and recipes that nourish the body and also taste good. I find great joy in building relationships and helping others make



GATHERING THYME

Above: Gathering Thyme owner Cheryl Fromholzer is the team leader for San Geronimo Valley, an organic community garden in West Marin. Gathering Thyme's Petaluma ranch also features an organic herb garden. Below: An instructor with the Fall Prevention program at Always Active helps older adults increase flexibility, strengthen muscles and improve balance.

peace with food.”
Introductory workshops span 1.5 hours and are held once a week over a four-week period. The public also can access the Leah's Pantry/Healthy CalFresh Initiative www.EatFresh.org site, for free information on meal plans that help reduce food waste and costs, healthy recipes and information about how to purchase, store and prepare non-processed foods.
For more specific assistance, Leah's Pantry also offers one-on-one nutrition counseling with a registered dietitian, like Ng. That includes customized food planning advice for maintaining health or managing a medical condition, personalized support in setting and achieving nutritional goals and guidance for accessing free food resources.
Support is available in Spanish and Cantonese languages, as are ethnic meal plans recipes, such as chicken chile tacos and Chinese winter melon soup.

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case holistic medicine. It's a form of healing that considers the whole person — body, mind, spirit and emotions — in the quest for optimal health and wellness. So instead of turning to chemical prescriptions, she curates an extensive herbal apothecary and custom blend formulas specifically for each client, while also counseling on natural dietary and lifestyle enhancement to improve

wellness.
While holistic medicine has long been a tenant of ancient cultures like Chinese and Native American communities, Fromholzer, 64, is seeing it more widely embraced by people of all ages and heritages.
“Chronic disease is on the rise, and many people are turning to holistic health care for answers to their complex problems,” she said. “Our difference is we seek to regain health, whereas America's current medical model relies on pharmaceutical drugs to suppress symptoms.”
Seeking holistic support doesn't mean that people, especially older adults, need to or should give up required prescriptions, however.
“Senior related issues we see quite a bit are anxiety and insomnia, mental health concerns like focus and concentration, changes in memory and mood, lack of vitality, prostate issues and menopausal concerns,” Fromholzer said. “We spend quite a bit of time with our clients to develop a plan of care that is focused solely on their needs, taking into consideration their constitution as well as any medication they may be taking.”
For people wanting to learn more about holistic medicine, the Thyme team hosts Zoom lectures or in-person classes twice a month at two field campuses. The Petaluma location features an organic herb garden planted with more than 60 different medicinal plants and an outdoor pavilion where instructors teach medicine making techniques. The Point Reyes Station location boasts an indoor/outdoor classroom on the historic Black Mountain Ranch.
There is a cost for workshops and classes, such as a \$275, two-day immersion in Petaluma April 9 and 10, 2022 about “Reading the Body.” But you can purchase many low-cost medicinal herbs at the San Rafael store, such as organic Ashwagandha root, a supplement revered by the Indian Ayurvedic system of medicine that is said to combat stress (\$2.95 for one ounce).



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PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Fiber artist and weaver Consuelo Jimenez Underwood works on her loom at her home studio in Gualala. Her work often depicts her personal border experiences.

Renowned artist channels ancestors, memories to explore crossing borders

By Carey Sweet

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood may be 72 years old in this mortal world, but the internationally renowned weaver and fiber artist draws on a more ancient realm for her craft. Even before receiving her very first award, an Honorable Mention for a painting at the California State Fair in 1981, she felt her creative process

guided by ghosts.

“Over thirty years ago, when ‘craft versus art’ was the most divisive issue in the arts, I discovered and established my authentic artistic voice, and refocused my artistic studies from the paintbrush and pigments to needle and thread,” she writes in her published mission statement. “Empowered by the voices of my indigenous maternal ancestors, I

began to cross the intellectual borders that separated the hand and the mind (craft), from the spirit (fine art).”

Other visions came to her: she was born in Sacramento on April 29, 1949, during what she calls “the Taurus, the Euro system of metaphysical calendar,” and “in the year of the Asian calendar, the year of the bull.” That led to “double power,” she said. “In

both systems, the Earth, and my strength from the Earth is prominent.”

But lest you think this artist is entirely mystical, it’s important to understand the reality of her upbringing and how it influences her work. The 11th child of 12 to migrant farm laborers Ismael Jimenez Aguirre and Francisca Cruz Jimenez, her heritage is Huichol Indian on her father’s

side, and Chicana on her mother’s side.

She draws on both cultures for her brightly colored murals, tapestries, quilts and woven rebozo shawls that speak of landscapes, historically fractured civilizations and self-strength.

Jimenez Underwood spent her childhood on both sides of the California-Mexican border, crossing between Calexico and Mexicali to attend school in the states, where she became keenly aware of America’s imposed boundaries.

Her family moved often, chasing seasonal harvests, and her earliest memories are of working in the fields and orchards around

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Above: Fiber artist Consuelo Jimenez Underwood demonstrates her work process at her loom in Gualala. Far right: Jimenez Underwood creates brightly colored murals, tapestries, quilts and woven rebozo shawls out of her home studios in Gualala and Cupertino. Right: An in-progress piece of art depicts undocumented border flowers. The 72-year-old artist's works have been exhibited at galleries and museums across America and Mexico as well as in Israel and Korea.



Vacaville, Suisun and Fairfield. To protect herself, she turned to dreams, and searched for beauty. "I remember seeing photos of me as an infant, tucked in a wooden prune box watching my sisters and brothers picking," she said. "By the time I was a toddler, my younger sister and I were in charge of picking the scattered prunes that my dad shook down from the trees. We were smaller and more lithe, so it made sense, no?" Those experiences summoned one of her first statement pieces, an early 1980's collage experimenting with photo transfers and

screen printing. In one panel, a black-and-white photo captures Jimenez Underwood, her mother and the family dog in 1963, sitting next to a stack of prune boxes (priced 35 cents a box, it reads). A large, superimposed blue-green-gold stamp of Our Lady of Guadalupe hovers above, protecting the family. "The orchards of peaches, apricots, pears and plums abounded," Jimenez Underwood recalled. "There were so many fields of multicolored wildflowers, incredible insects and many different colored robins and blue jays." She remembers it as a good

Details

www.consuelojunderwood.com

time. "The Beatles and the Rolling Stones had just busted through the air waves. I was happy. The best part was I belonged to a generation of peace, love and flowers." Yet, as with much of her art, life rippled with traumatic undercurrents. Jimenez Underwood's father was undocumented, and she still relives the horror of the many times he was picked up by border control agents then

dumped in random spots of Mexico. The family would have to somehow find him and smuggle him back home hidden under a blanket in the footwell of their car. "To have my dad whisked away at night or in the daylight of the fields, being chased ... the worst," she said. "It was very dysfunctional and dramatic, but I knew there was a bigger purpose to my personal experience. I would learn, and then implement change or at least bring light to

the border drama." And so in the plum box collage, the Lady of Guadalupe is flanked by darker colored stamps of gun-toting Mexican banditos, and blood red silhouettes of a father and mother fleeing with a child under the bold print word, "caution." The image, Jimenez Underwood explained, represents immigrant crossing signs she saw on the Interstate 405 San Diego highway in the early '80s, designed to resemble an animal-crossing marker. And that image would continue to be an anchor

Continues on page S10



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Fiber artist highlights struggles at border

From page S9

of many of her future pieces.

In her 2005 piece "C. Jane Run," for example, she screen printed the sign onto 120 pieces of clothing patches made into a 10-by-17-foot quilt, in tribute to the many unidentified immigrants who were killed while crossing that highway in search of a better life.

"I found out that when a person is hit by a car at full speed, nothing recognizable is left, except small fragments of clothing," she said. "I felt the need to construct a memorial quilt of sorts, a large-scale textile created to honor the anonymous dead who died when crossing the freeway."

These days, Jimenez Underwood lives a life very far removed from her time living in tents, abandoned garages or dirt floor sheds on the farms she and her family worked. She has comfortable homes in Cupertino and Gualala in Mendocino County.

She was the first in her family to graduate from high school, went on to college, then got a Master of Arts degree from San Diego State University, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from San Jose State University. She was a professor and Head of Fiber/Textile Area for eight years at the School of Art and Design at San Jose State University.

Her works have been exhibited at galleries and museums across America and Mexico, in Israel and Korea. An academic anthology of essays and 80-plus color reproductions about her work is currently in production with Duke University Press, titled "Consuelo Jimenez Underwood: Art, Weaving, Vision," and due out June 2022.

Also in July, the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles will host a retrospective exhibit called



PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Above: Fiber artist Consuelo Jimenez Underwood demonstrates her work process on an in-progress piece of art depicting undocumented border flowers. Below left: Jimenez Underwood works with a variety of tools to create her pieces. Below right: The 72-year-old artist will have a retrospective exhibit in 2022 at the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles as well as a book coming out.



"Consuelo Jimenez Underwood: Thread, Spirit, Resistance," and covering works from 1974 to 2020.

Next November, meanwhile, Jimenez Underwood's piece



"Virgen de los Caminos" will be featured in a "Subversive, Skilled, Sublime: Fiber Art by Women" exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Reflecting now on all her hard

times, Jimenez Underwood feels like the struggle might actually have been a spiritual gift, as it informed her art and pushed her to build a life she is proud of.

"I saw everything I did not

want to do when I grew up," she said. "I realized early that if I played the cards right, I would have an incredible adult life. And I absolutely have that. I guess, in a perverse way, I was blessed."

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Older volunteers find special benefit in helping peers

By Jeanne Cooper

Given the typical age for retirement, it may not come as a surprise that a quarter of those 65 or older volunteer their time to nonprofits and other organizations, according to a 2015 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the most recent data available.

Older adults' new "free time" may partly account for why the same bureau found their median annual hours of volunteering are also double that of the total population ages 16 and over. But older adults who devote time to volunteering may also be reaping physical and mental health benefit that sustain their efforts. And for those who volunteer to help other older adults, the emotional connections can be equally gratifying.

"A growing body of research suggests older adults who are engaged in social and community activities maintain mental and physical health longer than other older adults," the Washington, D.C.-based Population Reference Bureau wrote in a 2011 report on volunteering and health for aging populations.

Two studies with results released in 2017 bear that out. The Corporation for National and Community Service (now AmeriCorps) found two-thirds of volunteers in its Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs, which pair senior volunteers with youth or fellow older adults respectively, reported a decrease in feelings of isolation, while up to 70 percent who initially had symptoms of depression experienced a decrease in those. A separate study in Sweden found older adults who volunteer regularly have fewer cognitive issues and a lower occurrence of mild to moderate dementia than those who do not.

For Leonard "Lynn" Jordan, 77, a retired California state employee living in San Francisco, helping other older adults comes with emotional and spiritual benefits, too. A founding and



PENINSULA VOLUNTEERS, INC.

Left: Peninsula Volunteers, Inc., helps arrange transportation for older adults. Right: Volunteers with the Bridgemen help at the 2019 Fall Feast at Openhouse, a community center and housing complex in San Francisco that primarily serves older LGBTQ+ individuals.



MICHAEL KERNER PHOTOGRAPHY

still active member of the Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco (MCC), Jordan has volunteered for seven years with Openhouse, a nonprofit community center and housing complex in San Francisco that primarily serves older LGBTQ+ individuals and relies heavily on older volunteers.

"Community service is in my DNA," Jordan said. "Volunteering at Openhouse is simply another extension of my 50-plus years in MCC doing a whole wide range of social justice and community service ... I am always wanting to expand on the narrative of 'What is my purpose?' We're here for very short time and I'd like to give back and contribute."

As part of Openhouse's Friendly Visitor Program, which matched 155 isolated seniors with volunteers in 2019-20, Jordan used to visit the apartment of an older, isolated community member with mobility issues two to three times a month. Since the pandemic, Jordan said, he now calls him three to four times a month and they talk for several hours at a time.

"We do a lot of reminiscing," Jordan said. "He's 80, so there's not much difference in our ages.

He arrived in San Francisco in 1965, and I did in 1967, so there's quite a bit of parallel in our experiences."

They also discuss music from the 1940s, '50s and '60s, with Jordan doing "a lot of Google" on different performers for his community member, and are delving into the community member's genealogy — a favorite hobby of Jordan's.

Since his community member had "a series of hospitalizations" before COVID-19, Jordan also asks him toward the end of the calls if he has anything he wants to share about his health or self-isolation. While his community member hasn't had in-home support, Openhouse has helped arrange for services such as grocery deliveries, Jordan noted.

Mical Brenzel, 65, of Menlo Park said she "had the very good blessing" to retire in her early 50s from her job as a financial executive with Agilent. Nevertheless, she said she has appreciated being able to share her professional talents over the last eight years as a board member of Peninsula Volunteers, Inc. (PVI), which operates a variety of programs for older adults on two campuses in Menlo Park.

"It's a vital community organi-

zation ... seniors often get short shrift, but they are a growing number of the population and they really need assistance," Brenzel said. "To be able to use your existing skills, as I've been able to do on the financial management side, it's a tonic. It invigorates you."

Older adults make up some 70 to 75 percent of PVI's volunteer force of 428 people, accounting for 21,000 hours of work since March 2020, according to PVI Volunteer Manager Ann Eisenberg. While the pandemic caused some volunteers in their 70s and 80s to stop driving for the organization's Meals on Wheels program, which delivers meals to needy and shut-in seniors across San Mateo County, others in their 50s and 60s continued, Eisenberg noted.

Now a substitute meal packer and driver for the program, Brenzel previously had a regular delivery route, which offered "a challenge to do something new," she noted. "My tendency is to be an introvert ... I had to learn how to ring somebody's doorbell and say, 'Meals on Wheels' and to make small talk, and to learn that when someone answered the door and was

really snippy, they may be caring for an older person and be at the end of their rope."

Another plus to having a regular route: "You really get to love your clients," Brenzel said. She recalled bringing over a birthday gift of Italian toiletries to a "lovely gentleman," now deceased, after learning about his Italian heritage during her meal deliveries. "He was particularly special," she said.

At Openhouse, the pandemic has created new opportunities for older adults to serve each other, from running errands and making check-in phone calls to leading classes like tai chi on Zoom, noted Sylvia Vargas, Openhouse's director of community engagement.

"This community has always been folks helping folks, because some people aren't connected to family," she said.

Older adults can make a difference in someone's life "by simply being there," said Jordan, who also welcomes a monthly check-in call from another volunteer.

"Seniors have a lot to contribute and they do," he said. "There are a lot out there that are not in isolation and they're giving back."

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From iPhone photography to memoir writing, older adults learn new skills

By Peggy Spear

The Zoom screen is full — 24 participants — but one gentleman was having trouble lowering his hand, Zoom-style.

Immediately several participants gave him advice, but ultimately, it was the man himself with a little bit of experimenting, who figured out which button to push on his screen.

The class was taught by the San Antonio branch of Senior Planet, based in Silicon Valley. It was an introduction to YouTube, and the instructor’s first wise words are something we can all take to heart: “Learn like a child. Just keep exploring,” he said, as he taught the basics of the video sharing platform, from what it was, to how to upload your own videos, create a channel and explore everything else in the YouTube world, from travel to motorcycle meditations.

Most people have had some Zoom or other computer experience since the pandemic made us all more reliant on technical devices, and groups like Palo Alto’s Senior Planet are teaching older adults some of the programs and applications that can help them keep up in an increasingly fast-paced world.

San Francisco’s Community Living Campaign is also giving out tech advice and classes, and grants have even enabled it to give out tablets to people in underserved communities throughout the city.

Across the bay, at Alameda’s Frank Bette Center for the Arts, many older people are discovering — and rediscovering — other, not so technical pursuits, like



AMY PATICK

Above: Amy Patick used her iPhone to take pictures of a landscape in Iceland. She teaches iPhone Photography 101 at the Frank Bette Center for the Arts in Alameda. Below: Marina Lazzara, in the top left, leads her “Writing for Remembering” memoir class, which is currently on Zoom.

Details

Senior Planet: www.seniorplanet.org/locations/palo-alto

Community Living Campaign: www.sfcommunityliving.org

Bay Language Academy: 1325 High St., Alameda, 510-306-4229, www.baylanguages.com

Frank Bette Center for the Arts: 1601 Paru St., Alameda, 510-523-6957, www.frankbettecenter.org

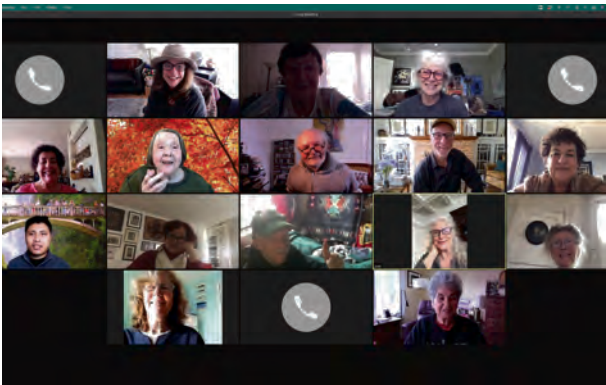
painting and photography.

And perhaps one of the most important skills for cognitive health, learning a new language, is available at such places as local senior centers and Alameda’s Bay Language Academy.

No, it’s not too late to learn like a child. More students are underscoring the importance of learning new skills, for fun, cognitive

improvement, and in some cases, for profit.

“At the Community Living Campaign, we are dedicated to enhancing neighborhoods, and one of the best ways to do that is through classes, from tech to cooking to dance parties,” said Patti Spaniak of the Community Living Campaign. “The neighborhoods in San Francisco



MARINA LAZZARA

have such different flavors, and we see too much isolation in older adults. We are dedicated to helping older adults age in place and avoid isolation.”

One of their classes is “Writing for Remembering,” taught by Marina Lazzara, who has a master’s degree in poetry and a strong desire to keep older adults connected to each other and their own pasts.

While there are several other popular memoir writing workshops offered through Community Living Campaign, Lazzara’s is somewhat fast-paced. She gives the students a prompt, then 12 minutes to write a few paragraphs about it. Then a brave volunteer or two reads their writing in class, and it is discussed, often prompting lively discussions.

The class was held on Zoom during the pandemic and Lazzara hopes to be back in person soon, or in a hybrid capacity, so some of her East Bay students can attend.

In fact, the class has been so successful that Lazzara is putting the final touches on a book of the published memoirs.

“Everything in life is a prompt,” she said. “If you don’t think you have something to say, you’re wrong.”

Speaking of something to say, Essia Bouzamondo-

Bernstein encourages expressing it — in as many languages as possible. The founder of Alameda-based Bay Language Academy likes to mix the ages in her classes, feeling like people can learn different things from other generations.

“It is so enriching to teach 20-year-olds up to 80-year-olds,” she said. “Our oldest student is 83.”

She stresses that learning a new language sparks neurological connections in the brain and improves cognitive abilities. She said she should know — she’s a former cognitive scientist herself.

“We live in a beautiful melting pot here,” she said. “I started teaching my native French, but have since branched out to other languages, including Italian, Russian Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese. Mandarin and Cantonese are very different, but most Americans don’t realize it.”

She is slowly easing back in to in-person classes, but still offers online classes as well.

“Like learning a different cultures, I have to be mindful of our changing social needs,” Bouzamondo-Bernstein said.

When it comes to art, no one who owns a cellular telephone realizes quite what they hold in their hand. Sure, it’s a small computer,

but it is also eyes to the world. Or so says award-winning iPhone photographer Amy Patick, who teaches at the Frank Bette Center for the Arts.

“While this class isn’t specifically for older adults, we have many retirees who are interested in learning more about what they can accomplish with their phones,” she said.

She developed a curriculum, iPhone Photography 101, and has seen the results develop into something even she couldn’t have imagined.

She gives her students a half-hour assignment to go out and take pictures, then the magic really happens.

“I teach them how to do simple editing, work with filters, give a photo a different artistic flair,” she said. “When we were growing up, we had to make sure every picture was perfect. Now, I teach that every picture you take, edit it. We show one or two photos on a screen, and I show how easy it is to make it their own artistic masterpiece.”

There have been some bumps along the road, like one student who couldn’t “swipe” at all.

“That was challenging. I realized a lot of older adults either press too hard or too soft. ... It’s just gaining muscle memory,” Patick said.

Some of her students have learned so well and have been confident enough to enter some of their more artistic iPhone photos in photography contests, as well as sell their art.

“They are amazed that they can do that with just an iPhone,” Patick said with pride.

It’s a similar sense of pride that artist Emily Weil feels when she sees the results of her “non-traditional” painting classes, also offered through the Bette Center. Her students range from those with an artistic background to older adults who want to develop a new hobby.

“I want people to ‘color outside the lines’ a little,” Weil said. “Many people come in with a little experience and thinks there is only one way to paint watercolors. I try to teach them to be a little less rigid, not to try so hard, to have fun. ... My goal is to have people tap into what’s inside of them, their creative center.”

Weil notices the younger people have more of a drive to produce something, but that some of the older adults in her classes welcome the opportunity to be a little more daring in their approach.

“We emphasize the process, not the result,” she said. “As we grow older, I think we give ourselves more permission to part ways with the ‘right’ way to do things.”

Weil has found her older students are open and more relaxed, just loving to learn.

“It’s a great energy to be around,” she said.



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Planning cautiously for longer financial futures

By Matt Villano

Older adults these days are living to be a lot longer than they did in the past.

According to the World Bank, the average American lifespan is 78.79 years, the second highest it's been at any point in modern history (second only to 78.84 in 2014).

This means older adults get more time with loved ones and more time to live out the dreams they had for their lives. It also means they are needing to save more money and plan for a longer time in retirement.

Many Bay Area accountants and money managers report that older adults should save for anywhere from 20 to 30 years of retirement — a tall order considering the costs of living and health care today. This, they say, is what makes financial planning now so important to paving the way to a smoother retirement and beyond.

"It was always important to plan ahead, but now you've got to plan better and longer," said Stephen De Martini, principal of De Martini & Company, an accounting practice in San Mateo. "You could look at it as getting prepared for dying, or as having enough to enjoy the last years of living."

MANAGE THE BASICS

There are several basic financial issues older adults need to manage to put themselves in a position of strength.

First on the list: Social Security.

More than 65 million older adults in the United States receive these benefits on an annual basis, but many older adults aren't leveraging the money to the best of their abilities. Put differently, there are special considerations for married couples, widows or widowers and former spouses that can have a significant impact on Social Security benefits.



SHUTTERSTOCK

As American live longer, financial planners recommend preparing for 20 to 30 years of retirement.

Despite consistent threats to dismantle Social Security, most financial experts say they don't expect the U.S. government to go bankrupt, and advise older adults to plan on the program being there when they need it.

"You definitely want to stay on top of Social Security," De Martini said. "That can be a decent benefit, depending on a person's situation."

Another important issue to monitor: Retirement accounts. Many older adults who spent their working years in traditional jobs signed up for 401(k) plans and other pre-tax savings accounts that may be eligible for liquidation after a certain age. It's important to keep tabs on these accounts and know when it's safe to access funds without penalty.

BIGGER-PICTURE ISSUES

Financial planners say there

» **"It was always important to plan ahead, but now you've got to plan better and longer."**

Stephen De Martini, principal of De Martini & Company, an accounting practice in San Mateo

are several larger issues that older adults need to monitor as they think about managing their money later in life. Brad Ledwith, principal at Ledwith Financial Wealth Management in Morgan Hill and a Certified Financial Planner, said the central themes with anybody over 65 is to avoid the risk of loss and to have enough of a nest egg to provide for long-term care.

"What I mean by avoiding risk of loss is that people want to make sure they have enough of a financial cushion to cover a big loss in the stock market — just like what happened to many people in 2008," Ledwith explained.

He noted that one of the ways retirees and other older adults can avoid this travesty is by diversifying their portfolios and spreading their retirement across accounts to minimize exposure to a downturn.

Put differently, he said one mistake he sees older adults making is that they take too much risk.

"You've got to operate under the assumption that every five years we're going to have a down year and you have to be prepared for that, whatever it means," Ledwith said. "If you are a senior and you go down more than you should, it effects your stress level and health and it be-

comes all you think about. Nobody should have to live that way."

Gregg Clarke, CEO and founder of Meritas Wealth Management in Larkspur, agreed with the basic premise of Ledwith's argument and noted that many older adults should start saving earlier to maximize performance of the market. He said this is another way for older adults to make sure they can afford long-term care.

Clarke suggested that older adults consider investing in long-term care insurance, but he noted that it's not always the first choice to manage care costs anymore. He noted that a newer and increasingly popular option is to take out a reverse mortgage and utilize the equity in a home to provide financial cover for long-term care costs. These work just like regular loans with the equity as collateral.

"There was a time when nobody would consider something like a reverse mortgage later in life," he said. "Now, the feds guarantee lenders will get their money back so it's more viable for everyone involved."

THINKING ABOUT THE GRANDKIDS

For those older adults with grandkids, another consideration is a legacy gift.

For some, this might be planning to sock away money to help defray college tuition. For others, it might be saving cash for the intergenerational vacation of a lifetime. Clarke said that if this sort of expenditure is important, older adults should start planning for it as soon as possible.

"The truth is that with preparation, you can essentially put yourself in a position to have the money for anything," he said. "The more that older adults can plan ahead, the better they'll be down the road."

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Caring for older adults requires patience, strength

By Matt Villano

There may be no harder job in the world than caring for a parent who is ill or in the latter stages of life.

The setup is a constant struggle, a rollercoaster ride of emotions and experiences that require strength and patience non-stop. Some days are great. Some days are difficult. The only certainty: It's never easy.

With the costs of end-of-life care options continuing to rise, there certainly are a lot of us acting as caregivers these days. According to a 2020 report from AARP, more than 41.8 million Americans have provided unpaid care to an adult 50 or older in the last 12 months.

Here in the Bay Area, Lauren Ahlgren and Vicki Tomiser are part of this group. Both women live in Sonoma County, and both take care of their mothers full-time. Ahlgren is in her 30s, Tomiser is in her 50s. And though the women don't know each other and never have met, the two report similar realities, hardships and perspectives they leverage to stay focused on the positives in life.

"This is without question the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," said Ahlgren, who lives in Healdsburg. "She was my mother. Now it's like I'm hers."

The 33-year-old Ahlgren has cared for her 71-year-old mother for more than five years. Her mother has early-onset Alzheimer's Disease, and Ahlgren said the situation has gotten more difficult as her mother's condition has become more serious.

Ahlgren said her mom started showing symptoms about 10 years ago.

» "It's really frustrating a lot of the time to see someone you've known your entire life act completely different and incapable of many things they used to be capable of."

Lauren Ahlgren, on caring for her 71-year-old mother who has Alzheimer's Disease

Recently, Ahlgren hasn't been able to leave her mom alone for more than a few hours.

That's not to say it's all bad. Ahlgren noted that her mother does have moments of lucidity — often surrounding memories connected to emotion. For instance, Ahlgren might have to ask her mom eight times to turn off a light, but she can tell her mother once that they're headed out of town together and her mom will fixate on the trip because she knows it will make her happy.

"Her reality is so different from ours," said Ahlgren, who is blogging about the experience for Redwood Caregiver Resource Center in Santa Rosa. "So much of this process is remembering that."

Of course, managing her mother is only one of the stressors on Ahlgren. She is a full-time swim instructor and manages part-time gigs as a baby-sitter.

Beyond this, Ahlgren doesn't have much time for a personal life. She notes that she isn't thinking about dating right



PHOTOS BY LAUREN AHLGREN

Above: Peggy Rapport celebrates her daughter, Lauren Ahlgren's 3rd birthday. Ahlgren, who is now 33, has cared for her 71-year-old mother for more than five years. Below: Rapport poses with a bouquet of flowers.

now, and that if she's lucky, she finds time to see her best friend, who lives down the street.

Discussing the situation with Ahlgren is sobering — she isn't necessarily sad, but she also admittedly is getting to the point where she needs a change. Her mother's doctors say her mother is in great physical health, which means the current situation could drag on for another decade or longer. Ahlgren said she simply can't do it that long, and eventually may move to find a memory care facility

for her mom.

"It's really frustrating a lot of the time to see someone you've known your entire life act completely different and incapable of many things they used to be capable of," Ahlgren said. "It's a long drawn-out death, and we don't know whether it's going to end in 2 years or 20."

On most days, the situation is lighter at Tomiser's house.

The 57-year-old is a full-time caregiver for her 82-year-old mother, who suffers from a host of chronic physical ailments but has experienced no drop-off in mental acuity.

Back in 2017, Tomiser bought her Santa Rosa house specifically to care for her mom; with a bedroom and bathroom adjacent to the kitchen on the ground floor, the house is perfect for Tomiser's mother to do everything she needs without having to climb the stairs.

Perhaps the best part of the setup: The relationships that have evolved as a result.

Tomiser is a single mother herself, so when she has custody of her 12-year-old daughter, the girl gets to bond with her grandmother. On weekends, the trio often films videos titled, "Sundays with Nanna."

"I am consistently blown away by the beauty of my daughter and my mother together," said Tomiser, who works in the wine business. "On my worst days, when I'm feel-



ing overwhelmed by work or life or being a caregiver in the first place, I feel like the universe gives me this gift of the two of them just laughing."

Transitioning into her new role as caregiver wasn't without difficulty for Tomiser.

She remembered back to one of the first nights after her mother moved in; Tomiser was out drinking with a friend and her mother called around 7:30 p.m., to share that she didn't think Tomiser should be out too late. The two spoke briefly, then Tomiser's mother called again an hour later.

"By 9 p.m. I was home sending my friend a text that read, 'I think I'm grounded,'" Tomiser remembered. "The mothering thing doesn't stop,

even though I've mentioned that I'm the one mothering her."

Tomiser admitted that she never pictured herself as a full-time caregiver to her mother, and said she recognizes this is reality for now. At the same time, Tomiser said she tries to keep a positive attitude and accept that her mother likely won't be around forever.

"We have a good line of communication. We joke a lot. We get fiery with each other. Sometimes she gets mad at me. Sometimes I'll get mad at her back," Tomiser said. "No matter how frustrating this can get, no matter how hard it might feel sometimes, I recognize I'm getting extra time with her and am thankful for every minute."

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Social media offers connection, escape

By Peggy Spear

If you're a TikTok user, you are familiar with the Dancing Grandmas. But even if you've never logged on to that particular social media site, these ladies of a certain age may be making their moves across local and nation news channels alike. A trio of older women from Winnipeg, Canada, became overnight TikTok sensations after creating videos to make their grandkids laugh.

According to CBS News, in September, 74-year-old Lois Kreutzer and her sisters, Donna Emes and Wendy Dreger danced to the 1962 hit song "The Loco-Motion" by Little Eva and posted it to the account @oldlady152. That video now has five million views on TikTok and counting.

Meanwhile, in Fort Myers, Fla., 93-year-old grandma Marie Frances O'Brien, known as "Fran" or "Fran the Hip Gram" on TikTok, is dancing her way into the heart of millions online. At the age of 15, she would perform in shows for WWII servicemen and she told a Fort Myers newspaper she has been dancing ever since. This time, it was to cheer up her daughter, who was undergoing treatment for lymphoma.

These dancing queens may epitomize the new world of social media, at least for aging baby boomers and the Greatest Generation, who may not have touched a computer until mid-life. While TikTok may remain the bastion of younger folks, connecting on Facebook is one of the most popular pastimes for older adults.

"Older adults turn to social media for the same reason that every adult does, because it's engaging, informative and social," said Suzanne Myklebust, a spokesperson for Senior Planet and Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), sponsored by

» **"Older adults turn to social media for the same reason that every adult does, because it's engaging, informative and social."**

Suzanne Myklebust, a spokesperson for Senior Planet and Older Adults Technology Services

AARP. "It's also an easily accessible way to stay in touch with loved ones, which has been significant as the pandemic has forced so many older adults to be locked down for months at a time."

According to the Pew Research Center, as more Americans have adopted social media, the social media user base has also grown more representative of the broader population. Young adults were among the earliest social media users and continue to use these sites at high levels, but usage by older adults has increased in recent years. In fact, about seven in 10 older adults 70 and older, have clicked with social media.

According to the Pew study, Facebook and YouTube are the most popular platforms, with Instagram and Pinterest gaining in popularity.

And as the Dancing Grandmas have proved, even TikTok has spiked some older adults' interest.

"I watch it for the videos, it's fun," said 63-year-old grandma Suzanne Soberanes of Walnut Creek. She admits she likes to stay in tune with what her granddaughters are doing. "I like the funny stuff, and the dances."

But Soberanes, like fellow Walnut Creek resident Sanjiv Chawla, 68, primarily uses Facebook to keep in touch with



SENIOR PLANET

The Senior Planet Exploration Center in Palo Alto and most senior centers in the Bay Area offer computer training classes. Currently, the Senior Planet classes are offered online only.

family members. They have both also joined Instagram for the same reason. Even Chawla's 93-year-old mother Pushpa, who lives in India, uses Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, a messaging app often used for international communication. He said Pushpa also takes her internet usage even further, learning about and teaching herself about art.

"She is truly amazing," Chawla said.

But both Soberanes and Chawla have the same concerns about social media that many people do: the plethora of disinformation that Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites have faced.

"When it's used right, it's great to connect with people," Soberanes said. "But when it's used in ways to influence people to believe things are not true, and create unrest ... it's very negative."

Chawla agreed. "There are lot of conspiracy theories and news that is not from proper sources," he said.

Also, young children should be monitored for how much time they spend online.

"I worry about my grandkids being bullied on social media," he confessed.

One other issue is the learning curve. Using computers is not intrinsic to older adults and as it has been for millennials and Gen Z.

Soberanes, 63, who joined Facebook six-to-seven years ago, mainly taught herself how to use the app, but she did have help from her daughter and granddaughters. She picked it up easily and is now mastering Instagram.

And let's not forget the millions of older adults who learned Zoom, Google Meet and other conferencing applications, to stay in touch with family, friends and telehealth medical providers during the heart of the pandemic, and even now.

Still, Myklebust is wary of older adults relying on kids and grandkids to train them to the level of computer and smartphone use and interaction that may be the new normal.

"Traditionally, older adults have learned from their family, friends and grandchildren, but we see this as an unsustainable process," Myklebust said.


Teaching someone about something they know little to nothing about can take a tremendous amount of time and patience — something a lot of teens don't have, she said.

"A long and arduous process like that can lead to feelings of frustration, causing people to drop whatever they're learning, never return to it and leaving a bad taste in their mouths," she said. "That frustration can also lead to unnecessary tension between loved ones."

That's why organizations like Senior Planet and other senior learning websites like AARP exist, Myklebust said. Also, many to most senior centers in the Bay Area offer some sort of computer training.

"As an organization, we're not only making this a learning process that's efficient and effective but one that's also fun and interactive," she said.

And who knows. Although Soberanes said she likes social media to stay current, watch funny videos on TikTok, enjoy Pinterest and get together for Happy Hours with her friends on Zoom, she may be the next Dancing Grandma. Stay tuned!

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LAURA MORTON

Chef and cookbook author Cindy Pawlcyn sits at Mustards Grill, which she opened in 1983. She supervises seasonal menu updates at the Yountville restaurant.

Pioneering chef continues to overcome challenges

By Carey Sweet

Longtime restaurateur Cindy Pawlcy is used to challenges. Since forming a catering business out of her family's Minnesota kitchen at age 13 then opening her first restaurant at 28, she has overcome professional and personal obstacles that might crush even the strongest spirit.

Except today, at 66, she can look at that original restaurant, the legendary Mustards Grill

that still thrives in Napa after all these years, and proudly say: pretty much nothing can stop her now.

"Retire? Not yet," she said.
"That sounds boring."

Life has never been dull for the silver-haired, 5-foot-2-inch chef, who made her mark as a pioneer in Northern California's local and sustainable food movement. She studied at Le Cordon Bleu and La Varenne in Paris. She met Julia Child. To hone her culinary art, she

worked at top restaurants like the famed Pump Room in Chicago, San Francisco's MacArthur Park and Meadowood Resort in St. Helena.

At the time, she was a rarity in a male-dominated chef world and considered a risktaker for her global-inspired dishes like the Mongolian pork chops with housemade Chinese mustard that remains a best-seller at Mustards to this day.

After debuting *Mustards*, she opened more than a dozen

restaurants in partnerships and on her own, including San Francisco's iconic Fog City Diner. She became a celebrity, twice being nominated for the James Beard Foundation award for Best Chef: California, plus three times for the Outstanding Restaurateur award.

Ever-busy, Pawlczyn also appeared in the first season of Bravo's "Top Chef: Masters" in 2009, and authored five cookbooks, including the James Beard award-winning "Mus-

tards Grill Napa Valley Cookbook."

Yet amid all the accomplishments, for the past two decades, the chef has lived a life worthy of a dramatic, often frightening movie. In 2000, she narrowly avoided a horrific car crash in Mill Valley, when a speeding driver smashed into a car ahead of her, causing several vehicles to flip over around her.

In 2009, a kitchen fire caused \$100,000 in damages to



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Left: A stack of vintage cookbooks donated to chef Cindy Pawlcyn sit on a countertop at Mustards Grill in 2020. Pawlcyn lost her home, as well as her incredible collection of 3,800 cookbooks, in the Glass Fire. Colleagues and strangers donated cookbooks to help restart her collection. Right: Pawlcyn makes her "Mighty Meatloaf" dish with horseradish barbecue sauce, along with chef Pablo Jacinto in 2009 at Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen in St. Helena.

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Mustards, closing the place for more than a week. And in 2014, she suffered 22 serious fractures when her Lexus collided head-on with a Chevrolet that swerved into her lane on Highway 12/121 near Napa's Domaine Carneros winery. She was hospitalized for 15 days, and spent four months in a wheelchair.

Her husband and the driver, John Watanabe, now 74, was also injured, suffering a broken hand, a kneecap fracture and shoulder trauma. A 4-year-old in the Chevrolet was killed, and the child's mother and the driver were seriously injured.

"The car crash changed my ability to work on the line in the kitchen," Pawlcyn said, reflecting how she was unable to stand up. "But it never affected my love of the restaurant, or the wonderful people that work there."

In between the uproar, she opened and closed multiple restaurants in Napa Valley, including Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen (2002-2018), and Go Fish, which opened as a sushi spot in 2006, then morphed to the Mediterranean-themed Brassica in 2011, then changed yet again to Cindy Pawlcyn's Wood Grill & Wine Bar in 2012, before closing for good in 2014.

Things were quieter until October 2017, when the Valley Fire threatened Mustards' rural site just north of Yountville, knocking out power and closing the restaurant off-and-on.

And then the pandemic hit, unleashing all the cruelty that was 2020. That spring, Mustards' business dropped 90%, and Pawlcyn was forced to cut her staff of 70 to just four. That August, an employee tested positive for COVID-19, and the restaurant was shuttered for several weeks for health safety.

Pawlcyn remembers how concerned staff openly wondered if this, finally, would send the chef into retirement.

"COVID and my age made them think I should stay away," she said.

Still, the Gods weren't done with her yet. Just one month later, the Glass Fire roared in, destroying her St. Helena hillside home of 31 years. She and Watanabe fled at 4 a.m., scrambling out with just their vanilla Labrador, Hiro, a computer and some dog food.

Gone: her gorgeous kitchen anchored by an enormous, tiled Moorish-style oven where she roasted whole pigs and lambs; treasured artifacts and furnishings from her travels around the world; and lavish culinary gardens. Heartbreakingly, the flames consumed her cherished collection of 3,800 cookbooks, including first-edition cookbooks signed by luminaries like Julia Child and James Beard.

These days, however, Pawlcyn still chooses to focus on the wonderful side of life.

"The fire was a setback," she said. "I can't deny it. We were going to rebuild, but fell in love with a house in town and just made the change."

She is still amazed at how the Wine Country community pitched in to help over the next months. One highlight was donations of thousands of rare cookbooks from hundreds of friends, restaurant customers



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and even her own employees.

On June 16 this year, Mustards celebrated its 38th anniversary. Guests now relax in the dining room and on an expansive new outdoor seating area. Staff is back to near-normal numbers. And Pawlcyn is back in the kitchen, supervising seasonal menu updates and other creative tasks.

"Now that I'm vaccinated, the team lets me hang out and

talk about food, service and what we are doing moving forward," she said.

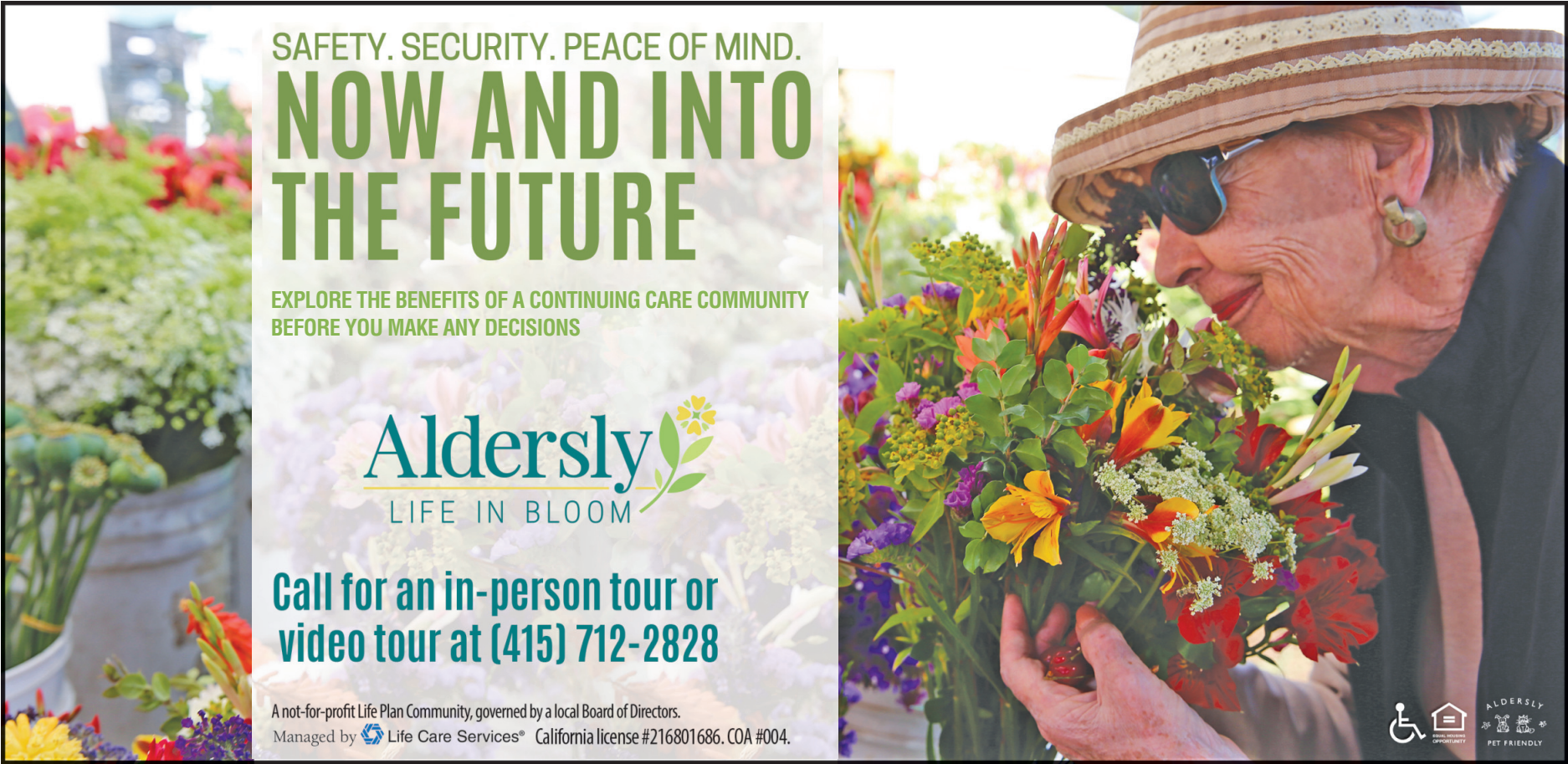
It's been an intense journey from that time when the teen chef was testing her skills with her nascent Peapod Catering — it should be noted that her first customers were the King and Queen of Sweden, who were visiting the Queen's cousin in Golden Valley, a western suburb of Minneapolis.

But through it all, Pawlcyn has kept true to her roots, and her love of local, seasonal, delicious food.

"One of my earliest memories is of sitting in the backyard garden in Minneapolis with a saltshaker while my dad picked perfectly ripe tomatoes hot off the vine," she said. "I can still taste the fresh, warm red flesh seasoned with a sprinkling of salt."

Her vision keeps her grounded, through the most exciting — daunting — times.

"My passion for seasonal, farm-fresh flavors has never waned," she said. "Through all those years in school, college, training in France, stints in other chefs' kitchens, transplanting to the West, and all the sweat and tears of running my own restaurants ... I'm still just a kid in a tomato patch."



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