Creative couple continues to collaborate after 56 years

Amalia Mesa-Bains’ career retrospective honors her unique room-size ofrendas
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 can be found representing the Bay Area at the Bay Area Senior Games. 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 novices 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 in age 50 to 90-plus. And the more than 1,000 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 to compete in both Olympic sports, but others are world-class athletes. The Bay Area Senior Games logo, “Competing at the Top,” sums it up, and the group has ample requirements to join. For the all, participants must be at least 50 years of age or before Dec. 31, 2023. 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 shirts. And commemorative event T-shirts.

Gold, Silver and Bronze medals are awarded for first, second and third places. There are cash prizes awarded for first place in each age group.

There are 11 different event categories, including track and field, swimming, tennis, pickleball, archery and more.

Nowakowski (right), members of a combined team of Peninsula Water Polo and the Menlo Mavens, relax on the sidelines between matches.

Clockwise from left: Gwen Golub, playing for 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.
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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." Jenni White, water polo player

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

Dave Hendrickson Silver Swords First Place Winner 2023 Bay Area Senior Games Andy Silver Surfers First Place Winner makes me proud.

"My favorite part is the camaraderie, the friendships, the experiences," he said, of his Santa Barbara resident Silver Swords 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-fashioned college spirit is still strong. In 30-some years, his team has seen at least 10 world titles (his last was in 2023) and is going to Japan in 2024 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 get in the water and the instinct kicks in," he said. "We have guys who have played on the National team and on the National water polo team and really are still incredibly competitive."

The 2023 Summer National Senior Games, organized by the California Senior Games Association, is one of the eight regional games held every two years around the country, "Warner Cribbs said. "Seniors find a sport they enjoy and register in local games and in state championships and with the opportunity to compete in the National Games, which are held every two years in a different city in the United States."

"Senior athletes are enthusiastic about their performance and really fun to be around," she added. "With the sports events always very upbeat, encouraging and friendly."

"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." Jenni White, water polo player plays water polo at least three days a week. "It really keeps your brain fit." Her fellow athletes have become kindred spirits.

"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 are at the Soda-Aquatic Center in Moraga. But we have just changed our name because not everyone on the team is a mom, so we are Club Soda."

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Older adults stay busy, earn money with side hustles

By Casey Sawt

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, as well. Most non-government jobs no longer provide traditional retirement benefits package as 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 OnePoll.

The international direct-sales company says it found, “On average, 40 percent of Baby Boomers have a side hustle, including selling products on e-commerce websites and driving for ride-sharing companies — while other re- spondents turned to direct sales, otherwise known as network marketing.”

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

One increasingly popular gig for Baby Boomers is being a translator in written communication. You can do it from home in your free time via sites like flex (www.rex.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/emp). Other resources include adding touches of humor, spirituality.

Meyer 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’re gone through school, or 40 years ago, they’ve gone through school, and they’re looking for a different kind of marriage.”

But Julie keeps busy working at a very personal context.”

“However, that never trans- typified,” the Santa Rosa resident said. "I ended up working with youth for 25 years, and so I have involved in charities and nonprofit work, 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 farm and real 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 pop- ular in Sonoma County," Meyer said. "Then it’s not church wed- dings, 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 — "Instead in a rela- tionship." Julie are retired in the sense that we don’t have an off- ficial business anymore." But Julie keeps busy working with local animal rescue groups, fostering animals, doing things like peacocks and exotic ducks and gardening specialties such as her extensive list of vegetables that she uses in cafes. 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 defi- nitely 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 trees and ornaments in the winter as a side hustle. I finally just had to let go of it be- cause I just didn’t have the time," Meyer said. "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.marryingmartha.com). The Reeve- nistrator caters to all couples, "mixed denomination, spiritual, non- spiritual." His signature approaches include wedding writing of haiku, and the relaxed, down-home luxury style his Wine Country cli- ents are usually seeking out. Re- ferrals are his biggest business driver.

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Left: Reverend Richard Meyer, 68, laughs with Elizabeth and Bryan as he prepares their wedding at Montage 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.
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“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 bingo, пряжка, chess, artwork and attends lectures with quizzes at the end that help stimulate the brain.

“Mommy’s boy.” Galante said. “My mom told me she has a boyfriend.”

Another important Institute on Aging program is their Friendship Line, a FREE 24-hour “safe” 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 “safe” 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 Elder Abuse 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’s been pretty comprehensive,” Hinchey said. “It helps give a voice to people who might not be able to advocate for themselves.”

The educational component to this elder abuse prevention program also involves electronic scans on the internet and the like. Keeping the dialogue open as people best combine 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, as 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 their illness or dependency as you age, the Connect program can help identify which programs and services will help you and your family.”

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

“Help keeps pretty comprehensive,” Hinchey said. “It helps reduce some of the pressure.”
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Artist, educator revolutionized ‘a lost tradition’ with colorful room-size ofrendas

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

By Marcus Croxall

Art 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 has to do with affirming a lost tradition,” Mesa-Bains said. “Because I had some background with home altars, which were the offerings for the day 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’ husband, Richard, created for the final and symbolic center of the Mexican celebration is like the Muertos (Day of the Dead). The Altar of Dolores-Elia de los Muertos is in a day of remembrance for those who passed away.

The arts have several levels to it, suggesting heaven and the bottom representing earth and culture, plants, food, sweat, marigolds and decorative candle offerings.

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

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, flowers, fabric and clothing, skin, paper, 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 powerful altars or ofrendas housed in large-scale installations.

With her husband of 56 years, Richard, Amalia joined him teaching art at San Jose State University and continued to collaborate and try new things. Richard has his own extraordinary gift as a visual artist. 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.

“Lately some of our work is music for a podcast Amalia is doing with the Latinx Research Center,” Amalia said. “I do some music for her projects and I help her with everything that she has. It’s more of a collaboration.”

Mesa-Bains 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 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.

For the last 13 years, “there’s been this in the studio in our home in San Juan Bautista,” the couple laughed. “We’ve been doing it together ever since. It was rather unintentional, although we had a lot of work out in that fourteen years 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 Mesa Department at CSU Monterey Bay 25 years ago.

Amalia joined him there teaching art for over a decade. Richard reentered the chair of the department in the summer of 2022 and was appointed professor emeritus this year.

“We’ve been there about 25 years, did interdisciplinary projects and raised lots and lots of money from all over the country to do projects in the community.”

“Amalia isn’t a witch, she doesn’t even know what I need to make and she can’t see it as a collaboration between us,” Richard said.

“There’s neither a movement nor a movement to that and created another form. ‘What was that about and who was it work,’” Amalia said. “We were both really in the Chicano movement, politically involved with some of the Latino organizations.”

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“’When I found my voice, it was in the Chicano movement,’” Amalia said. “’When I found my voice, I moved to San Francisco, that was the Summer of Love, and I got involved with some of the Latino organizations and I was able to make a significant contribution to the Chicano Community. Then, in that area, my work was diversified. I think one of the reasons Chicanos 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 the retrospective view of people interested in work that spans 50 years,” Amalia said. “There were always projects and interests in the community. Richard was always there. They 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, both of them being creative, both of them being involved,” the couple agreed. “Both of them are involved in cultural issues, that made Richard 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.”
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 celebrated 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. ‘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 life 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 Shanghainese.

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.

Yang enjoys the 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 have some celebration going on,” Poon said. “Aegis Gardens, which opened in 2000, has 64 apartments, all are designed for memory care.

Through China, it is a vast and populous country. Asian communities in the U.S. can have small circles, Poon said. “We have a residence move in, and they bump into their childhood friends,” she said. “It’s really nice because it’s really like a big family house.”

Yang, who is 89 and speaks Cantonese, 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 porridge.

She likes that she can choose from different dishes, such as dumplings with noodles or a red bean bun, and without the food reminds her of what she ate growing up.

“It’s traditional,” she said through a translator.

The check are from different regions of China. She might specialize in northern cuisine while another prepares southern dishes. Many Chinese are living here in America and would enjoy the food at northern restaurants.

The center that serves lots of dishes with cheese, butter, milk and cream.

“Sometimes you can pick what they want,” she said.

“As I’m getting older, my body tells me, ‘Ah, I want soup,’” she said. “I want simple 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 reassuring for them to be among those with a similar background.

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

“We had a Vietnamese American lady. She was so sweet,” Poon recalled. “She wanted to take a cruise to China but couldn’t afford it. So she stayed at Aegis Gardens for two weeks and loved it. The residents were so proud of their culture and interested in sharing with her everything about being Chinese.”

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.walkhelp.org/out-services/senior-housing/autumn-glow-alzheimers-care-home

Kokoro: www.kokoroassistedliving.org

for low- to moderate-income residents.

The dining hall features Japanese specialties such as ramen, cooked and occasionally those who aren’t Asian live there.

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

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

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

Does this seem like a good time to relocate to a new residential area? 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 Survey, released this week, found that the combined share of younger Boomers (58 to 67 years old) and older Boomers (68 to 76 years old) rose from 39% to 29% in the past year.

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% to 23 to 28 last year.

“Baby Boomers have the upper hand in the home-buying market,” said Jessica Lee, National Association of Realtors deputy chief economist and vice president of research, in a statement. The majority of Boomers 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 family and friends. They are long-haul buyers and now have the financial clout to be mighty home buyers trading houses later in life.

At this time, they also want to downsize and enjoy retirement without the great demands of home maintenance. Or they may be “empty nesters” who can help them live easier with an income stream.

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 Village at Ashby, the nonprofit Ashby Village Senior Real Estate Specialist with offices in Berkeley and Oakland, she has worked in the industry for nearly 20 years with an emphasis on planning for the financial and financial needs of older adults looking to move.

“The main thing that is affecting real estate in our area is lack of (sustainable) inventory,” she said. “Plus, many older people decide to stay in their homes so they can avoid capital gains. That is a $270,000 ex- emption 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 experienced 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 Wildfires or Natural Disasters Act (Proposition 19).

“Proposition 19, passed by voters in 2020, allows homeowners to transfer the tax base of their home to one of lower 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 financial decision.”

She also suggests that her clients consider empty-trading houses with their children who may need the usually more room from their parents or vice versa, if they 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 sched- ule 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 challeng- ing medical concerns can also be addressed by the professional assessment of a cognitively/neu- rological 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 pro- viders who 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 $6,701 a month for an average of 44 hours of as- sistance a week, based on the 2020 Genworth Cost of Care Survey, while skilled nursing home care costs an average of $12,747 a month for a semi-private room.

“For those who are able to make the decision about staying at home and living independent- ly 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 pos- sible.”

The nonprofit Ashby Village in Berkeley can smooth the way to planning for the health and care needed. “Ashby Village: 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 in- dependently in the places they call home. The community in- cludes more than 500 members over the age of 50, living in various neighborhoods. The nonprofit Ashby Village in Berkeley also provides as- sistance, through a peer-to-peer approach connecting older adults with each other and sys- tems to help age well. All group events, services and means are welcome; members are encouraged to contact us for 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. Re- cently, the Bay Area news has covered multiple instances of real estate fraud where victims who thought they were being helped to sell, refinance or take out a re- verse mortgage or save their home from foreclosure were tricked and unknowingly sold their homes for a fraction of their value. The schemes have been illegal, but in most cases, legal on paper.

If older adults are susceptible to scam artists of all sorts, Sullivan says to always check credentials, ask for references and (also) other financial advisors for second opinions. “It’s hard to know what to do about this. The reverse mortgage debacle has cleaned up its practices with regulations. But the other people who decide to get a reverse mortgage are usually seniors and often have likely had some grooming. Education is the best weapon. But people generally do not like being told what to do.”

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Tips for navigating a volatile real estate market

Details

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Advertising Feature | Sunday, June 25, 2023 S13
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 healthy 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 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 others,” 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 attract 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 relationships with each other,” Davis said.

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

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.

“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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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.

Details
Blue Zones: www.bluezones.com
San Jose Blue Zones Project: www.sjz.org/san-joa-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 a 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 bringing 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 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.”

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.
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 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 Nettle resigned because of serious health issues. Classes are taught in person 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.

“Most of the teachers approach the students as Art With Elders say. ‘We create these safe environments where expectations are limited. We don’t expect everyone to come out and create a masterpiece,’” Campbell said, Art With Elders CEO

“Creativity, community abounds at Art With Elders”

By Marcus Crowder

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

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.

Instructor Hugh Leeman (standing) teaches an Art With Elders class at Mission Neighborhood Centers to people both in person and online.
are people with experience," Ringle said. "It's great because a lot of the beginners find 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 have to worry about people being negative. And the teacher always sees something positive about whatever you did."

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

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

The other major component of the program is a commitment on 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 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 — an selection for the ANE 30th Annual Exhibit, works from the ANE Archive, works created by the ANE Senior Bridge Project Mental Health and Social Connection and finally from Campbell's classes at Laguna Honda Hospital.

"For people who may be feeling a portrait of the artist and a biography just like what Campbell has seen on display at practically any art museum," Campbell said. "The whole atmosphere is very supportive. It's a lot of work to open up the public.

"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."

"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 life," 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, positive perception of the world that can be shared," Campbell said. "The vocabulary of art creates a unique purview opportunity to articulate that wisdom and experience."

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.

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**FIND YOUR FRONT PORCH SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY.**
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 nowhere to even turn to,” she remembered. Moreno, who is now 73 years old, “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 Rodriguez-Salazar, a choir instructor with Community Music Center, who invited Moreno to join one of the newly-created Older Adult Choirs designed for people over 60 years old. “I’d never sing 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 happy.”

Members of the Community Music Center Older Adult Choirs perform at “Getting There Together: A Celebration of All Ages and Abilities” in 2019.
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 education for all ages in the form of voice lessons, choirs, instrumental lessons, ensembles and performances. As Sylvia Sherman, the nonprofit’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 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 percussion to blues, gospel, Brazilian, klezmer, 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, Montana,” Moreno said. “Lots of folks have joined us online. It doesn’t matter where you are.”

And if you are feeling a little ashamed 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 in a 92-year-old man who said he added 10 years to your life and that he is motivated for participating,” she said. “I often joke that since I’m in four choirs, maybe I’m adding 40 more years to my life.”

Above: Members perform in the Summit of Older Adult Choirs at Herbst Theatre in 2016.

Details

Community Music Center: 415-447-4015, www.sfcmc.org

Community Music Center group. The Community of Voices study, started in 2011 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 remembering 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 life.”

“I’ve met some of the closest friends in my life. When you sing, you’re body-brained. There are 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 experienced from being part of instrumental groups at the Community Music Center. In 2001, 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.”

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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.

Like a fine vintage, each Resident’s unique character develops over time. The many flavors of their lives merge into a rich blend of strength and confidence allowing them to shine. The Magnolia of Millbrae honors and supports the wonderful complexity of every Resident’s spirit.
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-agey, dubbed water aerobics, is a popular among individuals 60 and older; most gym and fitness centers around the Bay Area that have pools offer some sort of water-based aerobics classes year-round.

At all classes, participants walk into a shallow pool, claim a spot and prepare to follow the 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.

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

“Quite an impact”

Quite an impact

Water-based aerobics 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

Popular water aerobics classes offer a variety of water-based exercises for older adults. Because these exercise-based classes often encompass more than traditional aerobics, they are described by a more general moniker: water aerobics. However, there are more than a dozen categories: basic, water running, Aqua Zumba, Aqua Yoga, and even more. The YMCA of San Francisco features different water aerobics based on location and the Embarrasment location in the East Bay has water aerobics at the Berkeley location and Aqua Jum- ba 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.

Dina Sexton noted that in addition to being more general, this type of exercise improves health. “It makes a huge difference in their overall health,” Sexton said. “When you come together as a group it feels like you’re a team.”

Other approaches

At other gyms across the Bay Area, older adults are participating in water aerobics classes from SilverSneakers, a national program run by Franklin, Tenn.-based parent company Healthways. These low-impact classes, designed for all skill levels and dubbed SilverSneakers Splash, were designed specifically for seniors ages 50 and older.

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 13 million Americans through many Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare Supplement carriers and group retiree plans.

SilverSneakers classes are similar to water aerobics classes at local YMCA’s across 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 injuries and general reluctance to exercise.

“Quite an impact”

The SilverSneakers program is run by SilverStreaks, a national program run by Franklin, Tenn., and is marketed to Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare Supplement carriers and group retiree plans.

SilverSneakers classes are similar to water aerobics classes at local YMCA’s across 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 injuries and general reluctance to exercise.

SilverSneakers National Trainer Dina Sexton noted that in addition to being more general, SilverSneakers classes help create community.

“What sets SilverSneakers apart is that you come together during a class there’s a camarade- rie between members and also in the facility, “said Sexton. “Stories are shared, members encourage one another, and achievements are celebrated. As we age the feeling of community is invaluable.”

**”it's 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

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