

Senior Living

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SPECIAL SECTION

LIFESTYLE



Senior walkers from the Lancaster Hiking Club walk at Lancaster County Central Park in early November.

BLAINE SHAHAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

TAKE A HIKE

How walking helped these seniors improve their health — and even find love

CAROLE DECK | FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

Walking at any age is good for your health. For seniors, it's considered the best physical exercise. Plus, it doesn't cost anything, and requires no training or special equipment.

"For older adults, like many of us, taking the first step is the hardest part, but the best part is the many benefits it provides to keep healthy and fit. Your body will love you for it," says Pam Schorr, Willow Valley Communities wellness manager.

When COVID-19 closed gyms, seniors in Lancaster County who regularly walk continued their outdoor fitness routine unaffected by the pandemic limitations.

At 85 years young, Klara Byrnes loves to walk. Born in Germany, her passion for walking began as a young child. Moving to Lancaster in 1956, she became familiar with the city through daily strolls.

"Walking has kept me in good health 100 percent," she says.

Today, the retired histologist for the former St. Joseph's Hospital and Lancaster Regional Medical Center keeps fit walking several times a week. With no health issues, she adds more steps mowing her yard.

For 28 years, Byrnes has been a member of the Lancaster Hiking Club, joining at age 57.

"A friend and I decided to check it out. After one hike, I was hooked," she says.

Along with health benefits, she enjoys socializing with the club's like-minded people and getting to see the beautiful outdoor trails. At 70, she earned the club's award for hiking the most miles — a total of 358 in 2005.

These days, Byrnes walks a shorter distance of about three miles on the weekly hikes. She continues as always to use walking poles for endurance. The only time she doesn't walk is in bad weather.

"Maybe I'll stop walking at 90, but I have no plans to stop as long as I'm able," she says.

A safer way to exercise

The National Institute on Aging recommends walking for older people be-



Ben and Peggy May met through the Lancaster Hiking Club and got married in 2006.

cause it's a safe, low-impact exercise with less risk of injury that still offers a good cardio workout. People can walk at their own pace, distance and length of time.

While exercise experts have recommended 10,000 steps a day, a new study

in JAMA Internal Medicine, a journal published by the American Medical Association, states those who step less than half that amount can still see significant health benefits.

Walking as a teen in his hometown of

HIKE, page 6

INSIDE



NEW TRADITIONS

Page 2



DOWNSIZE DESIGN

Page 3



BRAIN BOOSTERS?

Page 4



VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS

Page 5

HOLIDAYS

Find new traditions to make season special

KIMBERLY MARSELAS
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

It's a holiday season like none other, with health officials urging Americans to cancel many traditional celebrations due to the ongoing pandemic.

But that doesn't mean families and friends can't come together to create meaningful new memories either virtually or at a safe distance.

Whether it's getting outside, cooking a delicious — albeit smaller — meal or participating in religious activities online, concentrate on what can be gained or made better and not just what's been lost. That's one message the Rev. Kevin Eshleman, lead pastor at Ephrata Community Church, is spreading this Christmas.

"It turns out that (times like this) can force us to be creative, to do things we never would have thought of before or maybe didn't have time for," Eshleman says. "I would encourage people to think about what they can begin this year that they can carry into the future as well."

After a year filled with sickness, loss and anxiety, consider these ideas and perspectives to see 2020 out with at least a little joy.

Light up the lead up

Acknowledging that indoor activities are among the riskiest for virus transmission, many local organizations are stepping up when it comes to outdoor events and decorations.

At Ephrata Community Church, for instance, Eshleman says there will be a bigger emphasis this year on outdoor decorations for the broader community, rather than the typical focus on interior decor.

At Garden Spot Communities, an outdoor Christmas tree lighting will be accompanied by an outdoor Christmas light and banner display that spans the New Holland campus.

On Tuesday evenings through December, residents will be able to take small group wagon rides to take it all in. The community remains closed to most visitors, but leaders are considering allowing family members to see the lights by car through a registration system.

"Holidays are so important. It's a time of family gatherings and friends," says Colleen Mussleman, director of life enrichment. "There's a loss when that can't happen. ... We're trying to mirror things we've done in the past but in a new, safe way."

Seniors don't have to live in a retirement community to enjoy the lights.

Expect more churches, entertainment venues and community organizations to do large-scale light displays this year. Have nearby family who won't be able to come together around the table on Christmas Day? Invite them to caravan through a drive-through display in separate cars. Pass out walkie-talkies so the grandkids can share their reactions with grandma and grandpa in another car.

Visit discoverlanaster.com for an extensive list of lighted events.

If the weather holds, consider a trip to Longwood Gardens, which is operating at 35% capacity with advance ticketing only. The displays are wheelchair accessible, and between lighted trees and railway tunnels, visitors can warm themselves by fire pits. Nature is an ideal way to lift the spir-



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its, and the sights and smells of a Longwood Christmas can bring some serenity to a stressful time.

Religious services

The 130 or so members of Temple Beth El have already experienced the year's Jewish High Holy Days in the time of COVID. The congregation has participated in most events virtually, making a few exceptions considering the Jewish faith encourages members to abstain from work (and most technology) on the Sabbath and during

religious feasting days.

Usually at Hanukkah, each family brings its own menorah and places it on a table to create a moving display after lighting. This year's celebration will be outdoors, depending on the weather, and the synagogue will light an outdoor, electric menorah instead.

"Although we want to connect with people and feel the joy, safety is always first," says Rabbi Rami Pavolotzky.

For many, attending holiday religious services is both a time for personal reflection and a chance to come together with family and community members.

Many churches are meeting in-person, but some individuals are hesitant to attend on what is traditionally the most crowded service of the year.

Ephrata Community has added services with limited capacity (asking members to pre-register) and improved its technology capabilities given renewed interest in its 10-year-old livestreaming service.

Other changes are also in the works this year. Candles are usually re-used; This year, attendees will be asked to keep or dispose of them after each service. Eshleman also expects his team

will prepare home kits for those among the 2,200 active members who cannot attend. The box will most likely include their own candle, a worship guide, cookies and hot chocolate mix.

Feel free to borrow the idea, and join loved ones for the same service with some physical touchstones to provide a sense of connection.

Singing more your thing? Search YouTube for sing-along options or download Smule, a karaoke app that lets you sing the same song, side-by-side on video.

The family meal

"Sitting at the table, it's a sacred tradition," says Pavolotzky, noting that his congregation skipped its normal group meal for Passover.

At Hanukkah, beginning Dec. 11, fried foods like sufganiyot (small jelly donuts) take center stage in homage to the oil that lasted a miraculous eight days inside the Temple of Jerusalem.

"I'm pretty, pretty sure there will be plenty of Zooms," Pavolotzky says of the upcoming season, noting he's seen Jewish Community Centers offer virtual challah baking lessons and more this year.

This December, many holiday tables will be missing relatives from across the country or just down the road. Find a way to incorporate them anyway.

If space allows, give each missing guest a place setting and place a photo of them on the chair back. Take a photo and send it to a relative who is in a nursing home — a tangible way of making them feel remembered, especially if you've sent along a holiday goodie bag, too.

For those who typically host, maybe this is the year to finally share the secret recipe for Grandma Sara's apple pie or Uncle Mike's mac and cheese. Schedule a video call, have everyone gather the ingredients and plan a time to cook together, wherever each chef is. In future years, this could be a tradition in the lead up to the big day.

For intergenerational fun, look for free resources that give you everything you need — including conversation starters — to cook with kiddos. Radish, a kids' cooking club, offers great ideas and a few recipes at bit.ly/RaddishCooking.

Or enjoy meals with immediate family members, then dial up other relatives to share dessert as you reflect on memories from long-ago holidays. This could be a great year to rummage through old photo albums and share the stories behind a few favorites. Black-and-white photos from World War II or even the Great Depression may help put into perspective the sacrifices on behalf of each other's health in 2020.

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LIFESTYLE

From Virginia home to Willow Valley apartment

Compromise, clever design key to couple's downsizing success

LIS KING
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

Most people find downsizing a daunting process. But not LaVera Leonard Sullivan. A whirlwind of energy and charm, she moved herself and husband Tim from their family home in Alexandria, Virginia, to an apartment in Lancaster's Willow Valley Communities without any angst at all.

"She did it all. She always does. It was her hallmark at work," Tim says, noting that LaVera started a Washington, D.C., public affairs firm that grew to 35 employees and handled such major projects as Headstart and the National Job Corps. Here, LaVera tries to stop him, but he won't have it. "I like to brag about her," he says, smiling hugely. "She's amazing."

"I was actually a bit of an obstacle in the moving-on process," Tim says. "Working in the Department of Labor, I became a huge fan of D.C. sports teams and didn't want to give up my seasons tickets to my favorite teams. I was also attached to my exercise room in the basement, and I wouldn't part with my recliner."

The Sullivans compromised. Tim commuted to games and stayed overnight in D.C. He took advantage of Willow Valley's world-class exercise facilities and moved the recliner to his man cave in their new apartment, he says.

"Except, of course, with the pandemic there have been no games and our exercise room has been closed."

Making the move

"Moving here was an easy decision," LaVera says. "My



LaVera and Tim Sullivan relax in their apartment at Willow Valley Communities.

mother — who's also named LaVera — has been a Willow Valley resident for years. In fact, she has an apartment right down the hall from us. So coming here was a natural decision. And since my mom's apartment has the same layout as ours, it wasn't difficult to visualize what furniture should go where."

For help, she looked to Lancaster designer David Lyall, who emailed her 25 questions before the move to discover information such as her priorities for the new place.

"When I visited his studio in Lancaster, he had a whole wall of photos and swatches. I was told to go over them and create three piles: one

for the things I liked best, the next for those I found so-so, and the third for those I didn't like," she says. "In the end we had an excellent picture of the kind of home I wanted. And then, when I started shopping for furniture, he would gently steer me in the right direction."

A new look

To her surprise, LaVera found that she wanted a complete change from the formal, traditional interiors of the Alexandria home. So everything went up for auction.

She exchanged all that formality of her former home for a contemporary, relaxed look. "I wanted something

airy, comfortable and calming," she says. "It isn't quite a coastal look, but close."

She got her look with walls painted warm taupes and greiges and one sage green feature wall in the master bedroom. The living room invites cozy get-togethers with a curvy white leather sofa and a giant TV screen. But LaVera's favorite piece is her gift wrapping center.

Yes, a gift wrapping center. LaVera laughs as she tells of Lyall's surprise when this was one of the priorities she listed during their initial communications.

"I had such a center in the basement of our former house," she says. "It was a standing desk with all sorts of storage, and I also had a



Top: The Sullivans added a sage green accent wall in their master bedroom. Above: LaVera Sullivan wraps presents at her custom gift wrapping station.

TV there. Now I have such a center here. I love it."

It's a bar-height peninsula, granite-topped and obviously a great bar counter, but LaVera proudly opens drawers underneath it, each one packed neatly with ribbons, wrapping paper, shipping supplies and more. On the wall behind the peninsula is a custom-built storage unit designed to hold bar paraphernalia and household necessities. "Storage is so important when you downsize," she says.

A round table from Lyall's studio seats six in the dining

room, where LaVera points to a spectacular contemporary chandelier. "I found it in a catalog," she says. One of the apartment's two bedrooms became Tim's man cave, where his famous recliner has pride of place. Accessories include pillows in the blues that help along the coastal vibe that LaVera wanted plus vivid contemporary paintings from Lancaster's Gallery Row. There's also a book that LaVera put together as a surprise birthday gift for Tim. It depicts

COUPLE, page 6



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HEALTH

Do supplements really boost brain function?

CAROLE DECK
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

Many people are looking for ways to improve their memory and concentration. Concern with the growing public health issue of cognitive dysfunction is prompting sales of supplements to boost brain health.

Can simply taking a tablet really work?

“Yes,” says 80-year-old Julia Disney, the former owner of Julia’s Health Food Store in Intercourse. “A supplement has been helping my memory from getting worse as I get older.”

Though she acknowledges most studies don’t support supplement manufacturers’ claims of improved memory and concentration, Disney says it’s because those studies are from a medical standpoint, not a nutritional one. For her, taking a supplement is like eating food for the brain.

“Why should seniors try a supplement to boost memory ... Why should they not invest in their health?” she asks.

Disney’s daughter, Darla Anastasi, 53, who took over ownership of the health foods store in 2018 and renamed it Julia’s Health & Nutrition LLC, shares her mother’s support for sup-



Julia Disney, right, and her daughter, Darla Anastasi, with memory supplements at Julia’s Health & Nutrition in Intercourse.

plements.

“We give our body good food for nutrition, exercise so it runs smoothly and also need to feed our brain. Supplements are the best brain food,” Anastasi says.

She says she disagrees with health experts who advocate eating well to avoid memory decline. With today’s food being genetically modified, she says there’s more need than ever to take supplements for better health. It

isn’t surprising, she says, that memory supplement sales are on the rise with more ads for more products with more research to back them. The store has always sold vitamins, omegas and ginkgo for brain health, she says.

Seniors make up the majority of customers purchasing supplements to improve memory, Anastasi says. Many are from the Plain and Amish communities, along

with tourists from all over the state.

Anastasi is aware there’s a lot of skepticism about supplements. Her husband, Vince, was the biggest skeptic. But, over a year ago, the 58-year-old territory manager for Lawn & Gulf Supply in Phoenixville became a believer.

“I began using a product which reduces brain fog, heightens my awareness and mental clarity,” he says, adding that he notices a difference when he doesn’t take the supplement.

No FDA testing

A survey by AARP released in June 2019 shows more than three-quarters of Americans over 74 take some sort of vitamin or dietary supplement, as do almost 70 percent of boomers (those between 55 and 73). These products can be purchased in retail stores and on the internet, with sales expected to reach \$5.8 billion by 2023. The study revealed a misconception by

consumers that the Food and Drug Administration regulates supplements for ingredients and claims.

Diane Boomsma, a compounding pharmacist and owner of Custom Prescriptions of Lancaster, says the FDA does no testing or checks on supplement ingredients. It only prevents health claims by manufacturers about specific treatment of specific diseases.

In terms of brain health, she says, a supplement manufacturer can claim a product helps with mental alertness or memory loss, but not that it protects against or improves dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

“A lot influences our brain and cognitive health doesn’t depend on taking one supplement,” Boomsma says.

She counsels patients referred to her by health care providers on how to appropriately use supplements and if they are benefiting from them. Some of the most popular ones on the market for memory enhancement are ginkgo biloba, ginseng, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E. No research to date demonstrates any of them actually work.

Prevagen has been one of the top brain booster supplements on the market for years. It can be purchased at retail stores. In 2012, the FDA sent a warning letter to Quincy Bioscience, manufacturer of Prevagen, for misleading the public stating the supplement was “clinically proven” to improve cognitive function. The lawsuit is ongoing. Today, the product packaging claims: “clinically shown to help with mild memory loss associated with aging.” But the average consumer never reads or would understand the lengthy clinical trials, Boomsma says.

“Claims about clinically tested ingredients in supple-

ments are vague,” she says.

While many supplements have been proven to have no benefit, especially for brain health, the pharmacist supports evidence the placebo effect (someone believes it works) can influence people.

Her recommendation is for anyone having a cognitive issue to discuss it with their physician or pharmacist.

“A healthy brain begins with a healthy lifestyle,” Boomsma says.

Dr. Jon Bentz, a neuropsychologist, and Dr. Timothy Martin, a neurologist at Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Physicians Alzheimer’s & Memory Care, say there are no dietary supplements documented to prevent cognitive decline.

“Studies do not strongly support supplements improve memory, enhance focus, prevent or delay dementia,” Bentz says.

Both doctors agree the lack of FDA regulations to review supplement products for safety and effectiveness before they are marketed is a problem with over-the-counter and online supplements. Martin says controlled studies by the FDA to test supplement ingredients and show benefits or any potential harm would be beneficial for consumers.

“Individuals who profess significant improvement in cognitive health from supplements is an opposite conclusion from research studies,” Martin says.

However, there are FDA-approved prescription medications to help stabilize Alzheimer’s disease and dementias, he says.

“A healthy diet, exercise, staying mentally active and engaging socially has a greater benefit for a person’s brain health than a supplement,” Bentz says.



GROWING UP,

Dr. Smith said he was always interested in medicine because it is a “caring field.”

For Dr. Smith, considering each patient on an individual level and creating a customized plan of care is key to his patient philosophy. “My approach is: listen to the patient first, and then consider all options, keeping in mind the final goal of them living happier, more fulfilled lives,” he said.

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COMMUNITY

Consider safe ways to volunteer during COVID-19

LAURA KNOWLES
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

For many seniors, the years after retirement are an opportunity to work in volunteer positions and give back to the community.

In another time, seniors might volunteer at a retirement home, a fundraising thrift shop or a hospital. These days, these types of volunteer jobs can be risky. Some do not even exist right now, since working directly with retirement home residents is not allowed because of the risks to both residents and volunteers.

So, what can a community-minded senior volunteer do in the time of COVID-19?

Consider creative new ways of communicating with others, such as by FaceTime or Zoom. That way, you can stay involved without putting yourself or others in danger.

Another option is to work in a lower-risk situation, such as sorting food for a food bank, filing library books or working with animals. You can also make things that others need, such as face masks.

Support a healthy cause

After retiring from his 40-year career in health care, Paul Carbone wanted to do a volunteer job in his field. The ideal opportunity came with working as a volunteer contact tracer for the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Following an extensive training program, Carbone began doing contact tracing calls to those who have tested positive for COVID-19 or those who may have been exposed to people with the coronavirus.

“It is very rewarding to talk to these people, and some are very scared,” he says. “But I can provide them with in-

formation and guide them through the process.”

There is an extremely urgent need for volunteer contact tracers, who typically work two hours a day, five days a week. They should have strong interpersonal skills, and be comfortable conducting phone interviews with patients who tested positive for COVID-19 or people they have been in contact with over the last few weeks. Having a health care background can be helpful. It is important to have a calm, reassuring demeanor since many people may be stressed by the call.

For more information on contact tracing, visit health.pa.gov.

Share a skill

Ruth Gilbert is a retired teacher, who has found a niche as a volunteer tutor. During COVID-19, many students have struggled with online learning.

“It’s hard for students to adjust to all the changes and sometimes they need extra tutoring,” says Gilbert, who tutors in reading, English, language arts and literature.

She has two high school students who needed extra help with their studies, and she is able to teach virtually in late afternoons, early evenings and on weekends, when students are not in class.

If you have a background in teaching or have a skill such as art, music or a craft, you can set up volunteer classes for students or even for older people who want to learn something new.

Share your experience

Retired business people can serve as volunteers at places like SCORE, putting their experience to work for others. In 2020, the men-

tors at SCORE Lancaster-Lebanon were able to provide 3,869 free mentoring sessions to small business owners, startups and non-profit leaders, donating a total of 4,599 volunteer mentor hours.

SCORE offers the nation’s largest network of volunteer, expert business mentors, who share their talents and expertise with the small business community. You can help as a mentor, offering confidential business mentoring services; a subject matter expert, providing knowledge based on your professional skills or industry; or a workshop presenter, leading local workshops, seminars and events to help entrepreneurs meet their goals and achieve success.

In the past, these services were provided in person, but now mentors and other volunteers are working remotely, so that both the volunteer and the business can stay safe during the pandemic.

The expertise of SCORE mentors was especially vital for businesses, as mentors helped guide 150 SCORE clients through the loan and grant application process to secure essential funding in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Share your love

If you love animals, you can still safely volunteer for animal rescue organizations in Lancaster County, like the Humane League of Lancaster County, Pet Pantry, Furever Home and Lancaster County SPCA. These animal rescue organizations often need volunteers who can walk dogs, feed dogs and cats, clean cages and litter boxes, and provide TLC.

You can also volunteer to foster rescue kittens or puppies until they are old



Online tutoring is a safe volunteer option for seniors.

GETTY IMAGES

enough or healthy enough to be adopted. Since this is done at home, you can avoid any risky contact with people and provide a good start to animals in need.

“I love taking care of tiny kittens who need extra help. It is so rewarding, except that I sometimes want to keep them all,” says volunteer Jean Miller.

Discover history

Working at home or remotely also gives you the opportunity to volunteer farther afield.

ONLINE, page 6

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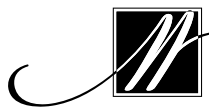
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