

Senior Living



Creative couple continues to collaborate after 56 years

Amalia Mesa-Bains' career retrospective honors her unique room-size ofrendas

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PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Clockwise from left: Gwen Golub, playing for a combined team of the Menlo Mavens and Peninsula Water Polo, throws the ball in a match against Club Soda during the Bay Area Senior Games; Jennie White (center) of Club Soda gives high fives; the Blue Thunder Masters Water Polo and Calgary Masters teams compete against each other at the Soda Aquatic Center at Campolindo High School in Moraga.

From archery to water polo, Bay Area Senior Games allows athletes to pursue their passion

By Carey Sweet

Several times a week, nearly year-round, athletes suit up all across the Bay Area. They converge at high schools, recreational centers and parks, testing their mettle in sports such as swimming, archery, track and field, pickleball, tennis, golf, and especially, the highly popular game of water polo. Some are new to the sports, but others are world-class talents.

The unifying themes: they love their activities, are committed way beyond hobby level and are all older adults, ranging from age 50 to 90-plus. And the more than 1,500 members have found each other thanks to the Bay Area Senior Games.

The organization, based in Palo Alto, promotes healthy, active lifestyles for adults wanting not only to exercise, but a competitive environment along with the camaraderie of other athletes. The Bay Area Senior Games slogan, "Competing Never Gets Old," sums it up, and the group has simple requirements to join.

For this year, all participants must be at least 50 years of age on or before Dec. 31, 2023 (except soccer players, who can start at 40). Teams are formed in five-year age groups, such as 50-54. There is a \$70 registration fee plus a nominal competition event fee to help cover amenities like Gold, Silver and Bronze medals and commemorative event T-shirts.

Bragging rights are free.

Jennie White Club Soda Gold Medal Winner at the 2023 Bay Area Senior Games Andy Burke Memorial Water Polo Tournament

After 27 years playing water polo, Jennie White still finds it difficult to believe that until the year 2000, women were banned from the international Olympic pools, especially since men's water polo has been part of the Summer Olympics program since the second-ever games in 1900.

"It's shocking, yet I guess not really surprising," said the Oakland resident, 73, who plays on two teams, is a highest level Masters National athlete and helped her squad take second place in a World Water Polo Championship in Italy several years ago. "But I think that's another reason that it has drawn a lot of us older women to a Master sport, because we weren't able to do that in college."

White first dipped her toes in the water in 1997, when a long-time friend who had taught



Above: Judy Ishida (center) and her teammates on a combined team of the Menlo Mavens and Peninsula Water Polo cheer on their team while waiting in the re-entry area during a match against Club Soda at the Bay Area Senior Games Andy Burke Memorial Water Polo Tournament. Below left: Gwen Golub (left) attempts to throw as Ann Bundy tries to block during a match. Below right: Jill Peters and Liz Nowakowski (right), members of a combined team of Peninsula Water Polo and the Menlo Mavens, relax on the sidelines between matches.



White's children how to swim and played on a national team, encouraged her to try it out.

"I told her, all I know about this sport is there's a yellow ball on your car (a miniature version of the professional ball used in the game)," White replied. "I said, 'there is no way, I am not joining this team.' But my youngest daughter who was then 36 started playing, so I decided I'd try it. Well, here I am so many years later. Obviously, I'm hooked."

What started as a whim be-

came a way of life, as she dove so deeply into the sport that keeps her sleek and muscled in her signature banana print swimsuit (her healthy diet includes four bananas a day, she explained), and now helps her cope with the stress of caring for her husband through his stage four cancer.

"It's really mentally challenging, and then physically, because water polo is a tough sport," she said, noting that she's only 5 feet, 1 inch tall and 85 pounds. She swims pretty much every day and




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Cover photo: Amalia Mesa-Bains, left, and Richard Bains pose for a portrait at their home in San Juan Bautista. Mesa-Bains is an artist and cultural critic who has worked to define Chicano art and is known for her large-scale installations. Bains is a retired chair and professor of music at CSU Monterey Bay. **\$10**
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» "I'm a team player in all things that I do, and these are groups of incredible women who have joined together, who really know how to be powerful in and out of the pool. And we have fun."

Jennie White, water polo player

plays water polo at least three days a week. "It really keeps your brain and body fit."

Her fellow athletes have become fast friends, too.

"I'm a team player in all things that I do, and these are groups of incredible women who have joined together, who really know how to be powerful in and out of the pool," she said. "And we have fun. For one team, we were the Soda Moms, because we play at the Soda Aquatic Center in Moraga. But we have just changed our name because not everyone on the team is a mom, so now we are Club Soda."

She takes great delight in knowing that some of her teammates competed on the world stage, breaking the gender barrier and helping promote women's sports.

"There have been women on our teams who have been in the Olympics," she said. "They came back after the Olympics, and now play on the Masters teams. I'm still the oldest in my group, and it makes me proud."

Dave Hendrickson

Silver Surfers First Place Winner 2023 Bay Area Senior Games Andy Burke Memorial Water Polo Tournament

Dave Hendrickson credits his family for his love of chlorinated water.

"I have 10 brothers and sisters, and my mom said, 'the only way you guys are going to be clean is if I can get you all into the pool at the same time,' " he said. "So we all got daily swimming lessons. Then, my six older brothers led the way into water polo, and I've been playing for, gosh darn it, 54 years."

In the 1970s, he played at UC Santa Barbara and still connects with his college teammates. They



Clockwise from left: The Blue Thunder Masters and Calgry Masters water polo teams compete against each other during the Bay Area Senior Games; Gigi Swan (left), who was leading and coaching a combined team of the Menlo Mavens and Peninsula Water Polo, and Helena Singelstad of Club Soda share a laugh; Chuck Wood of Blue Thunder Masters Water Polo throws the ball.

played hard, taking on championships and racking up medals.

"There are a number of sanctioned events, and it's very competitive at all levels, and every time, we played to win," he said.

Now, at 66, the Santa Clara resident reflects a bit differently — and more peacefully — on the game, where his Masters group has members up to 90 years old.

"My favorite part is the camaraderie, the friendships, the relationships, the experiences," he said, of his Santa Barbara Silver Surfers team. "As you go through life and the older you get, you want to stay relevant. We've been successful as a group, and even our wives have gotten involved."

But he also admitted that the old fighting college spirit still runs strong. In 30-some years, his team has won at least 10 world titles (he's lost count) and is going to Japan in August to defend their title. The plan is to come home as champions.

"We certainly don't talk about it much, but all of a sudden, you

Details

Bay Area Senior Games: 650-323-9400, www.bayarea seniorgames.org

California Senior Games Association: 650-323-9400, www.californiaseniorgames.org

get in the water and the instinctive juices flow," he said. "We have guys that have played the Olympics and played on the National team, and everybody is still incredibly competitive."

The work outs are demanding with twice-weekly team practices leading up to the Japan tournament, and private swimming many other days of the week. Those exercises often take several hours a day.

"Sometimes the mind will tell you one thing, but the body is not as cooperative," he said with a laugh. "But it's so good for your health, and it just keeps you very, very fit."

Ways to play

To be sure, for a first timer, joining a sports team can seem complicated with its many divisions.

"The Bay Area Senior Games is one of the eight regional games within the state of California," explained Anne Warner Cribbs, a California Senior Games Association Chair who runs the Bay Area Sports Organizing Committee nonprofit that supports the Bay Area Senior Games and its sister group Encore Games. "According to the regulations of the National Senior Games, organizing entities must be either nonprofits or city recreation departments."

But Warner Cribbs encourages all interested athletes to contact her office with any questions and to receive guidance on how to get involved with what sports interest them.

She is well-qualified to lead the groups. An Olympian and trailblazer for women's sports, she won her first gold medal at the 1959 Pan American Games at the age of 14. In the 1960 Olympics in

Rome, she won the gold as part of the 400-meter medley relay team and placed fifth in the 200-meter breaststroke.

The easiest way to get started is to log on to www.bayarea seniorgames.org for information and registration, along with www.californiaseniorgames.org for a calendar of all senior games in California.

"Seniors find a sport they enjoy and register in local games and in state championships and have the opportunity to compete in the National Games, which are held every two years around the country," Warner Cribbs said.

The 2023 Summer National Senior Games takes place in Pittsburgh, Penn., from July 7 to July 18, and about 600 California athletes are slated to participate.

"Senior athletes are enthusiastic, positive, with a great outlook on life," Warner Cribbs said. "They are committed to exercise and performance and really fun to be around. The atmosphere at the sports events is always very upbeat, encouraging and friendly."

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Jim was looking for a new technology-free hobby. In the garden, he learned to be present and pay attention to details with a watchful eye. "With roses, you constantly have to watch out for and deal with diseases," Jim explained. He also learned how to attract

beneficial insects and pollinators, which can improve the health of plants and soil. "I planted different flowers and ground coverings, which became my laboratory for experimenting. Gardening has been a valuable learning experience."

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Left: Reverend Richard Meyer, 68, laughs with Elizabeth and Bryan as he performs their wedding at Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa. Right: The wedding took place in 2019 on the winery's vineyard deck. Meyer performs about 15 to 20 weddings a year in Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties and caters to all couples.

Older adults stay busy, earn money with side hustles

By Carey Sweet

Retirement is a significant milestone for most people and a time that is exciting but it can also be a bit unnerving. The free time is marvelous, yet many often find they need some interests to keep them happy and engaged with other people.

Financial considerations can loom, as well. Most non-government jobs no longer provide traditional pension plans — only a quarter of civilian workers were offered a traditional retirement benefits package in 2022, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

Enter side hustle jobs, where older adults can do things they enjoy while earning money usually on their own time schedules. Forty percent of Baby Boomers have a side hustle, reports an April 2023 study commissioned by Herbalife Nutrition and conducted by One-Poll. The international direct-sales brand says it found, "On average, Americans with side hustles commit almost ten hours per week to side hustles, with the most common including selling products on e-commerce websites and driving for ride-share — while other re-

spondents turned to direct sales, otherwise known as network marketing."

These are self-motivated gigs with other top choices including freelance writing, selling items on eBay, creating commission art on Etsy, walking dogs and pet sitting or being a local tour guide in areas of personal interest like city historical sites.

One increasingly popular gig for bilingual Boomers is being a translator in written communications. You can do it from home in your free time via sites like Rev (www.rev.com), which can set you up as an increasingly necessary audio-video subtitle translator and closed caption writer.

For more traditional part-time work, employers often value older generations for their experience and dedication to the workplace. Government resources can get folks started, such as the Employment Services for Older Workers site offered by the State of California Employment Development Department (www.edd.ca.gov/en/jobs_and_training/Services_for_Older_Workers).

Another good option is the employment and training services offered through the America's Job

Center of California. This network partners with many agencies and organizations to help older workers return to the workforce or even transition to a new career. (<http://bit.ly/3oVcf6t>)

Do the hustle: Think outside the box

Some 40 years ago, Richard Meyer earned a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in theology with the plan of being a church pastor.

"However, that never transpired," the Santa Rosa resident said. "I ended up working with youth for 25 years, and so I was involved in churches and nonprofits that way."

His role expanded into other services, including hosting weddings and funerals.

Then, about two decades ago, Meyer left the Christian ministry for what he calls "a paycheck." He and his wife, Julie, developed a preschool-child care program on their 4-acre rural property and established My Little Farm, supporting sustainable agriculture and providing sanctuary for farm animals.

"We ran that for 13 years, and then a former colleague of mine in

nonprofit work asked if I would reconsider doing destination weddings, since they're very popular in Sonoma County," Meyer said. "They're not church weddings, I just enjoy working with couples and spending time with them to develop their ceremony in a very personal context."

Now, at 68, Meyer won't say he is retired — "retired is a relative term. Julie and I are retired in the sense that we don't have an official business anymore."

But Julie keeps busy working with local animal rescue groups, fostering animals, raising birds like peacocks and exotic ducks and gardening specialties such as her expansive fields of lavender that she uses in crafts. And Richard is focused on being a wedding officiant, overseeing about 15 to 20 weddings a year in Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties.

"I love doing weddings, and income wise, it is a significant thing in terms of our financial flexibility," he said. "There is definitely a financial motive there to supplement what we're able to bring in."

This isn't the first time in his lengthy career that Meyer has taken on extra gigs.

"For a number of years, I pruned fruit trees and ornamentals in the winter as a side hustle. I finally just had to let go of it because I just didn't have the time."

Meyer doesn't advertise his officiant services, though he does maintain a website (www.marrymewinecountry.com). The Reverend caters to all couples, "mixed backgrounds, Christian, non-denominational, spiritual, non-spiritual."

His signature approaches include adding touches of humor, and the relaxed, down-home luxury vibe his Wine County clients are usually seeking out. Referrals are his biggest business driver.

And he sees a different demographic now than when he conducted church weddings decades ago. Most of his couples are in their 30s and older and have known each other for many years.

"In most cases, the marriage is the last thing instead of the first thing that it would have been 30 or 40 years ago," he said. "They've gone through school, they've established their careers and their house, and oftentimes, they have one or two kids. Now they're ready to do the wedding."

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Nonprofit helps older adults safely stay in their home

By Jeannie Matteucci

Like many people with an aging parent, Danielle Galante of San Francisco noticed her then 83-year-old mother was showing signs of dementia and starting to lose certain skills, like cleaning her home and tending to her garden.

"I wanted to give her a feeling of purpose," Galante said. "My mother is very much a helper and she was constantly reminded she was losing her abilities."

After doing research and asking friends for referrals, Galante ended up contacting San Francisco's Institute on Aging. Founded in 1985, this nonprofit has become a leading advocate for older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers who often don't know where to turn for support. Whether it's social isolation, prevention of elder abuse, hands-on care or caregiver support systems, it revolves around keeping people independent and safely living at the place they call home.

"We want to enable that as much as possible," said Westyn Hinchey, an Institute on Aging spokesperson.

Galante turned to the organization's comprehensive dementia services called Companioa that gives families a trusted advisor as they navigate their journey with dementia.

"The strength of the program lies in all of the services being found in one place — the adult day program, caregiver coaching, care management and home care," Hinchey said.

Galante's now 85-year-old mother attends the Companioa Adult Day Program at Institute on Aging's Enrichment Center in the Presidio. The program offers social, cognitive and physical activities in an adult daycare center setting for individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia. Participants remain engaged and connected to the community while also providing caregivers with a much-needed break.

"It suited her needs and gave me a few hours a day where I could do things for her without needing the energy to also watch her while I do those things," Galante said.



PHOTOS BY INSTITUTE OF AGING

Above: A staff member leads a group of older adults in the Companioa Adult Day Program in a stretching exercise at the Institute of Aging's Enrichment Center at the Presidio. Below: The Presidio center hosts the program for individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia.

» **"Loneliness and isolation are a crisis, especially after the pandemic. The pandemic really put a spotlight on the importance of connections. Those connections are the ties that bind us to life."**

Westyn Hinchey, an Institute on Aging spokesperson

Galante's mother goes to the center three times a week. She enjoys meals and snacks, plays games like bean bag toss, does artwork and attends lectures with quizzes at the end that help stimulate the brain.

"There's a strong sense of community," Galante said. "There's a consistency with the activity directors and the people there. And they bring in high school students and college students who volunteer and have

wonderful energy."

The program allows Galante's mother to socialize with others with dementia. Galante recalls when her mother came home one day from the center and said she met someone special.

"My mother told me she has a boyfriend," Galante laughed. "She says his wife and children are very nice."

Another important Institute on Aging program is their Friendship Line, a free 24-hour "warm" line for older adults. This accredited

crisis intervention program that placed and received more than 150,000 calls in California last year is the only "warm" line program of its kind in the country, targeting older adults who may be at risk of depression, isolation or loneliness.

"Loneliness and isolation are a crisis, especially after the pandemic," Hinchey said. "The pandemic really put a spotlight on the importance of connections. Those connections are the ties that bind us to life."

The nonprofit's Elder Abuse

Details

Institute on Aging: 3575 Geary Blvd., San Francisco, 415-750-4111, www.ioaging.org

Prevention Program covers many forms of abuse. While many might think "physical" when they hear the word, this program also tackles verbal and emotional, financial, self-abuse and neglect, identity theft and more. The program works with community and state partners to address and resolve abuse, and the Institute on Aging hosts multiple events to educate the community and abuse prevention partners on the warning signs of various forms of abuse.

"It ties back to our mission of being a leading advocate for aging adults and adults with disabilities," Hinchey said. "It helps give a voice to people who might not be able to advocate for themselves. The educational component to the elderly abuse prevention program also involves electronic scams on the internet and the like. Keeping the dialogue open so people feel comfortable talking about it is also equally important."

Often caregivers and families struggle to figure out what the Institute on Aging can do to help them, so it offers a free community referral service called Connect. This program gives families and caregivers one place to call to help them sort out what they need.

"Everything begins with Connect," Hinchey said. "If you're struggling to embrace living independently as you age, the Connect team can help you identify which programs and services we offer that will help you to do so."

While based in San Francisco, the Institute on Aging also works with clients in Marin County, San Mateo County, Santa Clara County, Alameda County and Contra Costa County. The organization is funded through federal, local and state partnerships and the generosity of donors.

"It's been pretty comprehensive the help they're giving me," Galante said. "It helps reduce some of the pressure."



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LAURA MORTON



SAMANTHA LAUREY



SAMANTHA LAUREY

Far left: Richard Bains, left, and Amalia Mesa-Bains pose for a portrait at her studio in their San Juan Bautista home. Mesa-Bains is an artist and cultural critic who has worked to define Chicano art and is known for her large-scale installations. Bains is the retired chair and professor of music at CSU Monterey Bay. Above: Amalia Mesa-Bains presents "Circle of Ancestors" in her exhibit, "Archaeology of Memory," at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive that continues through Aug. 13. Left: Mesa-Bains includes personal artifacts in her piece, "The Venus Envy Chapter I: First Holy Communion, Moments Before the End."



SAMANTHA LAUREY



LAURA MORTON

Artist, educator revolutionized 'a lost tradition' with colorful room-size ofrendas

After 56 years of marriage, couple works to share her art

By Marcus Crowder

Artist and educator Amalia Mesa-Bains considers her lifelong creative work as a "cultural reclamation" project.

"In my case, I think the work that I started doing had to do with affirming a lost tradition," Mesa-Bains said. "Because I had some background with home altars, which were the offerings for the days of the dead, I moved into that aspect of the Chicano movement. Eventually I innovated on that and created another form."

The traditional ofrenda Mesa-Bains knew from childhood forms the literal and symbolic center of the Mexican celebration of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Her parents came to the United States as immigrants from Mexico where Día de los Muertos is a day of remembrance for those who passed away. The altars have several levels (the top suggesting heaven and the bottom representing earth) and contain photos, candles, food, sweets, marigolds and decorative table cloths.

Mesa-Bains began making her altars somewhat conventionally but soon realized the tradition yielded unlimited creative possibilities and she eventually revolutionized the form, creating her own artistic genre in the process.

Her ofrendas have evolved into room-size installations often containing hundreds of objects, many of them quite personal: beads, scientific instruments, perfume bottles, personal medical equipment, her wedding veil, her father's glasses and mother's necklace, statuettes, photographs of family and friends, crucifixes, fabric and clothing, dirt, plants, sugar skulls, calendars, stamps and candles.

The Santa Clara-born, San Jose State-educated Mesa-Bains has thoughtfully and creatively challenged the status quo of art institutions by making politically pointed altars or ofrendas housed in larger culturally-specific installations.

With her husband of 56 years, Richard Bains, constantly at her side, Mesa-Bains has made the political



SAMANTHA LAUREY

Above: Amalia Mesa-Bains presents "Cihuateotl with Mirror in Private Landscapes and Public Territories" at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. The exhibit runs through Aug. 13 and will eventually tour other cities. Below: Richard Bains shows the book "Archaeology of Memory," the exhibition catalog for his wife's major retrospective, at their home in San Juan Bautista.

» "For people in my generation who came up in different ethnic and political movements, there was a purpose. Art was to serve the community, to serve ideas you had about social justice."

Amalia Mesa-Bains, artist and educator

personal through her dense explorations of Chicana/o history, spirituality and personhood.

She also writes incisive art criticism and provocative cultural essays, providing essential insight for understanding contemporary Chicana and other Latinx art.

"For people in my generation who came up in different ethnic and political movements, there was a purpose. Art was to serve the community, to serve ideas you had about social justice," Mesa-Bains told me over a Zoom call as her husband, Richard, adjusted her monitor before plopping down in a chair just behind her.

Throughout the years, her husband has made such a contribution

to her work that it's difficult to not see it as a collaboration between them.

"Basically most of our work is together," Richard Bains said. "I do some music for her projects and I help her with everything that she has."

Amalia is quick to acknowledge what he means to the process. "I always say that Richard is the wizard behind the curtain. He manages the empire," Mesa-Bains said. "I'm really good at making things, but not very good at managing them and terrible at the financial end of it. I just know what I need to make and then Richard helps me find a way to do it."

The couple worked together on



LAURA MORTON

her latest art project: a retrospective titled "Amalia Mesa-Bains: Archaeology of Memory" at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive that continues through Aug. 13 and will eventually tour other cities.

"The work itself is innovative in the format of creating these site-

specific installations," said Julie Rodríguez Widholm, executive director of the museum. "When she was doing it in the '70s, '80 and '90s, it was not even that common. It was the beginning of installation art. So I think she was ahead of our time, ahead of her time, but also was

They both laughed. "We've been living together ever since. It was rather instantaneous, although we had a lot to work out in that first year before we actually got married," she added.

For the last 13 years, they've lived on the side of a mountain near San Juan Bautista.

Richard has his own extraordinary career, which included working with the San Francisco Symphony before founding the Music Department at CSU Monterey Bay 25 years ago. Amalia joined him there teaching art for over a decade. Richard retired as the chair of the department in the summer of 2022 and was appointed professor emeritus this year.

"When we were at CSUMB for almost 25 years, we did interdisciplinary projects and raised lots and lots of money from all over the country to do projects in the community," Amalia said.

"For instance, his mariachi class would do a corrido for our farm worker billboard project to initiate it."

After moving to San Francisco with Richard in 1966, Mesa-Bains started teaching in San Francisco's public school system. She found her artistic voice in the progressive politics of the counterculture shake up of the era.

"When I found my voice, it was really in the Chicano movement," Mesa-Bains said. "It wasn't until we moved to San Francisco, that was the Summer of Love, and I got involved with some of the Latino organizations in the Mission. Then, in that sense, my art was purposeful to me."

"I think it's one of the reasons Chicano artists have been late in being accepted by the larger museum world. They didn't understand what art with purpose or engagement was really about," Mesa-Bains said.

The couple, who are both 79, continue to collaborate and try new things. Richard has recently written music for a podcast Amalia is doing with the Latinx Research Center.

"A lot of what goes on now, at least for me, is this retrospective view of people interested in work that spans 40 to 50 years," Amalia said. "What was that about and who was there? Richard was always there. I could never have done any of it without him."

Amalia doesn't believe she could have received the same support from another visual artist because of creative competition.

"I think having two different disciplines, but both of them being creative, both of them being anchored in cultural values, that made it work," Amalia said. "We were raised in the same way. Even though we were from different cultural backgrounds, our parents had very similar jobs, coming from working class, religious communities. We were very lucky that way."

Amalia and Richard met at San Jose State University as undergraduates; she was studying art, and he was studying music.

"We had one date. We had a very good date," Mesa-Bains said.

Top: Amalia Mesa-Bains presents her exhibit, "Archaeology of Memory" at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Middle: Richard Bains (left) and his wife, Amalia Mesa-Bains, show prints of her work at their studio located at their home in San Juan Bautista. Below: Mesa-Bains presents "The Library of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz" in her exhibit at BAMFA, which continues through Aug. 11. The exhibit features nearly 60 works in a range of media.



SAMANTHA LAUREY

Senior living centers focus on Asian culture, cuisine

By Michael Shapiro

When she was in her mid-70s, Yu-Hua Yang of Dallas decided she was ready to move into a senior living center. She had heard from a friend about a place in Fremont called Aegis Gardens that celebrates Chinese culture and decided to try it for a week.

Yang enjoyed the morning tai chi class, the freshly made Chinese food and playing mahjong.

"I really felt at home," Yang said. "The programs and activities were really good and the staff (who speak Mandarin or Cantonese) was very friendly, like family."

Other than a brief return to move out of her home in Dallas, Yang has lived at Aegis Gardens for the past 14 years. She's so good at the Chinese tile game, a staffer said, that she's now known as the "mahjong queen."

Throughout the Bay Area, there are numerous Asian senior living centers. Most are Chinese and have staff that speak Mandarin, Cantonese and, in some cases, other Chinese languages such as Shanghaiese.

Aegis senior general manager Emily Poon, who has worked at the community for 20 years, said the elderly can feel "isolated" when they're not among people of similar background. Having activities like Chinese calligraphy classes and celebrating holidays such as the Dragon Boat Festival, she said, diminishes that feeling of isolation.

Not all the activities are Chinese — the center embraces aspects of American culture. The residents "love bingo," she said. "And they love ballroom dancing."

They celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas too.

"We always have some celebration going on," Poon said.

Aegis Gardens, which opened in 2000, has 64 apartments; of those, 18 are devoted to memory care.

Though China is a vast and populous country, Asian communities in the U.S. can have small circles, Poon said.

"We have residents move in, and they bump into their childhood friends," she said. "It's so nice because it's really like a big family here."

Yang, who is 89 and speaks Mandarin, said one of most appealing aspects of living at Aegis Gardens is the variety of Chinese food offered daily, including for breakfast where she can enjoy traditional porridges.

She likes that she can choose from different dishes, such as dumplings with noodles or a red bean bun, and said the food reminds her of what she ate growing up.

"It's traditional," she said through a translator.

The chefs are from different regions of China: One might specialize in northern cuisine while another prepares southern dishes. Many Chinese are lactose intolerant, Poon said, and wouldn't enjoy the food at mainstream American living centers that serve lots of dishes with cheese, butter, milk and cream.

"We have a menu, so they can pick what they want," she said.



PHOTOS BY AUGIE CHANG

Residents at Aegis Gardens in Fremont enjoy Chinese calligraphy. The assisted living center opened in 2000 and has 64 apartments.



Above: Chef Kenny Liu talks with the Aegis Gardens residents. Below: Life Enrichment Director Flora Pang, middle, discusses current events with Aegis residents in the garden.

» "We have residents move in, and they bump into their childhood friends, It's so nice because it's really like a big family here."

Emily Poon, Aegis senior general manager

And the center's tea rooms encourage residents to sip and socialize.

Aegis Gardens' design follows the principles of feng shui. In many mainstream senior living communities, the entry faces a staircase, Poon said.

"Our staircase is to the side because Chinese believe that if your staircase faces the entrance, all your good luck is going to run out the front door," she said.

There are also no rooms with the number 4, she said, because that symbolizes death.



Some other Chinese centers in the Bay Area include Joyful Chapter Senior Living in South San Francisco, where there are frequent dim sum outings, and East Bay Assisted Living, which encourages a family lifestyle and features Chinese food and cultural activities.

Autumn Glow Alzheimer's

Care Home in San Francisco is a small facility (maximum 15 residents) in a Victorian home that specializes in memory care for Chinese elders.

Kokoro, a nonprofit in San Francisco's Japantown, opened in 2000 and caters to the Japanese senior community. Of the 54 housing units, 37 are set

Details

Aegis Gardens: www.aegisliving.com/aegis-living-of-aegis-gardens

Joyful Chapter Senior Living: www.joyfulchapter.com

East Bay Assisted Living: www.eastbayassistedliving.com

Autumn Glow Alzheimer's Care Home: www.selfhelpelderly.org/our-services/senior-housing/autumn-glow-alzheimers-care-home

Kokoro: www.kokoroassistedliving.org

aside for low- to moderate-income residents.

The dining hall features Japanese specialties such as ramen, curried rice and California rolls.

Kokoro executive director Naoko Jones said that as people reach their later years, it's reassuring for them to be among those with a similar background.

"As I'm getting older, my body tells me, 'Ah, I want miso soup.' I want simpler foods, Japanese food that my mom cooked," she said. "As you age, you want to go back to where you came from. So it's very important to have that kind of comfort toward the end of their lives."

At Aegis in Fremont, Poon noted that not all residents are Chinese; a few are Japanese and occasionally those who aren't Asian live there.

"We had an African American lady. She was so sweet," Poon recalled. She "always wanted to take a cruise to China but couldn't afford to. So she stayed at Aegis Gardens for two weeks and loved it. The residents were so proud of their culture and wanted to share with her everything about being Chinese."

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Tips for navigating a volatile real estate market

By Carey Sweet

For anyone trying to figure out the last several years of steady inflation, a roller coaster stock market and a topsy-turvy real estate market, here's a tip: Take a deep breath, it's not over yet.

Does this seem like a good time to relocate residences? Probably not.

At the same time, the U.S. real estate landscape has seen an interesting change. In 2022, Baby Boomers surpassed Millennials and now make up the largest generation of recent home buyers, according to the latest study from the National Association of Realtors.

The 2023 Home Buyers and Sellers Generational Trends report found that the combined share of younger Boomer (58 to 67 years old) and older Boomer (68 to 76 years old) buyers rose to 39% in 2022, up from 29% the year prior.

Younger Millennials (24 to 32 years old) and older Millennials (33 to 42 years old) were the top group of buyers since 2014, but they saw their combined share fall from 43% in 2021 to 28% last year.

"Baby Boomers have the upper hand in the home-buying market," noted Jessica Lautz, National Association of Realtors deputy chief economist and vice president of research, in a statement. "The majority of them are repeat buyers who have housing equity to propel them into their dream home — be it a place to enjoy retirement or a home near friends and family. They are living healthier and longer and making housing trades later in life."

Older adults may also want to downsize and enjoy retirement without the great demands of home maintenance. Or they may be looking into a new home that can help them live easier with any medical concerns.

But here's the rub for Bay Area residents. Currently, it is a tricky time to consider buying or selling a home, according to Joann Sullivan, broker associate with the Grubb Company. As a Seniors Real Estate Specialist with offices in Berkeley and Oakland,



Older adults might consider downsizing to avoid the demands of home maintenance.

she has worked in the industry for nearly 20 years with an emphasis on planning for the health and financial needs of older adults looking to move.

"The main thing that is affecting real estate in our area is lack of (purchasable) inventory," she said. "Plus, many older people decide to stay in their homes so they can avoid capital gains taxes. There is a \$250,000 exemption for single homeowners and a \$500,000 exemption for married homeowners, but people who have been in their homes for a long time will still have expensive capital gains taxes on the sale of their homes."

That said, making a move can still be financially beneficial with a thoughtful approach. One consideration is the property tax benefits from the newly enacted Home Protection for Seniors, Severely Disabled, Families and Victims of Wildfire or Natural Disasters Act (Proposition 19).

"Proposition 19, passed by voters in 2020, allows homeowners to transfer the tax basis of their home to one of lesser value anywhere in the state of California," Sullivan said. "This works for some older or disabled homeowners or those affected

by fires, but they should talk with their accountant or tax attorney before making this decision."

She also suggests that her clients consider simply trading houses with their children who have growing families and may need the usually more room their parents have. Or vice-versa, if the children have enough land, the parents might move into an Accessory Dwelling Unit built on their property.

Before shopping for a smaller home, older adults should schedule a thorough health exam. This can help determine whether they might benefit from a first-floor condominium (no stairs), a co-op apartment or an independent living community. More challenging mental concerns can also be addressed by the professional assessment of a cognitive/neurological test.

"Downsizing to a smaller place is good for people who are living independently, not for those who may need assistance with most of their activities of daily living," Sullivan said. "Some who need minimal assistance, however, can contract with home care agencies or individual providers which provide the level of care needed."

Financially speaking, it is best to avoid a nursing home for as long as possible. In-home health care services in the Bay Area cost an average of \$6,101 a month for an average of 44 hours of assistance a week, based on the 2020 Genworth Cost of Care Survey, while skilled nursing home care averages \$12,471 a month for a semi-private room.

"For those who are able to make the decision about staying at home and living independently or moving to a facility, I always encourage staying in their home or moving to a smaller place," Sullivan said. "Most people are happier when they can stay in a familiar place for as long as possible."

Groups like San Francisco Village can smooth the way to aging in place. The nonprofit membership organization connects older San Franciscans to the community, resources and expertise they need to live independently in the places they call home. The community includes more than 500 members over the age of 60, all living in various neighborhoods.

The nonprofit Ashby Village in Berkeley also provides assistance, through a peer-to-peer

Details

Joann Sullivan, broker associate with the Grubb Company: 510-393-7889, www.eastbaysmartsenior.com

San Francisco Village: 415-387-1375, www.sfvillage.org

Ashby Village: 510-204-9200, www.ashbyvillage.org

approach connecting older adults with each other and systems to help age well. All backgrounds, cultures and economic means are welcome; members are grouped by neighborhoods spanning Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Emeryville, Kensington, Oakland and Richmond.

Both San Francisco Village and Ashby Village members have access to a variety of services, including rides to doctor appointments, minor household repairs, computer and mobile device assistance, help with light gardening, pet care and grocery shopping and group social events like film/book discussions and local cultural tours.

First and foremost, older adults thinking about selling or buying real estate need to do their homework and work only with vetted professionals. Recently, the Bay Area news has covered multiple instances of real estate fraud where victims who thought they were being helped to sell, refinance, take out a reverse mortgage or save their home from foreclosure were tricked and unknowingly sold their properties for a fraction of their value. The schemes have been unjust, but in most cases, legal on paper.

"Older people are susceptible to scammers of all sorts," Sullivan said. "Other than requiring fiduciaries or other financial advisors for all older folks, I do not know what to do about this. The reverse mortgage industry has cleaned up its practices with required counseling for all people who decide to get a reverse mortgage, but there are still glitches. Education is the best approach, but older people generally do not like being told what to do."



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BLUE ZONES PROJECT MONTEREY COUNTY

Members of the Blue Zones Project Monterey County work on the Natividad Creek Park Community Garden in Salinas. The organization regularly hosts garden work days.

Global Blue Zones offer inspiration for healthy lifestyle habits to live longer

By Michael Shapiro

There are places on the planet where an astounding number of people reach their 100th birthday. Among them: the Greek island of Ikaria and Okinawa, Japan. Closer to home, Loma Linda in southern California made the list.

Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow, sought to understand what people in these places have in common. After years of research and writing a National Geographic cover story on the topic, he found nine key components to living longer and better.

Among the Power 9, as Buettner calls the lifestyle habits, are gentle exercise such as walking frequently, having a sense of purpose, eating lightly and having a robust social life.

Here's some good news: people who drink in moderation, such as a glass of wine in the evening, tend to live longer than those who abstain.

Of course drinking too much is deleterious to one's health, but "part of the goal of living to 100 is enjoying the journey," Buettner said in a phone interview in May. "And for a lot of people, including myself, rewarding oneself with a glass or two of wine at the end of the night is part of that."

Buettner, author of the 2008



RICHARD GREEN FOR BLUE ZONES PROJECT MONTEREY COUNTY

Students play with hula hoops as part of Blue Zones Project Monterey County's goal to get the whole community more active. The organization has a hiking day and beach clean-up event scheduled for July.

book "The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest," seeks to share the wisdom of centenarians and their communities with the world at large.

"Most of us have more control over how long we live than we think," Buettner writes in the book. "Experts say that if we

adopted the right lifestyle, we could add at least ten good years and suffer a fraction of the diseases that kill us prematurely."

The goal isn't solely to make it to 100, he said, but to live well and enjoy the ride. To spread the gospel of healthy living, Buettner's Blue Zones organization seeks to

help people live longer through nutrition advice and communal activities.

San Jose has begun a Blue Zones Project led by City Council member Dev Davis.

"No person is an island, and they're not going to reach the age of 100, living well, without others and the support of oth-

» "We want to bring that social aspect where people are able to build community across all abilities and across all ages and really provide that structure and support for people to build relationships with each other."

Dev Davis, San Jose City Council member and Blue Zones Project leader

ers," she said. "That's the piece that I find so compelling and why I think big-city governments can and should be involved because building community is what we do."

Davis said San Jose is an "age-friendly city" and has sponsored recent events such as a Longevity Walk. While most attendees were older, Davis hopes to entice younger people to join these activities because she believes intergenerational connections benefit both older adults and youth.

"We want to bring that social aspect where people are able to build community across all abilities and across all ages and really provide that structure and support for people to build

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Details

Blue Zones: www.bluezones.com

San Jose Blue Zones Project: www.sjd6.org/san-jose-blue-zones-project

Monterey County Blue Zones events: <https://montereycounty.bluezonesproject.com/events>

relationships with each other," she said.

Another region embracing Blue Zones is Monterey County, which organizes frequent communal walks, beach cleanups and garden projects that give people a greater sense of purpose.

"A gardening day hits a lot of different elements," said Tiffany DiTullio, executive director of Monterey County's Blue Zones Project. "Gardening is natural movement. People think that in order to be healthy you have to run a half marathon or go to the gym every day when ... just small incremental changes in your daily activities — parking further away from the entrance, walking a dog, gardening — all of those natural movements actually help your physical well-being."

Gardening together creates connection in the community.

"They're feeling invested in their park and they're meeting other community members," she said. "So we're reducing isolation and getting people to see that to feel connected to your community, you have to participate in your community."

The Monterey County project is seeking to emulate the social aspects of the original Blue Zones to help local residents live better, DiTullio said. By being more involved with their families and communities and eating more healthfully, people become happier, she said.

"We're encouraging people to make healthier choices, to put family first, to create connection and find their purpose," she said. "We're taking all of those learnings from centenarians in those communities and applying it at a young age."

Healthy practices instilled in young people, she believes, will



JOEL FALCON FOR BLUE ZONES PROJECT MONTEREY COUNTY

Above: The Blue Zones Project Monterey County hosts a cooking demonstration of healthy foods at El Gabilan Library in Salinas. The organization hosts events around the region. Below: Blue Zones founder Dan Buettner talks with a centenarian in Costa Rica.

become lifelong habits.

Buettner, the "Blue Zones" author, notes that several of the original longevity regions were not high-income areas, and that too much ease can lead to disease.

Staying healthy into advanced age means "using our muscles, keeping our heart beating and keeping our brain engaged," he said. These "all require effort and a certain amount of discomfort."

Though the rate at which people age is partially genetic, it's mostly societal and environmental, he said. While we can't stop the aging process, we can avoid accelerating it.

In part, Buettner believes, age is a state of mind.

His 85-year-old mother, Dolly Buettner, "goes over to the senior home twice a week," he told me, "to help the quote unquote old folk, many of whom are younger than she is."



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PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON

Clockwise from top left: Thomas Lopez, age 70, talks to instructor Hugh Leeman while taking a class through Art With Elders at Mission Neighborhood Centers in San Francisco; Conception Ruiz, age 74, works on a painting while taking an Art With Elders class; paintings by Ana Miranda, age 71, are seen during a class. Through Aug. 25, the San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries at San Francisco City Hall has "Art With Elders: The Power of Creativity and Community" on display.

Creativity, community abounds at Art With Elders

By Marcus Crowder

Artist Mark Campbell was looking for a job when he stumbled into something that has become not only his life's work but an enduring legacy of compassion and inspiration. Campbell was at the now-closed Flax art supply store on Valencia St. in San Francisco when he came across an Art With Elders exhibit of community artwork there.

"It was clear to me that they were seniors because along with the artwork, they had a biography of the artists as well as a photograph," Campbell said. "I was just fascinated and literally went to each one and read about the artists."

Wanting to know more about the program, Campbell picked up an Art With Elders brochure and called the information number. As luck would have it, the organization was at that moment looking for someone to start a program at Laguna Honda Hospital. "Was Campbell interested?" they asked.

"It was kind of a big deal — it's a huge hospital, and at the time, they had no art program," Campbell said. "I'd never done anything like this, but we really built the program. I have been teaching weekly classes there for 25 years. I'm still doing it. I was there yesterday."

Campbell, while still a painter and instructor with the nonprofit, is now also the organization's CEO and a champion of involving creativity into learning activities at all levels.

The classes began as 'art therapy' but evolved under Art With Elders founder and original CEO Brent Nettle to focus on creativity and skills-building. The regularity of the classes meeting once a week and the positive feedback built into the sessions engaged the participants in developing personal skills and healthy community



Instructor Hugh Leeman (standing) teaches an Art With Elders class at Mission Neighborhood Centers to people both in person and online.

building.

"We've been around for 30 years, a long time for a nonprofit, and worked with about 12,000 seniors in the Bay Area in about 75 different senior centers," Campbell said.

Campbell took over the organization in 2013 when Settle resigned because of serious health issues. Classes are taught in person and online by professional artists and are available in five languages, Campbell said.

The program's structure is fairly simple and flexible, which he

» **"We create these safe environments where expectations are limited. We don't expect everyone to come out and create a masterpiece."**

Mark Campbell, Art With Elders CEO

believes contributes to its success. The organization provides weekly, two-hour art classes for older adults who live in either senior communities or nursing homes. The classes are usually between eight and 12 students though Campbell's hospital classes sometimes have as many as 25 students

in it.

How the teachers approach the students is the Art With Elders key.

"We meet our students where they are," Campbell said. "First of all, we don't teach in a regimented curriculum-based methodology because we have students in the same class, some of whom have

sold their work for hundreds of dollars, others who are picking up the brush for the first time. So it's inherent upon us to meet everyone where they are."

The teachers' goals are to "get inside the students' heads" and learn from them.

"That's very empowering for our students," Campbell said.

Kim Ringel, an artist participant who has been taking classes for several years, said the diversity of experience in her classes turns down the pressure on everyone.

"There are beginners and there



Left: Conception Ruiz, age 74, works on a painting. Art With Elders engages older adults in fine arts classes and shares their work and life experience through public exhibits. Right: Instructor Hugh Leeman (right) uses an iPad to show virtual classmates the art Thomas Lopez, age 70, was working on during a class.

are people with experience," Ringle said. "It's great because a lot of the beginners find out that they have a lot of talent they didn't know anything about. Because there are beginners and more experienced people, you feel a little more comfortable showing things you did."

She especially likes getting feedback on her work from both the other participants and the instructor.

"The whole atmosphere is very supportive," Ringle said. "You don't need to worry about people being negative. And the teacher always says something positive about whatever you do."

Campbell agrees that the goal is to make everyone feel comfortable.

"We create these safe environments where expectations are limited. We don't expect everyone to come out and create a masterpiece," he said.

The other major component of the program is a commitment to exhibiting their students' work throughout the Bay Area.

Currently through Aug. 25 on view at San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries at San Francisco City Hall is the show "Art With Elders: The Power of Creativity and Community." The organization has partnered with the San Francisco Arts Commission Art in the City Hall program to present the exhibition featuring over 90 original paintings and drawings made by older adults in classes from 40 program sites and community partners across the Bay Area.

There are four different groups of work in the show — art selected for the AWE 30th Annual Exhibit, works from the AWE Archive, works created by the AWE Senior Bridge Project: Mental Health and Social Connection and finally from Campbell's classes at Laguna Honda Hospital.

Each piece is supported by a portrait of the artist and a biography just like what Campbell first saw on display at Flax 25 years ago. The exhibition will be on display on the Ground Floor and in the North Light Court of San Francisco City Hall from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. It is free and open to the public.

"First and foremost, it is a celebration of our artists' accomplishments," Campbell said.

He gravitates toward the beginners or those who've had unpleas-



Above: Ana Miranda, age 71, works on a painting at Art With Elders. **Below:** A television shows what instructor Hugh Leeman was drawing on an iPad to instruct students on the scene they would be painting that week. Leeman has students draw or paint based on re-creating their version of a picture each week and helps them with how to get started on the shapes.

Details

Art With Elders: 415-441-2650, www.artwithelders.org

"Art With Elders: The Power of Creativity and Community": Through Aug. 25. San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries at San Francisco City Hall, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, San Francisco.

ant art class experiences.

"I understand the potential for growth in them is so great. It's just remarkable when someone comes to you with that kind of attitude and you nurture them into a space of self expression and self confidence," Campbell said. "And then to see that artist go to City Hall and see their work hanging on a wall there and have the mayor pop in singing its praises. It's transformational for them and everyone around them."



Besides the personal artist benefits of having exhibitions, there is a public facing advantage in how they help recalibrate society's perception of aging.

"The more we do that, the more society appreciates the fact that age should not be a limitation on the capacity to create and to invent and to be confident and celebrate your own personal vision," Campbell said. "We're playing a role in transforming

society's perception of what it means to get old."

He also believes in the power of art and creativity throughout our lives and daily activities.

"I mean that in terms of the capacity for allowing and embracing improvisation in day-to-day applications," Campbell said. "One dude shows up and he's got a flute that he wanted to paint and I'm like, 'This is fantastic!' However we can help enhance their creative

capacity, that's what we're there to do."

Campbell understands this as the natural progression of Art With Elders from the faith-based volunteer program Settle began in 1985 to lessen isolation in nursing homes.

"I think creating this environment in the classroom where you routinely overcome challenges and understand that expectations are not etched in stone, you become better at dealing with some of the challenges of age," Campbell said.

"The miracle we have been awakened to is that human productivity can manifest in manifold ways and in some ways material productivity is nowhere near as important as the kind of productivity that can be garnered from a creative, enlightened, poetic perception of the world that can be shared," Campbell said. "The vocabulary of art creates a unique persuasive opportunity to articulate that wisdom and experience."

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JOEY KOTFICA

Members of the Community Music Center Older Adult Choirs perform at "Getting There Together: A Celebration of All Ages and Abilities" in 2019.

Music programs provide joy, friendship, purpose

By Katie Morell

If you had come across Estela A. Moreno in 2011, you would've met someone with a very different disposition than that of today. Back then, she was reeling from the death of both her parents and struggling to find an activity that would bring her joy.

"I had retired to care for them," remembered Moreno, who is now 73 years old. "I was depressed and didn't know what to do."

One day, she went to a play and noticed a scene with a group of older adult choir singers. The vision sparked an idea: to join a choir of her own. She soon connected with Martha Rodríguez-Salazar, a choir instructor with Community Music Center, who invited Moreno to join one of the newly-created



HEIDI SCHUMANN

Left: An older adult participates in a blues guitar workshop at the Community Music Center Mission District branch. Right: Members of the Community Music Center Older Adults Choirs perform at the "Summit of Older Adult Choirs" at the Herbst Theatre in 2016.



LINDA A. CICERO

Older Adult Choirs designed for people over 60 years old.

"I'd never sang before," Moreno said. "I asked Martha if I

had to try out and she said no, that, 'anyone who can speak, can sing.' "

Since then, Moreno's quality

of life has dramatically improved. Today she participates in three choirs around San Francisco (each meet once per

week). "Choir is a place of friendship," she said. "I really look forward to choir; it makes me so

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LINDA A. CICERO

Left: Mark Allen plays alto saxophone in the Community Music Center's intermediate jazz ensemble. **Above:** Members perform in the Summit of Older Adult Choirs at Herbst Theatre in 2016.

happy to sing."

'Totally changed my life'

The Community Music Center was founded in 1921 with the mission of "making music accessible to all people regardless of financial means." The organization offers music enrichment for all ages in the form of voice lessons, choirs, instrumental lessons, ensembles and performances.

As Sylvia Sherman, the non-profit's program director, explained, the Older Adult Choirs started in 2011. Today there are 15 choirs sprinkled across the city in various neighborhoods from Bernal Heights to Visitacion Valley to the Castro and more.

"We have close to 400 participants in our choirs and partner with local senior centers to make culturally responsible music programming," she said, adding that the choirs sing in a variety of languages. "Participation is free for all seniors."

The positive impacts Moreno has felt from being in the choirs have science to back them up. In 2012, the Community Music Center was approached by UCSF, which in partnership with the San Francisco Department of

Disability and Aging Services, wanted to examine if singing in community choirs could promote health in older adults. The study, titled Community of Voices, kicked off in 2012 and worked with local senior centers to establish choirs for the study.

Notices were published calling for anyone interested to participate. At the time, Deb Lepsch, now 70, had recently moved to the Richmond District from Minneapolis and was feeling lonely.

"It can be hard to make friends in your 60s," she said. "For the first few years after moving, I did a lot of hiking and learning the city, but I was alone a lot. But then I read about the choir study in the local paper and reached out to get involved."

At the time, Lepsch didn't consider herself a singer, just humming along with the radio and remembered singing a bit in high school. Still, she dove head first into the opportunity and it started to transform her life for the better. Today, she is an active participant in four of the organization's choirs.

"It has totally changed my

Details

Community Music Center:
415-647-6015, www.sfcmc.org

life," she said. "I've met some of the closest friends in my life. When you sing, your body vibrates. You have a different focus for a while. You aren't thinking about your aches and pains."

The Community of Voices study continued for five years and was published in 2018. Its major findings included that involvement in community choirs reduces loneliness and increases interest in life for older adults, two claims that both Moreno and Lepsch have felt personally.

Instrumental participation

While he wasn't part of the Community of Voices study, Mark Allen can attest to the positive impacts he's experienced from being part of instrumental groups at the Community Music Center.

In 2000, after a career in film production, he pivoted professionally to working at an ad

agency and was looking for a creative outlet. He'd dabbled in playing the alto saxophone in high school but hadn't picked up an instrument in decades. When his son's music teacher pointed him to the Community Music Center, he jumped into instrumental lessons immediately.

Today he plays in the organization's intermediate jazz ensemble on Tuesday evenings and loves it.

"It feels like a good activity for my brain," he said. "It is a nice group of people who are all there for fun."

In addition to jazz ensembles, the Community Music Center offers a wide variety of instrumental classes and ensembles for experienced musicians and those who've never held an instrument. Classes are offered online and in-person for everything from classical music and Latin jazz (even tango lessons are offered) to bluegrass, Peruvian, ukulele and Middle Eastern, Turkish and Eastern music.

Music for all

Anyone can join a Community Music Center group. The Older Adult Choirs are free to

join, and people over 60 years old can participate in instrumental activities at a 30% discount.

Don't live in San Francisco? All choirs are also offered on Zoom.

"We have people call in from Texas, Los Angeles, New York, Norway," Moreno said. "Lots of siblings of members join us online. It doesn't matter where you are."

And if you are feeling a little skittish about your lack of experience, Moreno said, "don't be afraid. You will make good friends and experience so much joy. It is a beautiful community."

Lepsch loved that the Community of Voices study highlighted the health benefits of participating in community choirs, but she believes the gains are even more substantial than what was found.

"One of my fellow singers is a 92-year-old man who said he heard that joining a choir could add 10 years to your life and that is his motivation for participating," she said. "I often joke that since I'm in four choirs, maybe I'm adding 40 more years to my life."



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An Aqua Fitness instructor leads a class at the Peninsula Family YMCA in San Mateo. The classes help improve cardiovascular fitness, strength and flexibility.

Popular water aerobics classes make a splash

By Matt Villano

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, when many of today's older adults were in their 40s, aerobics classes were all the rage.

Nowadays this demographic is still taking aerobics — the only difference is that many classes are in pools.

The new pastime, dubbed water aerobics, is insanely popular among individuals 65 and older; most gyms and fitness centers around the Bay Area that have pools offer some sort of water-based aerobics classes year-round.

At the classes, participants walk into a shallow pool, claim a spot and prepare to follow an instructor's commands. The instructor, positioned in the front of the pool facing all the adults, then leads the group in a series of body movements made more challenging by the natural push-back of the water.

The resulting workout is challenging but not overwhelmingly so; experts say water aerobics represents a new way to exercise that is easier on the body while still strengthening and improving balance.

"It's is a great workout, no matter how old you are," said Susanna King, senior director of healthy living at the Embarcadero YMCA in San Francisco. "The classes offer a unique combination of water activity that is therapeutic on the body and more supportive for joint health."

Programs galore

Local outposts of the YMCA are great spots to find some of these water-oriented classes.

There are more than a dozen of these entities around the Bay Area and just about all of them with pools offer some form of water programs geared toward older adults. Because these water-based classes often encompass much more than traditional aerobics, they are described by a more general moniker: water fitness.

For instance, the YMCA of San Francisco features different water aerobics based on location, and the Embarcadero location includes Aqua Running and Aqua Boot Camp. The YMCA of the East Bay has water aerobics at the Berkeley location and Aqua Zumba at the Oakland location.

The Peninsula Family YMCA in San Mateo offers classes in two different categories: basic strength and low-impact for those older adults who normally use canes or walkers.

Miranda Boon, associate executive director, said water fitness classes have been among the most popular at her location for years and noted that the classes are now as much about wellness as they are about community.

"We have such a loyal following, many of the participants have become friends," she said.



Above: An Aqua Fitness participant stretches during a class. Below: The Peninsula Family YMCA offers a wide variety of water-based classes.

» **"It's is a great workout, no matter how old you are. The classes offer a unique combination of water activity that is therapeutic on the body and more supportive for joint health."**

Susanna King, senior director of healthy living at the Embarcadero YMCA in San Francisco

Quite an impact

Participants themselves reported that water fitness classes have made a huge difference in their overall health.

Judy Dulik, 66, lives in San Mateo and is a regular at the Peninsula Family YMCA. She reports that the time she spends in water aerobics "flies by" every week, and that she leaves the class feeling energized for the day ahead.

Vonnie McGee, an 81-year-old resident of Millbrae who attends the same YMCA, agreed. McGee joined water aerobics at the Peninsula Family YMCA in 2002 because she had terrible arthritis in her knees and could only walk a half-block without experiencing serious pain. McGee said the exercise helped her build up her joints to the point where she had both knees replaced on the same day in 2011.

"I healed very quickly, and the



doctor said it was because of the 10 years of water aerobics before the surgery," McGee said. "I think this exercise improves my balance, improves my energy levels and puts less pressure on my joints."

McGee added that the social aspect to the classes has been invaluable.

"I have made many friends, we have coffee once a week and we even have gone on trips together," she said.

Other approaches

At other gyms across the Bay Area, older adults are participating in water aerobics and strength classes from SilverSneakers, a national program run by Franklin, Tenn.-based parent company Tivity Health. These low-impact classes, designed for all skill levels and dubbed SilverSneakers Splash, were designed specifically for older adults.

Founder Mary Swanson created SilverSneakers in 1992 after her father survived a heart attack at the age of 51. Today, the program is available to more than 18 million Americans through many Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare Supplement carriers and group retiree plans.

SilverSneakers classes are similar to water aerobics classes at local YMCAs here in the Bay Area. So what sets SilverSneakers apart? All instructors have been specifically trained in senior fitness, which means classes are appropriate for seniors who may have mobility issues, past surgeries and general reluctance to exercise.

SilverSneakers National Trainer Dina Sexton noted that in addition to facilitating greater fitness, SilverSneakers classes help create community.

"When you come together during a class there's a camaraderie between members and also with the instructor," said Sexton. "Stories are shared, members encourage one another, and achievements are celebrated. As we age this feeling of community is invaluable."