



IN THIS ISSUE: 'Barefoot Empress,' Parking Lot Scams, Dementia-Fighting Diets, Senior Playgrounds, Visalia Gleaning Seniors, Cartoonist Jerry Van Amerongen

The Good Life

News, Health & Leisure for South Valley Adults 50+ • Volume X, Number 1 • May/June 2023



The new Family HealthCare Network adult day care center in downtown Visalia is expected to open in summer 2024.

Construction Underway on FHCN Adult Day Care Center

By Steve Pastis

Construction has started on Family HealthCare Network's 25,000-square-foot adult day-care facility in downtown Visalia.

"We anticipate that it will open in the summer of 2024," said Kerry Hydash, president and CEO of FHCN.

The project will use all of the 1.75 acres on the block surrounded by Murray Avenue, Tipton Street, School Avenue and Santa Fe Street, with the two-story building facing Murray Avenue. The property will have enough parking for 101 vehicles.

The large day center room on the first floor will be surrounded by activity rooms, a memory care activity room, physical therapy rooms, offices, a kitchen, a salon, examination rooms, private therapy rooms and consultation rooms. The second floor will include a conference room, break room and additional offices.

The facility will offer dental services, x-ray services, nutrition counseling and physical therapy. Transportation to and from the center will also be offered.

"The community is aging and has new clinical needs so it makes sense to do this," said Hydash.

The large room on the first floor of the center will also be used to host events.

"We've talked about bringing speakers in and we've talked about bringing activities in," said Hydash, adding that one possibility is having seniors who take advantage of the cen-

ter's programs make presentations that share their skills.

"We're brainstorming a lot of ideas for making this a place for a lot of individuals to go," said Hydash.

The facility was designed by EBM Design Group, Inc., a Visalia-based architecture firm whose portfolio includes the Kaweah Health Urgent Care facility in Tulare, Hanford Veterinary Hospital, Dinuba Transit Center, Tulare County Library, Kings Rehabilitation Center, and Phases III, IV and V of the Tulare Outlet Mall.

Elder Abuse Awareness Month to be Observed in South Valley

June is World Elder Abuse Awareness Month, and the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency (HHS) is participating by encouraging community members to Wear Purple on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), June 15, to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day was launched on June 15, 2006, by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations. The purpose of WEAAD is to provide an opportunity for communities around the world to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes that affect it.

To honor the 1,469 seniors in Tulare County who reported some form of abuse last year, HHS will be planting purple flags on the lawn at Tulare



Purple flags will fly at Government Plaza for the entire month of June.

County Government Plaza on Mooney Boulevard in Visalia.

Purple, traditionally associated with royalty, dignity and respect, was chosen as the color to describe elders and community members are encouraged to wear purple in support of prevention of elder abuse and neglect. The purple flags will fly at Government Plaza for the entire month of June.

In 2022 in Tulare County, prosecutors filed 33 felony counts and 17 misdemeanor counts of elder and dependent adult abuse. Tulare County Dis-

(continued on page 20)

CSET Reopens Woodlake Senior Center

By Larry Kast

Grace Villarreal looked around the new Woodlake Senior Center and smiled.

"I kept asking when it was going to reopen," she said. "I like the dancing for exercise, and the art."

On March 27, Villarreal and a couple of dozen other Woodlake seniors came to the new Woodlake Senior Center at 145 N. Magnolia St. for a grand reopening by Community Services Employment Training (CSET), which manages the center and seven others in Tulare County. Many in attendance had been regulars at the Woodlake Senior Center at one of its two previous locations in town. But while the new center has amenities the other locations did not offer, it is a somewhat smaller space and one that is shared with the Woodlake Boys and Girls Club. The youngsters take over the building at 2 pm



CSET held a grand reopening for the Woodlake Senior Center on March 27.

once the older crowd's day is finished.

"I loved the painting," said Gloria Ramirez, who like Villarreal was one of the regulars in attendance before COVID closed the centers in March 2023. "I'm looking forward to painting again, and bingo, and dance for exercise."

Seniors will get the oppor-

tunity to do all that and more with the expanded hours now offered. Stacy Dirker, the new senior site lead for CSET who manages the center, said the hours will be from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm Monday through Friday. Previously the center was not open on Thursdays.

"We're going to do bingo, (continued on page 20)

Tulare County Health Officer Dr. Karen Haught Retires

Tulare County's Health Officer, Dr. Karen Haught, retired as the county's top health official on March 17, following a career in public service spanning over 20 years.

Dr. Haught joined the Health & Human Services Agency in 2002 as the medical director for Tulare County's health clinics and California Children's Services Program. She was appointed health officer in 2006, where she most recently provided oversight and guidance in the local public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It has been an honor to serve the residents of Tulare County as a member of the Tulare County Department of Public Health, and I have deeply appreciated the leadership and commitment from our Public Health staff as we have worked together over the years," said



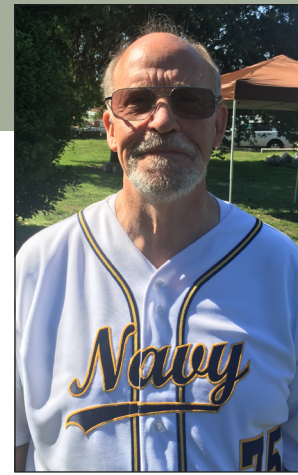
Dr. Karen Haught

Dr. Haught.

As the county recruits the next Tulare County Health Officer, current Deputy Health Officer Dr. Thomas Overton will respond to health officer matters.

VETERANS CORNER

California College Fee Waiver Program



Ken Cruickshank

Are you aware of the California College Fee Waiver (CFW) Program, an education benefit available to the spouses and children of U.S. veterans through the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet)?

The Fee Waiver runs through the academic year, beginning each fall semester. Once eligibility criteria are met, dependents can get their tuition fees waived when attending any California community college, California State University or University of California campus.

So, who is eligible, and what are the criteria? The state offers Plans A through D, but here we will focus on Plans A and B.

Plan A: You must be the spouse, registered domestic partner (RDP), child or unmarried surviving spouse of a wartime veteran who is totally disabled due to a service-related illness or injury, or who has died from a service-connected cause or any dependent of a former POW or veteran who was declared MIA.

Under Plan A, there is no income limit, but the child of a veteran must be between 14 and 27 years of age (up to age 30 if the child is also a veteran). There is no age limit for a spouse or RDP. This benefit is only available to students who are eligible for Chapter 35 VA benefits if the Chapter 35 benefit is waived. Additionally, surviving spouses or RDPs must not have remarried. The veteran's date of death or date of 100% disability rating must have occurred before the child's 21st birthday.

Plan B: You must be the child of a veteran who has a permanent service-related disability or who had a service-related disability at the time of death, or who died from service-related causes.

Under Plan B, there is no age limit, but the child's income plus the value of parental support must not exceed the federal poverty level of \$15,525 (this figure may be adjusted annually). The academic year benefit is based on the previous year's annual income.

This benefit can be used in conjunction with Chapter 35 benefits; wartime service is not a requirement, and the benefit is only available to the children of a veteran. To document the child's income, you may use a copy of the current year's income tax return (either the 1040 or the 540) or a letter of non-filing provided by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS usually starts issuing these letters after June 15 of each year. Be advised that without your meeting all the requirements, we cannot process the request.

Applications are available here in the Veterans Services office. You can also download it from www.tchhsa.org/vso and follow the California Fee Waiver link. Once completed, return the application to us, along with proof of income (if enrolling under Plan B) and proof of your relationship to the veteran (such as a copy of your birth, marriage or domestic partnership certificate).

Once the CVSO receives all the required information, a letter will be emailed to you, and you need to take it to your school.

Ken Cruickshank, the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County, is a retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer. Contact him at the Veterans Services Office at 3348 W. Mineral King Ave., Visalia; by phone at (559) 713-2880; or by email at kcruicks@tularecounty.ca.gov

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My Voice Media Center Helps Local Seniors Cope

By Larry Kast

As Mental Health Awareness Month, May is a time to raise awareness of and reduce the stigma surrounding behavioral health issues, as well as highlight how mental illness can affect all of us - patients, providers, families and society at large.

A local program is about to celebrate its tenth year of providing residents with a unique approach to coping with the struggles of mental illness. And while it is open to anyone ages 18 and up, most of the participants are over the age of 50.

My Voice Media Center began in 2014 and is a collaboration between the Arts Consortium, the mental health division of the Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency, the California Arts Council and the Tulare County Board of Supervisors.

"This is where you can spend your time making friends and meeting new people," said Halonnah Hope Kay, project coordinator for the Visalia Arts Consortium. "We want you to just enjoy your session and your time here."

The program offers a variety of art classes, ranging from painting, guitar, drawing, printmaking, video and photo editing, as well as topics such



Participants in the painting class learn several techniques and get the chance to work on projects.

as "art and feelings." Instructors are either professional artists or college educators who help participants learn various techniques that improve their skills. And while it is not professional therapy per se, there is a benefit that comes from expressing oneself creatively through the arts.

"Our main goal is to reduce the stigma of mental health in general, and let participants express themselves through art," Kay said. "They learn about themselves and who they want to be. And they tend to stay on that path toward recovery. But we aren't a counseling service, we aren't qualified to do that."

Art therapy began in Europe in the mid-1900s and is most

often attributed to British artist Adrian Hill, who is believed to have coined the phrase "art therapy" in the 1940s. While its initial use was largely with tuberculosis patients, it has since expanded to aid in the treatment of many disorders, including mental illness.

A study to determine the effectiveness of art therapy found that one of the populations gaining the greatest benefit was the elderly.

There are about 50 participants who regularly attend My Voice Media Center classes, which are offered free of charge. Class sizes typically range from two to 15 participants. Even supporters and loved ones

are able to attend, making up anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of attendees. The only requirement is that participants register to attend, and sign a code of conduct and release forms.

Unlike courses found at community colleges or adult schools, the classes have no beginning or ending date, and participants are welcome to come as often and for however long they would like. Even participation isn't required.

"We've had some come in that day and say they just needed someone to talk with and not participate that day," Kay said.

My Voice Media also has the No Stigma Speakers Bureau, where attendees can listen to the stories of those affected by mental illness, whether it is told by those struggling with a diagnosis, a family member, friend or loved one. According to the website, the bureau has trained individuals of lived and shared mental health experiences in various disciplines, alongside people from the general public. The main goal is to help diminish stigma and discrimination toward individuals with mental challenges.

"We understand caretakers need care too," said Ampelio (continued on page 18)



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Inspired by his father's work serving patients in a rural medical clinic, Dr. Sy-Siong followed his footsteps into a career helping others smile. "My patients are the best part of what I do. I love working with and caring for them," he says.

Dr. Sy-Siong offers general dental care for the entire family, including treatment for dental pain, periodontal disease, fillings, simple extractions and dentures, as well as dental health exams and oral health consultations.

Dr. Sy-Siong is accepting new patients and looks forward to serving the Tulare community!



Link Found between Eye Damage and Alzheimer's

Cedars-Sinai investigators have produced the most extensive analysis to date of changes in the retina – a layer of tissue at the back of the eye where visual information originates – and how those retinal changes correspond to brain and cognitive changes in Alzheimer's disease patients.

Their analysis, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Acta Neuropathologica*, is an important step toward understanding the complex effects of Alzheimer's disease on the retina, especially at the earliest stages of cognitive impairment. Experts believe this understanding is key for the development of more effective treatments that could prevent progression of the disease.

More than 3 million Americans are diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease each year. The disease progressively destroys memory and cognitive ability. Currently, there is no single diagnostic test that can definitively diagnose a patient with Alzheimer's disease.

"Our study is the first to provide in-depth analyses of the protein profiles and the molecular, cellular and structural effects of Alzheimer's disease in the human retina and how they correspond with changes in the brain and cognitive function," said Maya Koronyo-Hamaoui, Ph.D., professor of Neurosurgery, Neurology



Maya Koronyo-Hamaoui, Ph.D.
(Photo courtesy Cedars-Sinai)

and Biomedical Sciences at Cedars-Sinai, and senior author of the study. "These findings may eventually lead to the development of imaging techniques that allow us to diagnose Alzheimer's disease earlier and more accurately, and monitor its progression noninvasively by looking through the eye."

"The retina, a developmental extension of the brain, offers an unparalleled opportunity for affordable, noninvasive monitoring of the central nervous system," said Yosef Koronyo, MSc, research associate in the Cedars-Sinai Department of Neurosurgery and first author of the study. "And with the help of our collaborators, we discovered the accumulation of highly toxic proteins

in the retinas of patients with Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment, causing severe degeneration of cells."

Investigators looked at retinal and brain tissue samples collected over 14 years from 86 human donors – the largest group of retinal samples from human patients with Alzheimer's disease and mild cognitive impairment thus far studied. They compared samples from donors with normal cognitive function to those with mild cognitive impairment at the earliest stages of Alzheimer's, and those with later-stage Alzheimer's disease dementia.

The investigators explored the physical features of the retinas of these patients, measuring and mapping markers of inflammation and functional cell loss, and analyzed the proteins present in retinal and brain tissues.

In the retinas of patients with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease, investigators found:

- An overabundance of the protein amyloid beta 42, which in the brains of Alzheimer's patients clumps together to form plaques that disrupt brain function;
- Accumulation of amyloid beta protein in ganglion cells, the cells that bridge visual input from the retina to the optic nerve;
- Higher numbers of astrocytes and immune cells, called microglia, tightly surrounding

amyloid beta plaques;

- As many as 80% fewer microglial cells clearing amyloid beta proteins from the retina and brain; and

- Specific molecules and biological pathways responsible for inflammation, and cell and tissue death.

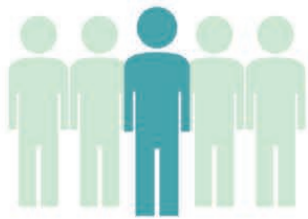
"These changes in the retina correlated with changes in parts of the brain called the entorhinal and temporal cortices, a hub for memory, navigation and the perception of time," said Koronyo.

Retinal changes also correlated with the pathological stage of Alzheimer's disease (called Braak stage) and patients' cognitive status. And they were found even in patients who appeared cognitively normal or very mildly impaired, marking them as a possible early predictor of later cognitive decline.

"These findings give us a deeper understanding of the effects of Alzheimer's disease on the retina," said Keith L. Black, MD, chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and the Ruth and Lawrence Harvey Chair in Neuroscience at Cedars-Sinai, and a co-author of the study. "Because these changes correspond with changes in the brain and can be detected in the earliest stages of impairment, they may lead us to new diagnostics for Alzheimer's disease and a means to evaluate new forms of treatment."

Mental illnesses are common and are treatable.

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If someone poses a danger to him/herself or others or needs emergency help, call 911. Ask for an officer trained in CIT.

New Report Finds Growing Caregiver Burden in California

The Alzheimer's Association's 2023 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report finds that the burden on California Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers remains significant. The report shows there were an estimated 1,374,000 dementia family caregivers across the state in 2022, providing 1,864,000,000 hours of unpaid care valued at \$44,277,000,000.

The new report also reveals that California caregivers and those across the country face significant emotional, physical and health-related challenges as result of caregiving as well, including:

- Dementia caregivers report higher rates of chronic conditions, including stroke, heart disease, diabetes and cancer, compared to caregivers of people without dementia or non-caregivers. In California, 61% of caregivers reported at least one chronic condition.

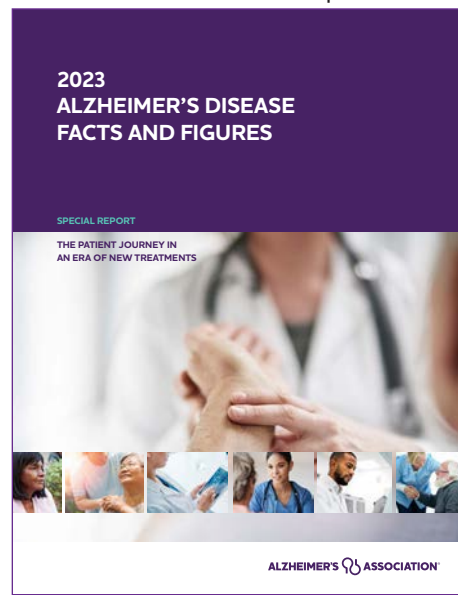
- The prevalence of depression is higher among dementia caregivers when compared to caregivers for other conditions. In California, 18.6% of caregivers reported depression.

- Seventy-four percent of dementia caregivers report they are "somewhat concerned" to "very concerned" about maintaining their own health since becoming a caregiver. In California, 13.1% report frequent

poor physical health.

- Across the country, 59% of dementia caregivers report high to very high emotional stress due to caregiving, and 38% report high to very high physical stress due to caregiving.

"This year's Facts and Figures report underscores the considerable physical and emotional toll California caregivers experience when caring for someone living with Alzheimer's," said Meg Barron, MA, regional leader and executive director of the Alzheimer's Association California Southland Chapter. "It clearly underlines the need for caregiver support in California. The Alzheimer's Association offers free local support throughout our state including support groups, education as well as the Association's 24/7 Helpline. This



support can be a lifeline to caregivers."

Support for Caregivers

- Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800-272-3900;

- Visit www.alz.org to learn more about Alzheimer's disease, research and resources; and

- AlzConnected, a free online community designed for people living with dementia and those who care for them.

The Walk to End Alzheimer's

Everyone across Tulare and Kings County is encouraged to participate in the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's, the world's largest event to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support and research.

The Walk to End Alzheimer's Tulare & Kings County takes place on Sunday, August 20, at Valley Strong Ballpark, 300 N. Giddings St., Visalia. Registra-

tion for the walk is at alz.org/walk.

On Walk Day, participants honor those affected by Alzheimer's with the poignant Promise Garden Ceremony – a mission-focused experience that signifies solidarity in the fight against the disease.

"We need all of Tulare and Kings to support this great cause," said Barron. "Alzheimer's is a progressive, fatal disease and, although there is no cure, we are fighting until there is one."

To register and receive the latest updates on this year's Walk to End Alzheimer's, visit alz.org/walk. To reach the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline, with services available in more than 200 languages, call 800-272-3900. The Helpline will also connect you to local support resources.

The Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association is a worldwide voluntary health organization dedicated to Alzheimer's care, support and research. Its mission is to lead the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia – by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Its vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia.

For more information, visit alz.org.



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Artist rendering of Mulligans, the indoor golf venue currently under construction in downtown Visalia.



Mulligans will feature seven bays with golf simulators, including two with curved screens, such as the one pictured above.

Mulligans to Bring Indoor Golfing to South Valley

Golfers in the South Valley will soon have a place to play a full round of golf without having to walk the complete length of a golf course, and without the weather being a factor.

A new 8,500-square-foot indoor golf course is currently under construction inside of the former Main Street Theatre, which for years presented productions by the Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company in downtown Visalia.

The venue will feature seven bays with simulators, which will allow golfers to "play" any one of 92 actual courses on Mulligans' large screens. The simulators will offer views from the most prestigious courses around the world, including Pebble Beach and St. Andrews.

If someone happens to be

"playing at" the St. Andrews course in Scotland, for example, they will know if their ball successfully made it over the bridge.

Two of the simulators feature 21-foot-long curved screens. The other five have 16-foot-long standard wide screens. Golfers stand in front of the screens and hit a real golf ball into them.

"The technology will pick up the bend in the shaft and the speed of the swing," said Shane Moss, president of Mulligans, adding that the player will know how far and where the ball would have landed on a real course - even if the ball hit a tree.

One of the bays will be upstairs and feature a 1,000-foot simulator.

"It will fit up to 50 people," Moss said, adding that the bay will be able to accommodate bachelor parties and corporate events.

Mulligans will also include a restaurant and bar.

The downtown Visalia project is "a pilot," according to Moss.

"Our goal is to have four or five locations, including Fresno, Clovis, Bakersfield and maybe Hanford," he said.

As of early May, Moss and his partner, Scott Wright, have applied for a conditional use permit. The chairs of the former theater have already been removed and sand has been brought in to level out the floor.

"We're working toward opening in December," said Moss, but he added that Febru-

ary or March of 2024 might be more realistic. The downtown Visalia location limits the use of trucks in the construction.

"We're forced to do a lot of late night work," said Moss.

The planned construction is limited to the inside of the building. The outside will only have minor changes, such as the marquee.

Moss expects Mulligans to host league nights and tournaments.

"We're definitely open to a senior league or tournament if there are people who are interested," he said.

Memberships will be available and "we'll do discounts for seniors, the military and retired military," Moss said.

Mulligans will be located at 307 E. Main St. in Visalia.



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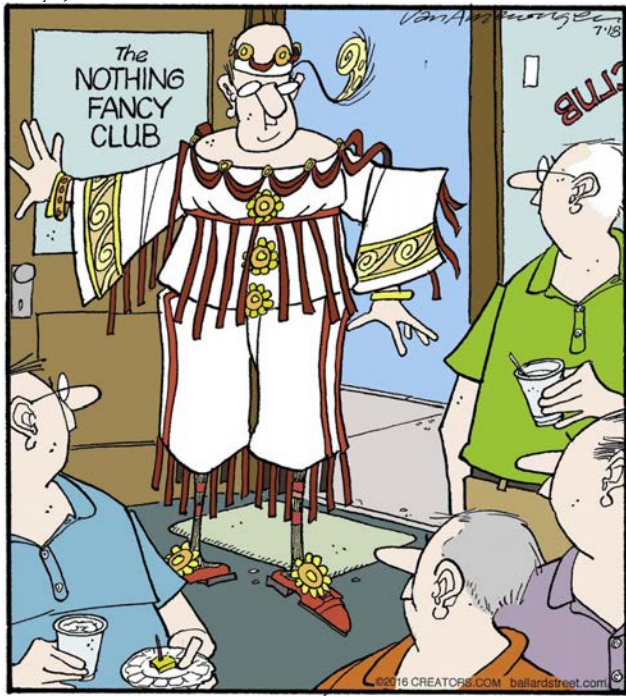
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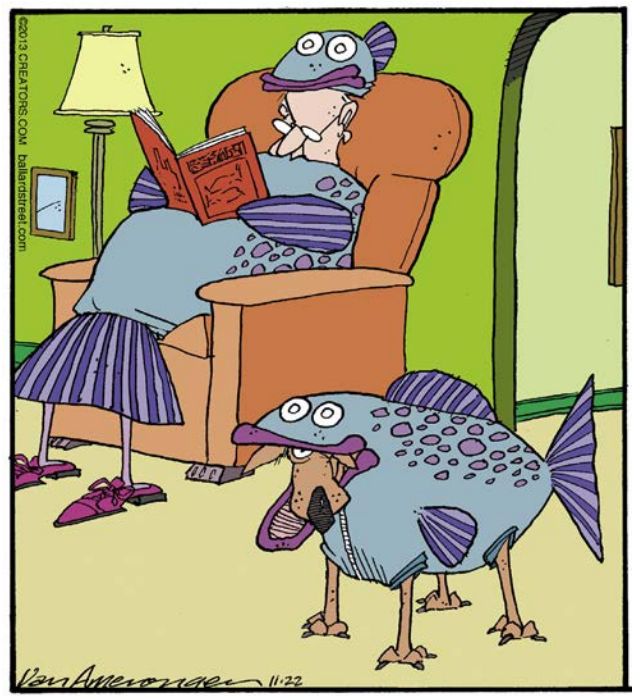
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Neal could tell right away he was out of place.



Mr. Neeley isn't aging all that gracefully.



Reggie pays a price for Bob's interest in fish.

Van Amerongen's Comics Feature Eccentric Seniors

"Most cartoonists ignore the graphic possibilities of the comic strip, but Jerry Van Amerongen understands that a picture can be the funniest part of the story."

— Bill Watterson
Creator of 'Calvin and Hobbes'

By Steve Pastis

The first thing one notices when talking to cartoonist Jerry Van Amerongen is how calm and friendly he is, a major contrast from the frenzied and moody characters that he is best known for in his comics, "Ballard Street" and "The Neighborhood."

Many of his characters are eccentric and almost all of them are elderly, something that was quickly noticed by the seniors who first saw his work.

"Real early on, people said, 'You're picking on us,'" Van Amerongen told *The Good Life*, adding that the criticism soon subsided.

He describes his comics as "taking a slice of life."

"You can look at a cartoon and tell what they did before we took this 'slice of life,' and you know what they are going to do after," he explained.

Van Amerongen's Dutch and Polish family roots have influenced his characters.

"Both sides were all large women with print dresses and men whose midribs got away from them," he said.

"Craggy features are just my style," he added. "I can't draw pretty or fashionable, but I can control facial features and body postures to a minute degree."

Very little of his work is about his life or people he knows.

"Every once in a while, my wife would say something that was tailor-made for a cartoon and I would draw that," he said.

Curmudgeonly and Named 'Scooter'

Van Amerongen loves dogs and as a result, they are often featured as the main characters in his comics.

"I've always had a dog," he



Jerry Van Amerongen hard at work.

said. "I have a dog right now. They are wonderful to draw. I have always been interested in the interaction between a pet owner and a pet."

He said that the dogs he draws tend to be "curmudgeonly" and are very often named "Scooter."

Becoming a Cartoonist

Van Amerongen was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he first developed an interest in cartoons.

"In our house when I was growing up, we had publications like *Esquire*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's* and *Life*," he said. "Most of them had gag cartoons in them. I must have been taking it in more than I thought."

When it came time for Van

Amerongen to pursue a career, however, "cartoons were off the radar." He earned a two-year associate degree in commercial art and used his education to work for an ad agency in Denver, "knee-deep in corporate America."

"I spent six or seven years kicking around Denver, which is not what you would call 'an ad town,'" he said.

"The thing I could do best was humorous drawing," he said.

After 17 years working in "corporate America," Van Amerongen became a cartoonist. He was 40 at the time.

Van Amerongen found himself working for *Hill & Lake Press*, a community newspaper in the Minneapolis area, where

his career as a cartoonist began.

"Everyone seemed to like what I was doing," he recalled.

The Minneapolis Tribune started a feature called "Neighborhood Scene" in its Saturday morning edition. His cartoons seemed to be a perfect fit.

He was soon signed by King Features Syndicate. He would go on to become part of Universal Press Syndicate, a subsidiary of Andrews McMeel Universal, which would publish books of his cartoons.

Van Amerongen drew "The Neighborhood" for ten years, starting in 1980. His comic "Ballard Street" followed, running from 1991 to 2019. It started as a strip, but became a single panel comic like "The Neighborhood" in 1993 - a format much more suited to his humor.

Van Amerongen received the National Cartoonist Society Newspaper Panel Award for "Ballard Street" in both 2004 and 2006.

Many collections of his work have been published over the years. Most recently, *Ballard Street Redux: The Comic Art of Jerry Van Amerongen* was published by Tesora Books last summer.

His work is currently distributed by Creators Syndicate, which has an archive of his work at www.creators.com/features/ballard-street.

'Retirement'

Van Amerongen is 82, but, "I don't feel it."

He is supposedly retired now, but it's hard to tell by his schedule.

"I stay busy with painting and just life in general," he said. "I'm happy where I'm at."

"I've been mostly painting for the past few years - plein air landscape painting," he said, adding that he is beginning to also do some cartoon faces, "but I'm trying to do them in a painterly way."

He recently started contributing his cartoons to *Hill & Lake Press* again, mainly work focused on issues of importance to local readers.

Parking Lot Scams

By Dr. Sherry McCoy, Ph.D.
Stop Senior Scams Acting Program

If you're like me, you've had enough of being cooped up with the cold, winter weather, and are chomping at the bit to get outside and enjoy the spring sunshine! But a note of caution - while we're out there frolicking in the beautiful spring weather, let's remember to be mindful that just about everybody likes the springtime - even scammers! Yes, even scammers.

And most recently, their fraudulent schemes are targeting seniors outdoors - in parking lots. So, let's educate ourselves, and take a look at what some popular parking lot scams look like.

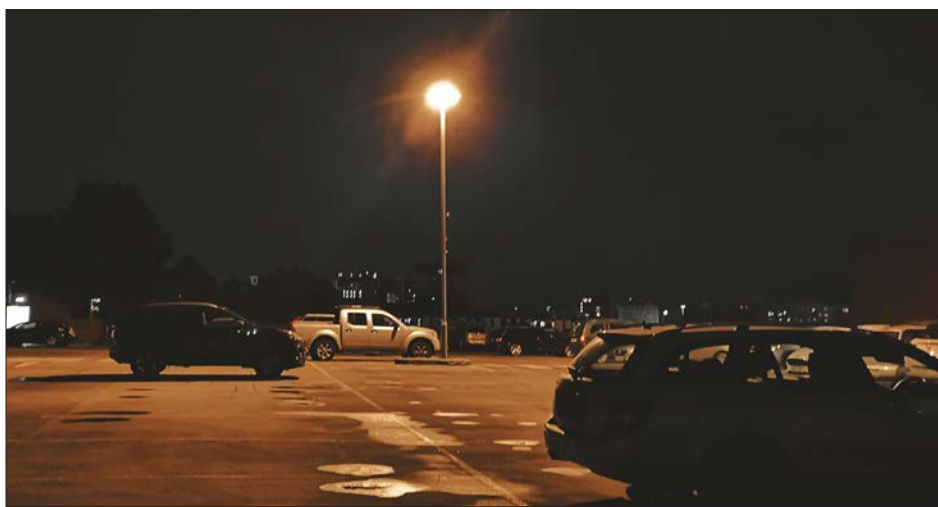
The Overly Helpful Stranger

A friend of mine told me how a relative of hers - a woman in her mid-80s - was recently the target of a scam in a grocery warehouse parking lot in West L.A.

Jane (*not her real name*) had just purchased a number of items at the grocery warehouse and was pushing a fully loaded shopping cart to her car. As Jane opened the trunk of her car, she was approached by a younger woman who asked if she could help Jane unload her items. Jane declined the offer, saying she was fine and didn't need help. But the younger woman insisted and began helping Jane anyway.

After all the items were put in the trunk, the young woman told Jane she'd be glad to follow her home and help her take the groceries inside. Again, Jane declined this offer, saying thank you but no, that would not be necessary. Jane then got into her car and headed home. Once on the road, Jane noticed that the young woman was following her.

Fortunately, Jane lives in a gated community, so when she reached the guard at the gate, she told him not to allow the car behind her to enter the premises. He agreed. But the young woman who was following Jane, zoomed in behind her, with the gate "arm" coming down on the tail end of her car.



Undeterred, the young woman continued following Jane to her residence, where she helped Jane unload the groceries on an outdoor patio table. The young woman finally left after Jane refused to allow her to help bring the groceries inside her home.

This was a very scary situation, where Jane was basically accosted by an overly helpful, intrusively aggressive stranger in the parking lot of a major grocery warehouse. The scammer, posing as a helpful stranger, did everything she could to "help" Jane so that she could gain access to Jane's home. Fortunately, the scammer failed.

The Distraction Scam

Last November, I wrote about a friend of mine who was the victim of a "distraction theft scheme." My friend, Phyllis (*not her real name*), had gone shopping at a local grocery store and was in her car ready to leave for home, when she was approached by a nice-looking couple who asked her for directions. Phyllis rolled down the passenger window of her car to offer help. (*Note: Phyllis's handbag was on the passenger seat of her car.*) But the woman opened Phyllis's passenger car door and proceeded to open a map and place it over the passenger seat (and Phyllis's purse) to show where she and her husband wanted to go. While Phyllis was showing the woman how to get to the destination, the woman's husband was rifling through her purse.

Shortly after the couple left, Phyllis was driving out of the grocery store parking lot, when

she received an urgent phone call from her bank's fraud unit, notifying her that someone had tried to charge over \$10,000 to her credit cards! All charges had been denied, with the exception of one charge for \$1,600, which eventually was reversed. The thieves had stolen three credit cards from Phyllis. All three cards had to be cancelled.

Fortunately for Phyllis, her bank's fraud unit was on the ball!

Hey! You Hit My Car!

The "Hey! You Hit My Car" scam often takes place in a parking lot. This is how it can play out - Scammers wait till you come out of a store, and then approach you, saying you hit their car when you parked next to them, or sideswiped their car when you drove into the parking lot. The scammer may show you "scratch marks" on your car that somehow match "scratch marks" on their vehicle as proof of the accident. Next, the scammer might suggest that you settle the situation without contacting insurance companies or the police, i.e., they'll take several hundred dollars cash from you, so your insurance rates won't go up, etc.

It's a strategy designed to make you doubt yourself and to instill fear and confusion, so you'll act quickly and not think clearly about what's really going on. It's a con job. Don't fall for it! Call the police instead.

How to Protect Yourself

One of the best ways to protect yourself from any scam that takes place in a public arena such as a parking lot is to remain mindful of your surroundings at

all times. Be present. Keep your mind focused on what you're doing in the moment.

Keep your attention on your purse / wallet when out in public. Keep your purse zipped closed. Wear a slash-proof, anti-theft, cross-body purse or fanny pack.

Try to go shopping or on walks with a friend or friends. There's greater safety in groups.

Be on the lookout for suspicious activity. Be aware. Notice vehicles that may be following you or look out of place. Call 911 if needed.

If you are the victim of a parking lot scam, report it immediately to the police.

Report parking lot scams to the manager of the grocery store or business where the scam occurred. They need to be alerted to the fact that a crime has taken place involving one of their customers on their property.

And finally, but most importantly, as our Stop Senior Scams Acting Program (SSSAP) Educator Ann Stahl has suggested, "Don't let your desire to be kind to strangers distract you from protecting yourself!"

Be empowered! Find your voice! Speak out about fraud!

Where to Report Scams

- Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357 or online at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#>
- For questions about Medicare fraud/abuse, call the Senior Medicare Patrol at 1-855-613-7080.
- U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging's Fraud Hotline at 1-855-303-9470.

Remember: You may be a target, but you don't have to be a victim!

This article first appeared in the March 2023 issue of Not Born Yesterday (NBY) at www.nbynews.com and is reproduced here with the permission of Dr. Sherry McCoy, Ph.D.; NBY; and the Stop Senior Scams Acting Program (SSSAP).

Dr. Sherry McCoy, Ph.D., is a freelance writer and actor for SSSAP in Los Angeles. Follow SSSAP on Facebook.

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At 83 years old, I am unable to maintain things the way I used to.

I highly recommend JC's Tree Service.

Gayle Segrue - Visalia

References Available

Juan Carlos Delgado

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APS Raises Awareness of Financial Exploitation of Seniors

(This is the third in a series of articles from the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency about supportive services for local seniors to appear in The Good Life.)

Each California county has an Adult Protective Services (APS) agency to help elder adults (60 years and older) and dependent adults (18-59 who are disabled) when these adults are unable to meet their own needs or are victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation. APS agencies investigate reports of abuse of elders and dependent adults who live in private homes, apartments, hotels or hospitals.

APS is responsible for seeking to protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect or financial exploitation, while respecting the rights of adults with capacity to self-determination.

Did you know California is in the top five states for elder fraud in total losses?

Californians lost nearly \$10.8 billion to elder financial exploitation, impacting over 11% of the elderly population. That is over 928,000 cases in total. California is home to 8.17 million individuals over the age of 60.

The most recent stats show that in fiscal year 2019/2020 financial abuse increased by

13%, from 13,157 to 14,783 cases. Elder fraud doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's widely acknowledged to be a growing problem; financial abuse has become rampant. Loneliness, social distancing, dependence on others, and the quick adoption of online banking technologies all contributed to the rapid growth of elder financial fraud as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created a shift in the financial industry that made older adults increasingly vulnerable to financial exploitation, according to a new report from AARP.

The study found that elder financial fraud by "trusted others" – family members, caregivers and friends – more than doubled, from 3.5% pre-pandemic to 7.5% during the pandemic. Fraud initiated by strangers also doubled to 57% during the early months of the pandemic, compared with prior years.

"We have seen an influx of financial abuse cases in our county," said Lisa Avila, unit manager of Tulare County Adult Protective Services and the Public Guardian Office. "During the pandemic, families practiced social distancing to keep their elderly loved ones safe and healthy, but during the distancing forgot to connect and

check in. This made our seniors vulnerable to the predators using social media and telephone calls.

"The isolation and loneliness has led our elders to believe these individuals care, and in return believe they owe it to them to gift them their property and life savings," she added.

Financial Scams Targeting Tulare County Seniors

- Elder financial abuse happens when someone the victim knows and trusts – like a family member, close friend or caregiver – tries to gain access to the senior's savings, credit or assets. They could trick their victim into signing over access or power of attorney.

- Romance scammers create elaborate fake profiles, often on social media, and exploit older adults' loneliness to get money. In some cases, these scammers may be (or pretend to be) overseas. They may request money to pay for visas, medical emergencies or travel expenses to come visit the U.S.

- Computer tech support scams usually involve a pop-up message or blank screen that appears on a computer or phone, telling the victim their device is damaged and needs fixing. When they call the support number for help, the scammer may either request remote access to the older person's

computer and/or demand they pay a fee to have it repaired.

- Gift card scams routinely involve callers, often from overseas, phoning victims and telling them they owe money for a debt or needed services, and that they should immediately go to a retail location to buy a gift card that can be used to pay off the purported obligation.

Know the Signs

- Sudden changes in bank accounts or banking practices, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the older adult;

- Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents;

- Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions;

- Provision of substandard care or bills left unpaid, despite the availability of adequate financial resources;

- Discovery of a forged signature for financial transactions or for the titles of the older adult's possessions; and

- Unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family.

If you or someone you know may have been a victim of abuse, you can contact the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency, Adult Protective Services at the 24-hour Abuse Hotline (877) 657-3092.

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Funding provided by private donations and a grant from the KINGS County Area on Aging and the California Department of Aging. To qualify participants must be 60+ years of age, requiring assistance with two or more activities of daily living.

Belle of the Ballpark Competition Highlights Opening Week

Visalia Rawhide celebrated Opening Week at Valley Strong Ballpark with fans enjoying baseball and senior ladies telling "Yo Mama" jokes.

April 12th was the second day of Opening Week as the Visalia Rawhide played against the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes (a Los Angeles Dodgers affiliate). Although it was an exciting game and the Rawhide's first win of the season, for many fans the highlight of the night was the Belle of the Ballpark competition.

The competition featured five contestants, one of whom was Bernie Watson, the reigning champ from 2019, the last time the competition was held.

Watson was back and ready to fight for her crown again.

The five beautiful contestants started the night off by being escorted onto the field by Visalia Rawhide players, followed by throwing the first pitches of the night. (All of the five Belle's pitches were called strikes.)

In the middle of the second inning, the Belles then strutted their stuff, showing off their best



2023 Belle of the Ballpark contestants, including this year's winner, Geraldine Oliver (at center about to throw a baseball), pose with their Visalia Rawhide escorts and Tipper, the team mascot.



2019 Belle of the Ballpark Bernie Watson competed again.

runway walks. After impressing the judges with their style and poise, they participated in a cheek-pinching competition.

Although some of the ladies apparently misunderstood which cheek they were supposed to pinch, they managed to keep everything PG.

The last competition the Belle's participated in was the "Yo Mama" joke contest. The ladies had not only the crowd but the players rolling with

laughter.

After the fans' and the judges' votes were tallied, the winner was announced. The 2023 Belle of the Ballpark was Geraldine Oliver.

Geraldine moved to California in 1959 to work with 20th Century. She is still active in the community as a process server and notary public. She has five children and 12 grandchildren with whom she loves to spend her free time.

Her favorite memory of baseball was when she was 10 years old and her father taught her how to pitch a softball. She fell in love with pitching after that and played for the family softball team at Plaza Park.

Geraldine is 84 years old and her life has revolved around baseball. Her grandfather built a "Field of Dreams" on his Quincy Farm, and whenever Geraldine drives by the Valley Strong Ballpark, home of the Visalia Rawhide, she fills with love and memory for not just her grandfather and his field, but also with the fond memories she has had working with the Rawhide in the past.

Based on the positive response from those in attendance, the Rawhide organization expects to continue the Belle of the Ballpark as an annual tradition. They are already starting to make plans for next year's event.

The deadline for the July/August issue is Thursday, June 15, 2023



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Senior Day in the Park Scheduled for May 5

"April Showers Bring May Flowers," the 51st Annual Senior Day in the Park, will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, May 5, at Mooney Grove Park. (The confirmation of the date came shortly after our previous issue went to press.)

Community Services and Employment Training (CSET) will host the event, which will

feature '50s music and dancing, food, games and exhibitor booths.

"This is the first Senior Day in the Park since 2019," said Angel Avitia, director of community initiatives for CSET. "We're really excited to bring it back."

For more information about Senior Day in the Park, call CSET at (559) 732-4194.

Education Summit & Senior Resource Fair on May 6

The NorthPointe Community Church Elder Care Ministry and AgeWell Fresno have partnered to bring a free Education Summit & Senior Resource Fair-proclaimed "All Things New" to the Fresno campus of NorthPointe Community Church on Saturday, May 6, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Education Summit will present three speakers, each on a subject that is practical, relational and inspirational. Sally Westlake of the California Department of Finance & Innovation will speak on protecting yourself from electronic fraud. Douglas E. Noll, J.D., M.A., will speak on how to de-escalate conflict in elder care in 90 seconds or less. Marlene Hubbell, Elder Care Ministry leader, will speak on turning purpose into your greatest legacy.

The Senior Resource Fair

will showcase almost three dozen Valley-wide organizations and senior living experts with the newest resources and information for elders, their families and caregivers, including HandsOn Central California, Resources for Independence Central Valley, Valley Caregiver Resource Center, Senior Care Home Services, and Catholic Charities Senior Companion Program.

Attendees will learn how to enhance their skills in elder care support, advocacy, compassion and generational impact.

The event will include NorthPointe's own house brand of Origin coffee, door prizes, and a catered BBQ tri-tip lunch by Fairwinds Woodward Park.

To register or for more information, visit: www.northpointe.org/event/education-summit-senior-resource-fair



Aging Network California to Host Professional Summit in Visalia

The Aging Network California will host the Inaugural Professional Summit for senior living professionals on August 22 in Visalia.

The goal of the event is to inspire, encourage and equip professionals with practical tools and expert insights to reach new heights in their personal and professional lives.

The keynote speaker will be Melanie Warner, author of *Defining Moments*.

Other featured speakers include Cindy Ames and Danny Hill who will share their insights

on shifting mindsets, achieving success through laughter and overcoming challenges.

The Professional Summit will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Wyndham Hotel, 9000 W. Airport Dr., Visalia. Early registration is \$65 per person (\$85 after June 15th),

For sponsorship opportunities, contact Rachel Reed at (559) 283-2576 or rreed@asuredsls.com.

For general information, contact Gina Kendall at (559) 351-1557 or gkendall@everlightcare.com.

Senior Health Fair in Hanford Set for May 26

The Kings County Commission on Aging Council will present this annual event, featuring a free pancake breakfast (from 9-10 a.m.), flu and COVID-19 shots, entertainment and informational services.

The event will be held on Friday, May 26, at the Hanford Civic Auditorium, 400 N. Douty, Hanford, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, call (559) 852-2828.



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CALENDAR

May 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 29, 31 - Senior/Adult Aerobics
City of Hanford Parks and Community Services hosts aerobics from 9-10 a.m. at Longfield Center, 560 S. Douty St. in Hanford, three days a week. The monthly cost for those 55+ is \$16. For more info, call (559) 585-2530.

May 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18, 23, 25, 30 - Zumba
City of Hanford Parks and Community Services hosts Zumba from 6-7 p.m. in Civic Park, 400 N. Douty St. in Hanford, twice a week. The monthly cost for those 55+ is \$16. For more information, call (559) 585-2525.

May 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18, 23, 25, 30 - Water Aerobics & Lap Swim
City of Hanford Parks and Community Services hosts these classes at The Hanford Plunge, 415 Ford St., Hanford, twice a week. For fee and other information, call (559) 585-2525.

May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 - Bingo
The Tulare Senior Community Center, 201 N. F St., Tulare, will host bingo starting at 1 p.m. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. For more info, call (559) 685-2330.

Thursday, May 4 - Cinco de Mayo Luncheon
This event will be held at the

Visalia Senior Center, 310 N. Locust St., Visalia, at 11:30 a.m. The cost for Visalia residents 55+ is \$6. Tickets must be purchased in advance. For more information, call (559) 713-4365.

Thursday, May 4 - "I Thought He Was My Ancestor: Avoiding the Six Most Common Genealogy Mistakes"
The Sequoia Genealogical Society will host this 6 p.m. presentation by genealogist James Baker. Refreshments will follow. The free event will be held at the Tulare Public Library, 475 M St. in Tulare. For more info, call (559) 685-4518.

Friday, May 5 - Senior Day in the Park
This event is scheduled at Mooney Grove Park, 2700 S. Mooney Blvd., Visalia. (See page 11 for more information.)

May 5-6 - Visalia Gleaning Seniors Yard Sale
Visalia Gleaning Seniors will host this sale from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Gleaner Yard, 28600 Road 156 in Visalia. For more info, call (559) 733-5352.

Friday, May 5 - Cinco de Zumba
Hanford Parks and Community Services will host this Zumbathon event from 6-9 p.m. in the Civic Auditorium, 400 N.

Douty St., Hanford. Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$15 the day of the event. For more info, call (559) 585-2525.

Friday, May 5 - The 5th Annual Tree to Table/Dinner in the Groves
This fundraising event for Farmer Bob's World will be held at Seven Sycamores, 32988 Road 164, Ivanhoe, from 5:30-8 p.m. Tickets are \$100 each. For more info, call (559) 798-0557.

May 5, 12, 19, 26 - Bingo
Bingo will begin at 6 p.m. at the Veterans/Senior Center, 401 N. Irwin, Hanford. Doors open at 3 p.m. For more info, call (559) 904-5019.

May 5, 12, 19, 26 - Friday Night Dances
The Tulare Senior Community Center, 201 N. F St., Tulare, will host this weekly event from 6-9 p.m. \$10 entry fee. May 2 is a Cinco de Mayo Celebration and May 9 is a Luau. For more information, call (559) 685-2330.

May 7, 14, 21, 28 - Senior Pride Bingo Sundays
This weekly event is held at the Visalia Veterans Memorial Building, 609 W. Center St., Visalia, Doors open at 12:45 p.m. For more information, call (559) 618-3221.

Friday, May 12 - "Once Upon a Dream"
CASA of Tulare County will host its annual gala dinner and auction, featuring a gourmet dinner by the Vintage Press, and live and silent actions, at the Visalia Convention Center. For more info, visit www.CASATulareCo.org or call (559) 625-4007.

Saturday, May 13 - Walk with a Doc
This informational walk and talk sponsored by Kaweah Health and held at Blain Park, 3101 S. Court St., Visalia, begins with registration at 8 a.m., followed by a warm-up at 8:15 a.m., and "Talk with a Doc" at 8:30 a.m. The topic this month is "Yoga Session." For more information, call (559) 624-2416.

May 13-14 - 68th Annual Woodlake Lions Rodeo
This year's rodeo will include new specialty acts, and the Annual After Party. For tickets or more information, visit www.woodlakelionsclub.com.

Tuesday, May 16 - Visalia Caregiver/Dementia Support Group
Quail Park on Cypress, 4520 W. Cypress, Visalia, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more information, call (559) 737-7443.

Thursday, May 18 - Tulare Caregiver/Dementia Support Group
The First Baptist Church, 469 N. Cherry St., Tulare, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more information, call (559) 737-7443.

Friday, May 19 - Hanford Caregiver/Dementia Support Group
The Remington, 2727 N. 11th St., Hanford, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more info, call (559) 737-7443.

Friday, May 25 - Senior Health Fair
The Kings County Commission on Aging will present

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Kings County Commission on Aging (559)852-2828

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CALENDAR

this annual event, featuring a free pancake breakfast, flu and COVID-19 shots, entertainment, activities and informational services. (See page 11 for more information.)

Monday, May 29 - Avenue of Flags

The Avenue of Flags, coordinated by a committee of local Veterans groups, will be held in the Pavilion at Visalia Cemetery starting at 10 a.m. Seating fills up fast so bringing your own lawn chair may be helpful. Flags are up by 8 a.m. and down by 4 p.m. For more information or to volunteer, call Bill Morland at (559) 300-2306.

June 1, 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, 29 - Water Aerobics & Lap Swim

City of Hanford Parks and Community Services hosts these classes at The Hanford Plunge, 415 Ford St., Hanford, twice a week. For fee and other information, call (559) 585-2525.

Thursday, June 1 - "The Kaweah Colony"

The Sequoia Genealogical Society will host this 6 p.m. presentation by author Corky Peterson about the utopian socialist community founded in 1886 near what is today Three Rivers. Refreshments will follow. The free event will be held at the Tulare Public Library, 475 M

St. in Tulare. For more info, call (559) 685-4518.

June 2, 3 - Visalia Gleaning Seniors Yard Sale

Visalia Gleaning Seniors will host this sale from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Gleaner Yard, 28600 Road 156 in Visalia. For more info, call (559) 733-5352.

June 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 26, 28, 30 - Senior/Adult Aerobics

City of Hanford Parks and Community Services hosts aerobics from 9-10 a.m. at Longfield Center, 560 S. Douty St. in Hanford, three days a week. The monthly cost for those 55+ is \$16. For more info, call (559) 585-2530.

June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, - Bingo

Bingo will begin at 6 p.m. at the Veterans/Senior Center, 401 N. Irwin, Hanford. Doors open at 3 p.m. For more info, call (559) 904-5019.

June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 - Friday Night Dances

The Tulare Senior Community Center, 201 N. F St., Tulare, will host this weekly event from 6-9 p.m. \$10 entry fee. For more information, call (559) 685-2330.

June 4, 11, 18, 25 - Senior Pride Bingo Sundays

This weekly event is held at the Visalia Veterans Memorial Building, 609 W. Center St.,

Visalia, Doors open at 12:45 p.m. For more information, call (559) 618-3221.

June 7, 14, 21, 28 - Bingo

The Tulare Senior Community Center, 201 N. F St., Tulare, will host bingo starting at 1 p.m. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. For more info, call (559) 685-2330.

Saturday, June 10 - Walk with a Doc

This informational walk and talk sponsored by Kaweah Health and held at Blain Park, 3101 S. Court St., Visalia, begins with registration at 8 a.m., followed by a warm-up at 8:15 a.m., and "Talk with a Doc" at 8:30 a.m. The topic this month is "Valley Fever." For more information, call (559) 624-2416.

Monday, June 12 - 10th Annual Golf Event

Hands in the Community is sponsoring this event at Tulare Golf Course. For more information, call (559) 625-3822 or visit www.hconline.org

Thursday, June 15 - Tulare Caregiver/Dementia Support Group

The First Baptist Church, 469 N. Cherry St., Tulare, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more information, call (559) 737-7443.

Friday, June 16 - Hanford Caregiver/Dementia Support Group

The Remington, 2727 N. 11th St., Hanford, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more information, call (559) 737-7443.

Saturday, June 17 - Legends of Motown

Perico Productions will present this 8 p.m. tribute show at the Visalia Fox Theatre. Tickets are \$45 to \$55. For more information, call (559) 625-1369 or visit www.foxvisalia.org.

Tuesday, June 20 - Visalia Caregiver/Dementia Support Group

Quail Park on Cypress, 4520 W. Cypress, Visalia, will host this 10:30 a.m. monthly session. For more info, call (559) 737-7443.

July 7, 8, - Visalia Gleaning Seniors Yard Sale

Visalia Gleaning Seniors will host this sale from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Gleaner Yard, 28600 Road 156 in Visalia. For more info, call (559) 733-5352.

Tuesday, August 22 - Professional Summit for Senior Living Professionals

The Aging Network California will host this event at the Wyndham Hotel in Visalia. (See page 11 for more information.)

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Diane Ramsey-Paige Fights for Rare Disease Community

By definition, the term "rare" implies something uncommon. When applied to diseases, it means a condition that impacts a small number of patients, usually fewer than one in 2,000. However, to have a rare disease, and the challenges it brings, is more common than many people may realize.

Diane Ramsey-Paige - a rare disease patient, caregiver, advocate and nurse for more than 40 years - knows this all too well.

Ramsey-Paige lives with two different rare blood disorders, and her youngest child has an ultra-rare immune regulation syndrome. Even with her training as a nurse and experience as a rare disease patient herself, navigating her son's rare disease journey was a challenge.

"Despite having a physician and advanced practice nurse for parents and being evaluated at a world-class medical center, it took quite some time to arrive at a diagnosis and a treatment plan for our son," said Ramsey-Paige. "Due to a variety of factors, this experience is unfortunately quite common among those with rare disorders."

A Calling to Help

A lack of education in the healthcare community and awareness about these rare conditions can delay time to diagnosis, just as it did for Ramsey-Paige's son. Some patients

can wait years or longer for an appropriate diagnosis, a process that can take a toll.

Other challenges include lack of available treatment once diagnosed, since 95% of rare diseases don't have an approved treatment. Often, even if there is an available treatment, patients may face financial difficulties or other access barriers to these life-saving therapies.

While these challenges can be frustrating, even for those skilled in navigating the medical system, Ramsey-Paige's experience motivated her to help others impacted by rare disease.

"I knew I could use my personal experiences, along with my training, to hopefully make a difference in the lives of people with rare diseases," she said. "And that's exactly what I've done."

Ramsey-Paige began her nursing career working at academic medical centers, eventually focusing on rare disease patients with unmet needs, including those with a rare, genetic disorder called hereditary angioedema (HAE).

Today, she uses her expertise as a Senior Global Nurse Advocate for BioCryst, a global biopharma company based in Durham, North Carolina, that develops novel oral medications for rare diseases, including HAE, where she's proud to work alongside others committed to



Diane Ramsey-Paige, rare disease patient, caregiver, advocate and nurse

addressing the needs of rare disease patients.

Important Lessons

Rare diseases impact about 5% of the worldwide population, so chances are, you may know someone with a rare disorder, even if you don't realize it. So here are a few things Ramsey-Paige wants everyone to know:

- A rare disease is something someone has, but it is not who they are. Some rare diseases require constant care and are readily apparent, while others can be more easily managed behind the scenes, but it is only one aspect of a person's life; it doesn't define them.

- Inequities only compound

the challenges many patients face. In addition to lack of awareness about the diseases themselves, there is also often insufficient understanding of the limitations faced. Proper accommodations in the workplace, at home, in educational settings and more can go a long way in helping those with a rare disease.

• Greater awareness and continued momentum are needed. "I've seen progress, however, there is still much to be done, including in the areas of policy and access, as well as advancing the science of rare disease," said Ramsey-Paige.

Rare Strength

Perhaps most importantly, Ramsey-Paige wants people to know about the rare disease community's strength.

"The rare community is incredibly strong and motivates me every day, from those bravely navigating their own rare disease journey to the caregivers taking on an often underestimated and underappreciated role," she said. "The efforts of each and every member of the community matter greatly, whether it's raising awareness, advocating for change or researching new treatments. Even one determined person can move mountains."

To learn more about rare diseases and the work being done to support the rare community, visit www.rarediseaseday.org.

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The Municipality of Sievi in Finland decided to invest in the well-being of its residents of different ages by investing in a well-equipped local sports and play park.

Does the South Valley Need a Senior Playground?

By Steve Pastis

Senior playgrounds are places where older adults can get exercise and fresh air while developing their strength and coordination. They are popular in countries such as China and Finland, and were slowly gaining popularity in the U.S. before the pandemic.

They are still few and far between in the U.S., however, to some degree as a result of people not understanding - or perhaps not agreeing on - what exactly a senior playground is.

"A senior playground is an outdoor space with beneficial, low-impact fitness equipment for older adults," explained Lindsey Stafford, marketing manager for AAA State of Play, which is based in Indianapolis.

"A senior playground encourages older adults to stay moving and get adequate exercise, while also enjoying the outdoors," she said. "It can be a great draw for communities with large populations of seniors, as it provides a place to come together, socialize and enjoy beneficial fitness experiences. A senior playground is much less intimidating than an indoor gym."

"Personally, I don't use the term 'senior playground,'" said Aarni Mertala, sport concept manager at Lappset, based in Turku, Finland. He prefers using terms such as "senior park" and "senior sport."



Lappset's Sona is a playground addition often used to get dementia patients out of social isolation to play outside together with their physiotherapist and memory trainer.

"The idea is to provide activities for elderly who might have lost some physical capabilities that younger adults have," he said. "Of course, we need to understand that this is not all together an age-related issue. Some younger adults are also struggling with daily activities. Walking ability - lower body strength combined with obesity - balance, coordination, mobility are also components of physical capabilities that will vanish if not used. If you don't use it, you lose it."

"Our outdoor fitness equipment is designed for all adults but we find that it is most beneficial for seniors," said

Stafford. "We've found that the design of the equipment, which only uses your body weight as resistance in most cases, makes physical activity more accessible to most seniors.

"That being said, we recently added a line of additional senior-specific fitness, or 'assisted fitness,' which includes some support rails and additional safety," she added.

Indoor vs. Outdoor

Senior playground equipment is different than indoor gym equipment.

"Unlike standard gym equipment, our options are designed to be outdoors," said Stafford. "They are made

from materials that withstand various weather conditions. Additionally, standard gym equipment can be dangerous or confusing for many people. The machines are not always easy to use. Our adult fitness equipment is meant to be intuitive and encourage movement with minimal resistance."

"The obvious difference is that our equipment is outdoors," said Mertala. "Being out in a fresh air is much more refreshing than indoor training. Probably our equipment concentrates more on balance, joint mobility and coordination than what is normally considered as 'indoor gym equipment.' In other words, in our equipment the body is used as a whole entity - like in everyday life - not doing only isolative movements for one muscle group at a time."

Most of the senior playground equipment from AAA State of Play are ordered by parks, cities, homeowner associations and assisted living facilities, according to Stafford.

"We've worked with a county health department as well," she added.

Lappset is new to the U.S. market and has not installed any senior fitness parks yet. The company has installed many playgrounds in Europe.

"Parks Departments are the biggest purchaser of senior fitness equipment," said

(continued on page 22)



The "Snake Bar" by Lappset helps develop coordination.



Seniors benefit from exercise on AAA State of Play's adult outdoor playground equipment.

QUAIL CORNER

Anxiety, Stress and Grief Can be Harmful to Your Health

Q&A with Kimberly Jensen

I am a 73-year-old woman who just lost her husband of 50 years, and I am having a difficult time getting up in the morning. My children say that anxiety, stress and grief can be harmful to my health, is that true?

YES! Many aging adults come face to face with changes such as loneliness and isolation once a spouse dies. It can cause stress, depression, anxiety and grief. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sees loneliness as a serious public health risk affecting a significant number of people in the United States and putting them at risk for memory disorders and other serious health conditions.

A report from the National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine points out that more than one third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one fourth of adults 65 and older are considered socially isolated.

When you are with your spouse, you have companionship and socialization. Your communication might diminish over time, but just having the companionship of another person in the home helps to make

you feel like you are not alone.

When your spouse passes away, you miss the communication that you had with him, but most of all, you will miss his companionship in the room. Having another person across the table from you while you have your meal or someone sitting next to you on the couch while you watch TV is a comfort to you. When that comfort is gone, you realize that you are alone.

Some individuals can feel lonely even if their spouse is still there with them. Every individual is different.

Loneliness creates anxiety, stress and depression, stressors that can put your health at risk. According to the CDC, these stressors can lead to smoking, obesity and physical inactivity, which can cause respiratory disease, heart disease, balance issues and cognitive decline.

Isolation has been associated with a 50% increase in risk of dementia, 29% increased risk of heart disease, and a 32% risk of stroke. Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 400% increased risk of death, 68% risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.



support group. Quail Park on Cypress has one that is open to everyone in Tulare County, on the second and third Wednesday of the month from 2-3 p.m. The address is 4520 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia. You do not have to RSVP, just come when you can.

If you enjoy art and music or if you want to hear uplifting speakers, check out the My Voice Media Center at the Art Consortium. (See article on page 3.) You can call them at (559) 772-0001 for more information.

If you were a church goer, get back to church. Make this an opportunity to volunteer your services and make new contacts and reconnect with old ones. You need that socialization to stimulate your mind. Get back to participating in life again. That will be the greatest gift you can give yourself and your family.

Kimberly Jensen has been working with Quail Park as a Senior Resource Advocate for over ten years and has helped hundreds of families find solutions to their senior problems. If you have a question, you can send it to her at Kimberly.J@QPCypress.com or call (559) 737-7443.

To reduce the potential risk of physical harm, speak to your doctor. Be honest about your anxiety, stress and depression. There are medications that may help you to get back on your feet again. Once you feel like your energy is coming back, get moving. Take small walks and get fresh air. Being outside will feed more oxygen to your brain. Walking will also strengthen your muscles and help with balance issues. Make your daily walks a routine that you do for yourself and your wellbeing.

Eat healthy food. Fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and chicken will give you most of the nutrients that you will need to feed your mind and body. Try to stay away from fried food, packaged food and canned food. Preservatives are NOT our friends.

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MIND and Mediterranean Diets Apparently Result in Fewer Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

People who eat diets rich in green leafy vegetables as well as other vegetables, fruits, whole grains, olive oil, beans, nuts and fish may have fewer amyloid plaques and tau tangles in their brain – signs of Alzheimer's disease – than people who do not consume such diets, according to a study published in the March 8 online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

The study examined how closely people followed the MIND and Mediterranean diets. While similar, the Mediterranean diet recommends vegetables, fruit and three or more servings of fish per week, while the MIND diet prioritizes green leafy vegetables like spinach, kale and collard greens, along with other vegetables. The MIND diet also prioritizes berries over other fruit and recommends one or more servings of fish per week. Both the MIND and Mediterranean diets recommend small amounts of wine.

While this study shows an association of fewer Alzheimer's disease plaques and tangles with regularly consuming these diets, it does not establish a cause and effect relationship.

"These results are exciting – improvement in people's diets in just one area – such as eating more than six servings of green leafy vegetables per week, or not eating fried foods – was associated with fewer amyloid plaques in the brain similar to being about four years younger," said study author Puja Agarwal, Ph.D., of Rush University in Chicago. "While our research doesn't prove that a healthy diet resulted in fewer brain deposits of amyloid plaques, also known as an indicator of Alzheimer's disease, we know there is a relationship and following the MIND and Mediterranean diets may be one way that people can improve their brain health and protect cognition as they age."

The study involved 581 people with an average age of 84 at the time of diet assessment who agreed to donate their brains at death to advance research on dementia. Participants completed annual questionnaires asking how much they ate of food items in various categories.

The participants died an average of seven years after the start of the study. Right before death, 39% of participants had been diagnosed with dementia. When examined after death, 66% met the criteria for Alzheimer's disease.

At autopsy, researchers examined participants' brains



The Mediterranean diet includes vegetables. Feta (also pictured) is considered the best cheese in this diet.

to determine the amounts of amyloid plaques and tau tangles. Both are found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease, but may also be found in the brains of older people with normal cognition. Researchers then looked back at the food questionnaires which were collected during follow-up and ranked the quality of diet for each person.

For the Mediterranean diet, there were 11 food categories. Participants were given a score of zero to 55, with higher scores if they adhered to the diet in these categories: whole grain cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, olive oil, fish and potatoes. They were given lower scores if they ate red meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products.

For the MIND diet, there were 15 categories. Participants were given a score of zero to 15, with one point each for 10 brain-healthy food groups including green leafy vegetables, other vegetables, nuts, berries, beans, whole grains, fish, poultry, olive oil, and wine. They lost a point if they ate foods more than

recommended in five unhealthy food groups, including red meats, butter and margarine, cheese, pastries and sweets, and fried and fast food.

Researchers then divided participants into three groups for each diet and compared those in the highest groups to those in the lowest groups. For the Mediterranean diet, people in the highest group had an average score of 35 while those in the lowest group had an average score of 26. For the MIND diet, the highest group had an average score of 9 while the lowest group had an average score of 6.

After adjusting for age at death, sex, education, total calorie intake and whether people had a gene linked to a greater risk of Alzheimer's disease, researchers found people who scored highest for adhering to the Mediterranean diet had average plaque and tangle amounts in their brains similar to being 18 years younger than people who scored lowest.

Researchers also found people who scored highest for adhering to the MIND diet

had average plaque and tangle amounts similar to being 12 years younger than those who scored lowest.

A MIND diet score one point higher corresponded to typical plaque amounts of participants who were 4.25 years younger in age.

When looking at single diet components, researchers found people who ate the highest amounts of green leafy vegetables, or seven or more servings per week, had plaque amounts in their brains corresponding to being almost 19 years younger than people who ate the fewest, with one or fewer servings per week.

"Our finding that eating more green leafy vegetables is in itself associated with fewer signs of Alzheimer's disease in the brain is intriguing enough for people to consider adding more of these vegetables to their diet," said Agarwal. "Future studies are needed to establish our findings further."

A limitation of the study was that participants were mostly white, non-Hispanic, and older, so the results cannot be generalized to other populations.

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health.

To learn more about dementia, visit www.BrainandLife.org, home of the American Academy of Neurology's free patient and caregiver magazine focused on the intersection of neurologic disease and brain health.

You can also follow *Brain & Life* on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The American Academy of Neurology is the world's largest association of neurologists and neuroscience professionals, with over 40,000 members.

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First Baptist Church, 469 N. Cherry St., Tulare Room #115, Tulare

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Instructor Olivia Garza assists a class participant with a plaster mask art project.

My Voice Media Center...

(continued from page 3)

Perez, executive director. "Although we don't require evidence of having a mental illness to participate, we ask how they have been affected by mental health. One in four people is affected by mental illness in some way. We are also in an area that is historically underfunded and underrepresented by care providers."

While the classes are not professional counseling sessions, there are opportunities for participants to schedule one-on-one sessions with a peer support specialist. Perez spoke about the path toward recovery some participants have been on.

"We've had people come in after years of having agoraphobia," he said. "They have even been coming in for years and staying on the fringe of participating. Then, sooner or later they would start collaborating and contributing."

"Our goal is to help diminish stigma and discrimination toward individuals with mental illness," according to the website. "Our passion is to transform pain into empowerment through sharing stories."

My Voice Media Center is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. To find out more, log onto www.myvoicemediacenter.com or call (559) 772-0001.

Most Americans Worry about Long-Term Finances

The majority of Americans don't think they can depend on Social Security for retirement income and worry about their long-term financial stability, according to the 2023 1Q Quarterly Market Perceptions Study from Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America (Allianz Life).

Nearly three in four (74%) say they can't count on Social Security benefits when planning retirement income. At the same time, 88% say it is critical to have another source of guaranteed income beyond Social Security benefits in order to have a comfortable retirement.

"Social Security benefits are often the backbone of a retirement strategy but it cannot be your entire strategy," said Kelly LaVigne, vice president of consumer insights at Allianz Life. "A strong retirement strategy will ensure you have enough guaranteed income to cover your essential expenses. That guaranteed income can come from Social Security benefits, along with other investments and protection products such as annuities."

Cautious about Investing

Fewer Americans worry about a major recession right around the corner (57%) than last year. Still, 41% say they are concerned they will be laid off because of an economic downturn in 2023.

In addition, most Americans are still very cautious about investing. More than half (63%) are keeping more money out of the market than they think they should and 62% would rather

have their money sit in cash than endure market swings.

More Americans are also expressing concern about their long-term financial health. For example, 78% worry that they might not be able to afford the lifestyle they want in retirement due to the increased cost of living.

This is up from 73% last quarter and 68% from first quarter 2022. Meanwhile, 66% worry that if they don't increase their retirement savings soon, it will be too late to have a comfortable retirement.

"A strong retirement strategy will address potential risks like inflation and taxes," LaVigne said. "You can't prepare for everything, but you can prepare for anything - if you start preparing for retirement early."

Gen X Also Worried

Gen Xers, people born between 1964 and 1978, are worried about their retirement and long-term financial stability.

- 43% of Gen Xers worry their employer will suspend their 401(k) match, compared to 38% of millennials (born between 1979 and 1996) and 24% of boomers (born between 1945 and 1963)

- 67% of Gen Xers say they are keeping more money out of the market than they should, compared to 66% of millennials and 54% of boomers

- 85% of Gen Xers worry that they might not be able to afford the lifestyle they want in retirement because of the increased cost of living, compared to 80% of millennials and 72% of boomers.



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96-Year Old First Grader the Hero of 'Barefoot Empress'

By Steve Pastis

"Barefoot Empress" is a 15-minute film about Karthyayani Amma, better known locally as Amma, a woman who lives in the village of Haripad in the Alappuzha district of India. As a young girl, she was unable to attend school but she never gave up on her dream of getting an education.

At the age of 96, Amma decided to achieve her dream by enrolling in first grade at the local school. Later that year, she was easily the oldest of the more than 40,000 students who took the fourth standard equivalent examination, which includes testing in reading, writing and mathematics. (Her great-grandchildren, 9 and 12 years old, helped her study.)

The result was that Amma scored 98 out of a possible 100 points, the top score among all students. She was named as a Commonwealth of Learning Goodwill Ambassador in 2019, and was awarded the Nari Shakti Puraskar by Indian President Ram Nath Kovind the following year.

Amma's story attracted the attention of director Vikas Khanna, who was able to inspire others to join the project.

"Vikas' grandmother didn't

have an opportunity for an education," co-producer Doug Roland told *The Good Life*. "He really felt compelled to tell a story that was close to his grandmother's story in India.

"He told me the story and I was intrigued," he added. "It just made sense for me to come in and get involved."

Roland quickly learned "that Amma's story isn't as rare as it should be. Girls disproportionately aren't able to get the same education that the boys are."

Roland first started "helping peripherally," bringing his experience as an Academy Award-nominated director (for the short film "Feeling Through") to advise the production as needed. His involvement in the film grew and he soon became a co-producer, with author and alternative medicine advocate Dr. Deepak Chopra serving as executive producer.

Roland considers Amma and women like her as "great role models because they defy people's expectations of what life is in your nineties."

Sadly, Amma has "physically deteriorated since the film," said Roland. "She has lived a very long life, a very difficult life, and her energy level has declined."



Karthyayani Amma, pictured with her young classmates, shows that it's never too late to achieve your dreams in "Barefoot Empress."

Amma's difficult life includes being married and having six children, becoming a widow, and working as a street sweeper and maid. The story of her life has become an inspiration to women to get back to school and further their education.

More importantly, the filmmakers have partnered with the nonprofit organization Leap to Shine to rehabilitate classrooms in India, and provide students with basic

educational supplies and healthy meals. The partnership also seeks to train girls in culinary skills (a career path with few barriers to women in India) to become financially independent.

"Barefoot Empress" has also become a movement to bring five million Indian girls back to school over a period of three years.

The film can be seen online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIPdBJSCWKU



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Attendees of the grand reopening of the Woodlake Senior Center on March 27 take a break from playing bingo to socialize and enjoy refreshments.

Woodlake Senior Center...

(continued from page 1)

cards, board games, arts and crafts, storytelling, and painting," said Dirker, who was excited about the day's attendance. Additionally, the center will offer lunch on weekdays at noon.

"Our intent (for the center) is to get it past where it was before," said Mary Alice Escarsega-Fechner, Executive Director of CSET who was on hand for the event. "The old building didn't have the creature comforts we all like."

While details were not available at press time, CSET plans to reopen the remaining closed senior centers in Lindsay, Exeter and Goshen in the next few months, according to Jerel Dutton, CSET's Assistant Director for Senior Services. But Villarreal is just happy the Woodlake Center is open again. "We were getting kinda bored," she said of the closure that lasted three years. "We even started going to the Visalia Senior Center just to have something to do."

Elder Abuse Awareness Month...

(continued from page 1)

district Attorney victim advocates served over 1,000 victims of the crime at various stages of the criminal justice process.

"This year looks like a return to form for TCDA outreach to our senior community," said Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward. "For the first time since the before the pandemic, our office will have a strong presence at Senior Day in the Park in May to meet with seniors and provide valuable resources on scams and other issues impacting the community."

"Throughout June, we will once again be hitting the air-

waves with our annual elder abuse awareness ads on TV and radio," he added. "We encourage any group or club focused on senior issues to contact us for presentation opportunities. Call the TCDA Victim Services Division at (559) 636-5471 to schedule. Our website (<https://tulareda.org/elder-abuse>) is also a great resource."

"If you suspect elder abuse, you can contact law enforcement or call the County Adult Protective Services toll-free, 24-hour-a-day hotline at 1-877-657-3092 to report confidentially," said Ward.

CDC Now Recommends Updated COVID-19 Vaccine

Following regulatory action by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken steps to simplify COVID-19 vaccine recommendations and allow more flexibility for people at higher risk who want the option of added protection from additional COVID-19 vaccine doses.

On April 19, CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) met to discuss these COVID-19 vaccine recommendation changes, and the associated implications and implementation. Although there was no vote at this meeting, ACIP members expressed their support for these recommendations.

CDC's new recommendations allow an additional updated (bivalent) vaccine dose for adults 65 years and older and additional doses for people who are immunocompromised. This allows more flexibility

for healthcare providers to administer additional doses to immunocompromised patients as needed.

Monovalent (original) mRNA COVID-19 vaccines will no longer be recommended for use in the United States.

Individuals ages 6 years and older who have already received an updated mRNA vaccine do not need to take any action unless they are 65 years or older or immunocompromised.

Alternatives to mRNA COVID-19 vaccines remain available for people who cannot or will not receive an mRNA vaccine. CDC's recommendations for use of (monovalent) Novavax or Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccines were not affected by these changes.

CDC and ACIP will continue to monitor COVID-19 disease levels and vaccine effectiveness and look forward to additional discussion around potential updates this fall.

Victim Advocate Promoted to Supervisor

Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward announced the promotion of long-time staff member Nicole Burnham to the position of Supervising Victim Advocate.

Burnham has served in the Office of the District Attorney since 2003. After supporting prosecutors in the office's juvenile division, she transitioned to the position of Victim Advocate specializing in serving victims of elder abuse.

During her time serving the Tulare County senior community, she worked with the county multi-disciplinary team



Nicole Burnham

serving elders and dependent adults and gave over 200 speaking presentations to seniors and caretakers about abuse and scams. In 2018, Burnham spearheaded the Tulare County Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Symposium that provided training to 125 participants serving


the elder community.

Burnham is also a trained handler for Fortune, the office's first courthouse comfort K-9.

As Supervisor, Burnham will oversee advocates trained in the Violence against Women Act, human trafficking, and elder abuse.

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The Visalia Gleaning Seniors are located at 28600 Road 156, just east of Visalia.



Members of the Visalia Gleaners include (left to right): Richard Celaya, Sofia Hernandez, Olivia Landaverde and Oscar Huezo.

Visalia Gleaning Seniors Serving for Nearly 50 Years

Tulare County is fortunate to have an abundance of food, and that's why it is called a breadbasket to the world. Unfortunately, the county is also known for its high poverty rate. Based on 2021 U.S. Census figures, nearly one in every five county residents live in poverty. And undoubtedly within that group some go hungry and regularly wonder about their next meal.

Government – federal, state, and local – does much to address the hunger problem through various assistance programs, and churches, community food pantries, rescue missions and other nonprofits do their part in the fight against hunger. One of these is the Visalia Gleaning Seniors. The group has been around for the last 47 years, but still many people don't know much about it.

The Visalia Gleaners began in 1976 and was patterned after a similar group in Sacramento. While Cal Dooley, the son of rural Visalia ranchers, Dick and Do Dooley, was attending college, he had heard about the work of the gleaners in the state capital. Dooley, who later was elected to the U.S. Congress and served for 14 years as our representative, wrote in 1992, "I originally discovered the idea of 'gleaning' while in college at the University of California at Davis.

"I was introduced to the Sacramento Senior Gleaners and felt that the idea could certainly work in Visalia. When I returned to the area after graduation, I approached Senior Center management. We held a couple of organizational meetings where we set objectives for the group." Thanks to Cal's impetus, the Visalia Gleaners was organized.

The idea of gleaning is not new, in fact it dates back to Biblical times when the



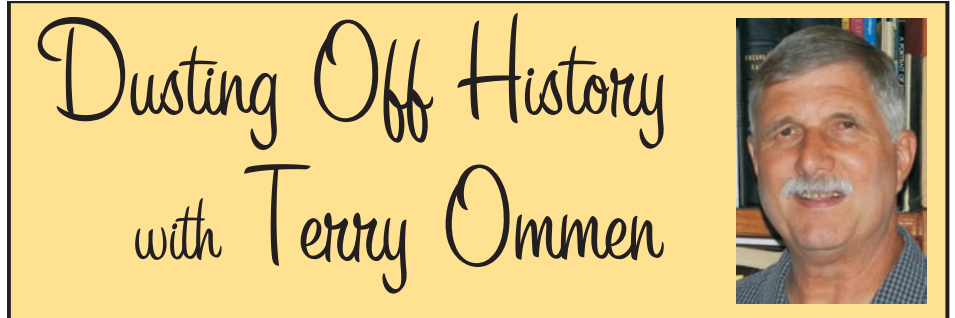
Cal Dooley brought the idea of the Gleaners to Visalia. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Congress)

poor were allowed to go into a farmer's field and gather up leftover food. By doing so, the poor were fed with food that would otherwise be wasted. Early in the program, Dooley helped connect farmers willing to share with the seniors. He wrote, "I was instrumental in the initial interfacing between the organization and area farmers. We first 'gleaned' apricots from Harold Griebler."

The Visalia Gleaners started at the Visalia Senior Center with a small group of workers including Carl Benc, Bob and Lee Hagen and Pearl Mathews.



Office Manager Donna Hall (left) and Treasurer Gayle Surratt of Visalia Gleaning Seniors.



Groups like the Visalia Chamber of Commerce and Visalia Volunteer Bureau were instrumental in the beginning.

Over the years, the group has operated out of several locations throughout Visalia, oftentimes requiring multiple spots. But in 2007, all that changed thanks to the generosity of the Visalia School District. The school property at 28600 Road 156 became home to the group and the Gleaners remain there today.

For nearly 50 years the Gleaners have experienced highs and lows. One exhilarating moment occurred in 1995 when founding member Annie Maye Hanna purchased a much needed nearly new 1994 Ford flatbed truck for the group. But in 2009, they hit a low point when someone destroyed the truck while trying to steal it.

But through all the ups and downs, the group fed the hungry and helped so many. In 2022, for example, the Visalia Gleaning Seniors gave away over 1.8 million pounds of food.

When the Gleaners first started, food came from farmers who allowed seniors to glean their fields. But today, due to liability concerns, seniors no longer go onto the farmer's land. Instead, they receive their food, mostly from retail stores and markets that have more food than they can sell. Thanks to their generosity the Gleaners consistently have more than enough food for their 311 members.

Some of the local retail markets participating include

Savemart, Winco, Best Buy, Walmart and R & N. They call them when they have food to donate and volunteers from the Gleaners pick it up. Foodlink also provides food to the group. If the Gleaners have any extra food, it is distributed to groups like the Rescue Mission and to the homeless. Food is rarely wasted.



Donna Hall, a retired Visalia city clerk, is currently the volunteer office manager and has been involved with them for the last eight years. She is committed to the organization's mission "to glean surplus food from every available source for distribution among the membership and other nonprofit charitable organizations in a fair and equitable manner."

Hall says the two biggest challenges the organization faces today is having enough cash to operate and finding enough volunteers to pick up and deliver the food. Even though everyone associated with the Gleaners is a volunteer and receives no pay for their work, the operation requires cash for various expenses like volunteer mileage reimbursement, office supplies and equipment repairs.

So the Gleaners gladly accept donations both in cash and saleable items that they can sell at their yard sales. The sales are open to the public and are held

(continued on page 23)

Senior Playground...

(continued from page 15)

Mertala. "Private senior centers also purchase the equipment. In addition to the fitness equipment, we also sell an interactive playground called the Sona that has been used at senior center facilities in the Netherlands."

Both AAA State of Play and Lappset help make it easy for a city, senior center or senior home to find funding for a senior playground (as do other senior playground equipment companies).

"We do an annual funding guide which includes national and state-specific grants," said Stafford. "This is available on our website (see "Grants and Stimulus" under "Purchasing" at www.playgroundequipment.com). We also offer free consultation with a sales rep to help with the process."

"While we do not have grants available for the products, we refer people to organizations like AARP, health insurance companies and foundations that have grants that are focused on health and wellness for all ages," said Mertala. "Often times, cities get state or federal funding for parks. This money can be used for the purchase of senior fitness equipment."

Not Everyone is as Optimistic

"Senior playgrounds are



The senior fitness area at Ralston Tower Park in Modesto is already complete, in advance of the park's late spring opening. (Photo by Jason Ortega, parks project coordinator for the City of Modesto)

not popular in America," said Laura Guscott, president of Goric Playgrounds, based in Belmont, Massachusetts. "It is a hard sell. Often budgets get in the way. There have been many inquiries but not a lot of follow through."

Fortunately for Guscott, Goric Playgrounds does much better selling playground equipment for children.

She said that senior living facilities are very concerned about seniors getting hurt. As a

result, they want "nothing that (seniors) can fall off of, nothing high. They don't want liability for things they are maybe imagining."

While Guscott commented, "There's a danger in walking down the street," she also noted that, "There aren't standards for playground equipment for people above the age of 12."

Guscott said that anyone interested in having their city create a senior playground should work through the city's parks and recreation department.

"They usually are the ones with the budget," she explained. "They are going to be asking if this is a playground for children. If you say, 'No, it's for seniors,' it will be a tough sell. If it's intergenerational, that would be an easier sell."

Whatever kind of facility someone envisions, Guscott advises them to "figure out exactly what it is they want and know how to sell that concept."

Ralston Tower Park in Modesto

If the South Valley ever gets a senior playground, it won't be the first one in the Central Valley.

Ralston Tower Park, a park for seniors adjacent to a retirement community in downtown Mod-

esto, is expected to open in late spring. The park includes a senior fitness area, as well as a sport court activity area, walking paths, board game tables, a horseshoe pit and a central plaza with yoga paving. It also has a gated entry, perimeter fencing, safety area lighting and security cameras.

"We're excited about getting it done," said Nathan Houx, parks planning and development manager with the City of Modesto's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhoods Department.

The Modesto City Council suggested the project at a December 2014 meeting. In March 2016, O'Dell Engineering, based in Modesto, was hired by the city to create a master plan to develop the one-third acre property, which had not been renovated since it opened in the 1970s.

"It was challenging to get grants," said Houx. "It took a few years to be able to do it."

The estimated \$1.2 million cost to develop Ralston Tower Park came from two grants: the U.S. Federal, Land and Water Conservation Funding Grant, and State of California Community Development Block Grant Funding.

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Tracking Fall Risks in the Home

A rug not fastened to the floor. A slippery surface in the bathroom. A small pet running around.

Each of those are common in the homes of many older adults, and all are among the hazards that can lead to falls by seniors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year 36 million older adults suffer a fall, which is a leading cause of injuries among those 65 and older.

Many falls occur in the home, a place where older adults might let their guard down. But taking just a few minutes to scan the home for common fall hazards can help keep you or a loved one safe.

Here are a few things to look for, or consider, in different rooms in the home:

Living Room/Bedroom

- Remove loose cords and wires, or fasten them to baseboards or the floor where possible.
- Remove unnecessary clutter like piles of newspapers, magazines, laundry, etc.
- Remove or limit end tables or other small pieces of furniture in well-traveled areas.
- Ensure all light bulbs are bright enough and working, and keep spare bulbs on hand in the home.
- Wear non-slip footwear,

particularly if the home has hardwood flooring.

Staircases

- Check that handrails are securely fastened to the wall, and none are loose.
- If stairs are carpeted, ensure the carpet is securely glued to the floor with no lumps or loose areas.
- If stairs are hardwood, install non-slip adhesive strips.
- Keep the stairs well-lit at night and, as with the living room/bedroom, have spare light bulbs on hand.
- Although they can be expensive and require installation, consider a chairlift.

Bathroom

- Install non-slip mats or pads in the shower or tub.
- Consider installing a walk-in shower or tub if able.
- Have a waterproof stool or chair for the shower for ease and comfort.
- Install weight-bearing grab bars or railings for assistance getting up and down.
- Install nightlights for increased visibility in case the bathroom is needed at night.

This article is courtesy of Prestige Assisted Living at Visalia. To learn more about their wellness programming or community, or to book a tour, visit prestigecare.com/Visalia or call (559) 735-0828.



Donna Hall (left) is the office manager and Judie Casey is the president of the board.

Visalia Gleaning Seniors...

(continued from page 21)

the first Friday and Saturday of each month. This revenue is the primary source of income for the group.

Judie Casey, current president of the board of directors, is committed to the organization's work. She is a retired insurance executive and brings leadership and organizational skills to her job. She compassionately serves "those who can't afford a loaf of bread," and is committed "to feed those that do not have enough to eat."

Both Hall and Casey are dedicated to their work and have no plans to leave. When asked how long they planned on working with the Gleaners, both said "We would never NOT do it."

The 2023 Board of Directors

for the Visalia Gleaning Seniors are Judie Casey, president; Nick Sherwood, vice president; Irene Muller, secretary; Gayle Surratt, treasurer; Delila Bradshaw, sunshine; and Directors Janice Pineda, Leila Hipp, Tom Hughes, Steve Watkins Nancy Shackelford, Larry Kast and Don Jacobs.

Want to help? They are a 501(c)3 tax exempt nonprofit charitable organization, so if you want to help with a donation of cash or saleable yard sale items, or want to volunteer, contact Donna Hall or Judie Casey at (559) 733-5352.

The mailing address is P.O. Box 3835, Visalia, CA 93278, and the office and yard sale location is 28600 Road 156 (near Linnell, just east of Visalia).

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