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SPECIAL SECTION

HEALTH & WELLNESS



BLAINE SHAHAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER PHOTOS



Lancaster Senior Games participants do Bingocize at Spooky Nook. From left: Carroll Adams, top, of Willow Valley; Wayne Keene, left, and Susan Krasnai of Mount Joy; instructor Gail Young (center, holding microphone) with Katie Cooper of Manheim; Krasnai, top right, and bottom right, Mary Lou Alsentzer of Willow Valley, with Betty and George Aurandt of Mount Joy.

What do you get when you combine bingo with exercise?

BINGOCIZE

MARGARET GATES | MGATES@LNPNNEWS.COM

Marie Strait sits alone in a back room of the Elizabethtown Senior Center, a pair of bingo cards in front of her and a laptop by her side. With a collection of blue chips and a magnetic bingo wand at the ready, she listens intently for the numbers and starts marking her card. It seems like a typical round of bingo until number caller Gail Young switches gears:

“Everybody ready for a little dance party?” she asks. “Alexa, play ‘The Twist.’”

Strait is now on her feet watching Young and the seven other participants on her laptop screen, moving to the beat of the Chubby Checker classic and following Young’s instructions: “Weight on the front foot, weight on the back foot.” Another participant breaks into song, “Let’s twist again like we did last summer ...”

And just like that, ordinary bingo turns into Bingocize.

Like the name suggests, Bingocize combines exercise, health information and the game of bingo with the goal of helping older adults improve or maintain independence, reduce falls, improve nutrition and stay socially engaged.

The Lancaster County Office of Aging currently offers Bingocize twice a year as part of its free virtual programming. Bingocize also made its in-person debut as a Lancaster Senior Games event this month.

The 10-week workshop, approved through both SNAP-Ed and the National Council on Aging, includes a series of exercises interwoven with periods of rest for calling numbers. If someone wins bingo, a new game begins until all exercises are completed.



VINNY TENNIS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Marie Strait does virtual Bingocize at the Elizabethtown Senior Center, above and top right.

It’s a way to have fun with a favorite senior activity while also improving health.

“Somebody came up with this brilliant idea to combine the two,” Young says.

A serendipitous start

That somebody was Jason Crandall, an associate professor of exercise science and co-director of the Center for Applied Science in Health & Aging at Western Kentucky University. Crandall calls the creation of Bingocize serendipitous more than anything else.

In 2011, while teaching at Kentucky Wesleyan College, Crandall wanted to prepare physical therapy and occupational therapy students for their future professions, so he tasked them with planning and developing an exercise program for the older residents of a nearby independent living community. The students put up flyers, promoted the program and got excited for it to start.

“The first day, not a soul showed up. They were devastated. ... Everybody was down the hall playing bingo,” Crandall recalls. “It hit me right that very minute: Bingocize.”

The idea was simple: Encourage the residents to do something they didn’t want to do by disguising it with an activity they enjoyed.

Crandall immediately got to work developing a program that incorporated both. The next week, 15 residents showed up to participate.

Soon, Crandall was securing research dollars to do his first study. In 2013, he left Kentucky Wesleyan, a school of about 650 students, for Western Kentucky, with a student population of about 20,000. Working at a larger university allowed him to do the research and collect the data to take Bingocize from a service-learning project to an evidence-based program approved by the National Council on Aging.

“That’s what propelled it to where it is today,” Crandall says.

Bingocize is now in 43 states and four countries.

“To be honest, people kind of laughed at me. They thought it was kind of silly, especially in academia,” he says. “They don’t laugh too much anymore.”

Certainly, no one is laughing at the results. Crandall’s research has shown improvement in lower body



VINNY TENNIS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

strength and balance, both of which help prevent falls. His colleague, Matthew Shake, a cognitive psychologist, has found improvement in specific aspects of cognition among Bingocize participants. They’ve also seen improvement in patient activation, or someone’s ability to navigate their own health care.

Steady progress

For Marie Strait, the results have been tangible. The 68-year-old Elizabethtown resident usually participates from her home, but she’s completing the last class in this 10-week session at the senior center because she’s having work done at her house. It’s her third time doing the Bingocize program.

“I’m more flexible,” she says. “I have better balance. I feel like I have more energy.”

Each session includes a series of exercises to improve strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Some are done while sitting, others while standing. Young, a Geri-Fit instructor with the county office of aging, encourages participants to work at their own pace and offers sitting versions of some of the exercises for those who have trouble standing.

Young has been teaching Bingocize for three years. In the first year, the program was in person, but it switched to virtual with the arrival of COVID-19.

“Because I’ve done it in person, I was really not visualizing it online,” Young says. “I’ll tell you what, it was so great. People had been kind of cooped up. It was a great way for them to connect. They really did form a group and a support system for each other, encouraging each other. It was really amazing to watch it grow.”

Mary Ann Hess, 77, of East Petersburg, says she tried other exercise programs offered by the office of aging

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Explore Retirement Living
Open House details and participating communities at
www.ExploreRetirementLiving.org

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VINNY TENNIS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER PHOTOS

A GOOD SPORT

Novice learns the basics of pickleball: Have fun and stay out of the ‘kitchen’

KARYL CARMIGNANI
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

There aren’t many sports that make me grin from ear-to-ear, but playing pickleball for the first time brought forth a surprising swell of joy.

Admittedly, I’m late to the pickleball party — I’ve heard about it for years but didn’t hit the court until this spring. The sport is a composite of other racket sports — happily, the court is much smaller than a tennis court, the paddles are larger than pingpong paddles, and the ball lighter than a squash ball — with the goal to wallop the plastic whifflelike ball over the 34-inch-high net to the other team. It can be played indoors or outside; playing doubles keeps the sprinting down, but it is still a challenge.

I decided to join the pickleball players at my gym, Universal Athletic Club, though I was warned that they are really good and take it seriously. Three pickleball courts are set up on the basketball courts, with sturdy, ceiling-hung nets encompassing them so errant balls don’t travel far. While healthy competition reigned across the courts, players generously shared their pickleball tips with me as we sat on the sideline waiting to join a game.

“We’re just here to have a good time and stay out of the kitchen!” said one fellow. “Kitchen” is the affectionate term for the first 7 feet of real estate on either side of the net. Another man shared that Bright Side in Lancaster and Lititz Rec offer pickleball lessons.

“Pickleball basically saved my life after I retired,” he added. “I found a place (on the pickleball court) so I didn’t go over the deep end.”

Another fellow said that he respects beginners but



LNP correspondent Karyl Carmignani, top and above, second from left, gets a pickleball lesson at Universal Athletic Club from Peggy Gerhard, left, Mary Ann Warnick and Betsy Chamberlain.

added, “The better players you play against, the better you’ll be.”

Indeed, the folks playing on these courts appear keenly dialed into the sport mentally and physically — focused, agile and attentive to keeping score. Pickleball is like a fountain of youth of sorts, keeping players quite literally on their toes and their minds sharp.

In recent years, pickleball’s popularity has exploded like an overhead smash. According to a recent Sports & Fitness Industry Association report posted on USAPickleball.org, 4.8 million people picked up the paddle in 2021, a staggering two-year growth rate of over 39%. Of these, 1.4 million are “Core” players who play eight or more times per year; over 33% of players 65 and older are Core players. Many people play multiple times per week at my gym.

Though pickleball appeals to young and old alike, the pickleball courts at my gym are available weekdays 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., drawing

mostly recent retirees and those who have celebrated more than a few milestone birthdays — and a couple of young guys possibly committing truancy.

Which brings us back to my stance — feet wide, knees slightly bent — pickleball paddle clutched in my right hand, hips facing the net, eyes on the ball. Hearing the smack of the ball on the paddle harked back to the pingpong days of my misspent youth. You can never tell what latent motor skills will prove useful later in life, as my swift forehand shot clearing the net — and bouncing inbounds — demonstrated. Of course, those elegant exchanges were in painfully short supply my first time out, but I was undaunted. It was great fun!

Despite my legs initially feeling like cement blocks, over time I got lighter on my feet. At first, pickleball seems a bit complicated with its constant shifting of servers, the must-follow two-bounce rule and the three-part scorekeeping

DID YOU KNOW?

Pickleball was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, Washington, as a game to keep the kids entertained. Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum returned from golf and found their families bored so they improvised a game — part pingpong, part badminton — that everyone could enjoy. McCallum made the first pickleball paddles on his bandsaw. Joan Pritchard, Joel’s wife, said the game reminded her of the “pickle boat” in crewing where the oarsmen were chosen from the leftovers of other boats, and the name pickleball was born. Later, they got a cocker spaniel and named it Pickles, in honor of the sport — the sport was not named for the dog, as is a common misunderstanding.

when playing doubles. Like a toddler, I just wanted to hit the ball!

Betsy, a lithe, quick-as-a-doe 84-year-old, took me under her pickleball wing, explaining the rules and basic paddle technique. She politely shared the most urgent rule: Stay out of the kitchen! And tips like Face the net! Be ready! It likely

pained the seasoned group to play with a complete amateur, but they patiently coached me. Happily, my past pingpong experience proved helpful, though I still whiffed some shots, and hit some before the ball bounced. But I managed a couple of gratifying spin shots and volleys.

However, moments into my first foray into the sport, I thundered toward an expertly executed lob shot, my middle-aged momentum building, and face-planted into the gigantic net surrounding the courts, knocking over a chair and going full cat claw into the mesh to save my knees. The seasoned pickleball players rushed to my aid, filled with concern and a bit of mirth, helping me up. Apparently, recklessly chasing the ball is a common mistake among rookies. Duly noted. I would have burned with shame in high school at such a clumsy move, but among these seniors, I was able to shake it off and carry on.

On my second visit, my enthusiasm still eclipsed my athletic talent. Fortunately, someone mentioned that there happened to be a private pickleball class going on upstairs in a studio, so I high-tailed it up there. A woman named Peggy was instructing seven beginner-level students. She graciously let me join a team. Here, my talents — and fumbles — were better received.

“The most important thing is getting the ball over the net,” Peggy explained. “Then you can strategize.”

She demonstrated how important “dinking” is to the game. That’s where you gently tap the ball over the net into the kitchen, forcing your opponent to sprint and possibly miss or hit it out of bounds.

“Patience and precision are more important than power,” Peggy added.

Perhaps that’s the true appeal — and challenge — of this sport.

Bingocize

Continued from 1
before discovering Bingocize.

“The idea of playing bingo enticed me into it,” she says. “The exercises are fantastic, and the bingo is fun.”

Hess also likes the convenience — and the accountability — of doing Bingocize via Zoom.

“If it’s rainy or ugly outside I don’t have to go out of the house. It’s right there,” she says. “There’s no excuse for not doing it.”

Classes are held twice a week, and the workout intensifies gradually. At the beginning of the 10-week session, participants do each exercise for 20 seconds. By the end, they’ve worked their way up to a minute. Young also challenges her students to continue the exercises on their own days.

Strait does her exercises while watching TV at night and happily reports that she no longer misses the end of a show due to falling asleep.

“(Marie) usually has at least 20 total times that she’s done her whole sheet,” Young says. “She’s made amazing progress.”

Hess says she can easily get in her reps in the time it takes to cook her potatoes.

“I can see the strengthening,” she says. “One of the hateful exercises is sitting and standing up. When I started I could barely do it, now I can keep up. ... It’s a life skill. You have to be able to stand up.”

The Bingocize program includes an education option as well, so instructors can choose to offer exercise only, exercise and fall prevention, or exercise and nutrition education.

Crandall says he is looking to expand the program for people with different disabilities. He’s also hoping to add an educational option focusing on sexual health for older adults.

A winning combination

It should come as no surprise that an activity that involves exercise AND bingo isn’t all work and no play. Crandall says he and his colleagues are just starting to measure the social engagement benefits of the program.

“I like the people, I like all the camaraderie, and I love 81,” says Katie Cooper, 81, of Manheim. “It’s been just a joy to be able to each Thursday or Monday ... set some time aside for Bingocize.”

Among the participants, there’s some good-natured kidding around, too.

As Strait and the other virtual Bingocizers complete a balance exercise with their eyes closed, it’s time for a dance party again, this one to the tune of “Stayin’ Alive.”

Another participant pipes up: “Ironically, if somebody’s having a heart attack, that’s the song you do CPR to.”

“No one’s going to have one on my watch,” Young says.

When the Bee Gees song ends, it’s time for more bingo. With the call of the next number, Strait shouts, “Bingo!” The win earns her one bingo buck. With nine more she’ll get a \$10 gift card.

“If you win Bingocize, everybody cheers,” Hess says.

Bingocize seems to be producing a lot of winners — no matter where the chips land on their bingo cards.

For more information on Bingocize and other virtual classes offered by the Lancaster County Office of Aging, contact Debbie Groff at 717-299-7979 or dgroff@co.lancaster.pa.us.



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LINING UP TO DANCE

Willow Valley resident Dottie Giersch teaches popular line dancing class that keeps students on their toes

GAYLE JOHNSON
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

When Dottie Giersch calls for a rocking chair, she isn't talking about a piece of furniture usually associated with front porches and old folks. Rather, the 78-year-old names a dance step as she directs some 60 senior citizens during a recent line dance class.

Her students respond, repeatedly shifting weight between their right and left feet. Then, they clap, stomp, shuffle, march and slide as Dolly Parton's voice rises from a laptop in a sports gym recently left vacant by pickleball players.

Giersch lives and teaches at Willow Valley Communities. Her 12-week Tuesday afternoon class fills up within 36 hours after enrollment opens. Mostly women register, but a smattering of men sprinkle in for a class that requires no partner.

"We get the biggest turnout for line dancing," says Kristin Holloway, assistant manager for the senior living community's Clubhouse and amenities.

Line dance has roots in dances brought to the United States from European immigrants in the 1800s. The activity consists of people who line up in horizontal rows and perform choreographed steps of 32 beats, usually facing an instructor.

Dancers then pivot to the right and perform the steps again before turning to another direction, continuing the process until a song ends. The first part of line dance classes usually features a teacher who explains choreography and demonstrates a routine. Music covers all genres, from country-western songs to Broadway tunes to Frank Sinatra or Top 40 hits.

A teacher in demand

"Physical activity is the key to good health," says Giersch, who discovered line dancing after she and her husband, Brian, retired to North Carolina. Giersch taught two classes a week there.

The dance teacher grew up in northern New Jersey with two older brothers who kept her on the basketball court and football field and taught her field hockey. Giersch says she joined any sport her high school offered. She originally wanted to teach physical education but was swayed by a guidance counselor who steered her to a regular classroom.

Then, college, marriage and two kids led Giersch to expand her activities. She led a Girl Scout troop, joined book clubs and worked, although she still managed to squeeze in skiing and sailing on the family's boat.



Top: Dottie Giersch, center, teaches a line dancing class at The Clubhouse at Willow Valley Communities. Above left: Resident Janet Clark and others follow Giersch's instruction. Above right: Giersch's husband, Brian, follows his wife's lead.

Willow Valley, which often brings speakers or entertainers to a large event hall, held a line dance party a few days after Giersch and her husband moved to the community in the fall of 2019. Giersch says the couple chose Willow Valley as a second retirement location after searching for a community that offered continuing care.

Other residents noticed Giersch's dancing prowess during that line dance party and soon began to interrupt the couple's dinner at a community dining room to ask Giersch to teach her own class.

Brian Giersch soon offered his wife a deal: If she would start a line dance class, he would register for a social dancing club and take lessons. Giersch agreed. The pandemic shuttered the live class, but Giersch, a former Maryland educator for more than 30 years, sent out dance videos and instructions so participants could dance at home.

"It's an exciting time to get people active," Giersch says, explaining that line dancing helps seniors stay physically and mentally fit because participants memorize dance steps, stay on their feet and then socialize during planned breaks after

every 30 minutes of movement in the two-hour class.

Darlene Copeland appreciates every facet of the class.

"I love the dancing, and I love the camaraderie," the 72-year-old says. "Dottie's really good. She'll take the time to explain a step, and she'll stand right by you."

Giersch, ever the teacher, prepares her students by sending video links and instructions before each class. In fact, a second group has started meeting informally on Mondays in an auditorium to practice the video steps together. She also modifies steps for dancers who have trouble turning or balancing. In addition, the music rarely plays at a fast beat.

"It's very exciting to see how people are picking this up," she says.

For Copeland, though, she also likes what she calls the class's side show — banter between Giersch and her husband. For instance, Copeland says Brian Giersch often asks his wife to repeat a step several times, such as swinging her hips, before Dottie Giersch realizes that the request comes from her husband, who already knows the step but wants to see his wife shake her body.

"They feed off each other,"

for her newfound stability. "Dottie really breaks things down. She does a fine job of presenting it."

'Line dancing is huge'

Another student, Jack Himes, knows line dancing. He's been doing it almost 30 years.

"I'm amazed at the number of people here we have line dancing," Himes says.

The 88-year-old watches dancers from a bench while he undergoes physical therapy for a pulled leg muscle. "I will be back," he promises.

Himes also has taken lessons from area teacher Michael Diven, who says, "line dancing is a worldwide phenomenon." The instructor teaches classes in Lancaster and York counties. He travels to dancing events across the country. People will often gather from Thursdays to Sundays for lessons and dancing. Diven will host a one-day Saturday event June 11 in Ephrata.

Carol Craven share's Diven's perspective.

"Line dancing is huge," says Craven, who publishes a digital World Line Dance newsletter and hosts a similar Facebook page from Clearwater, Florida.

While Willow Valley limits its classes to residents, line dance classes are still available locally. Diven, who has been dancing and teaching for about 36 years, offers a 6 p.m. drop-in class Thursdays at Bright Side Opportunities Center in Lancaster for \$10 a session. The class runs until 9 p.m. Diven also teaches in Columbia, Red Lion and York.

For more information, go to www.mdiven.com or email cwdance@localnet.com.

SUZETTE WENGER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Copeland says.

Jane Armstrong, another Willow Valley resident, practices the piano for hours a day. She also likes to read, another occupation that keeps her sitting. Armstrong, 77, noticed her ability to balance had waned when

she tried to teach her granddaughter to hopscotch.

"I'm not an avid exerciser," says Armstrong, who registered for the class after a neighbor recommended it. "It was not easy, but it has helped me regain balance." Armstrong credits Giersch



My mother always said, "Choose wisely."

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When I was a little girl my mother would say, "You'll have to make many choices in life.

Just be sure to choose wisely." I've made many decisions since then, but when it came to choosing a retirement community, I was reminded of her valuable advice. That's how I ended up choosing Brethren Village. It's a continuing care retirement community—a CCRC—which means I'll always have access to the care I need. With a wide range of residential options I found a perfect apartment that's close to everything and a financial option that fit my needs to a tee.

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Ray Loewe shares secrets of ‘luckiest people’

MARGARET GATES
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Ask Ray Loewe about his retirement philosophy, and he'll likely bring up the penguins.

When Loewe and his wife, Sandy, were in their 50s, they did what they called their “practice retirement,” knocking off some of their big bucket list items early in life.

While touring Antarctica, they went on an outing one day to see the penguins. When they returned to their ship, Loewe asked an older couple on the tour why they had stayed behind. More than two decades later, he can still remember their answer:

“We kept putting off this trip because we wanted to feel financially secure,” the couple told him. “Now we have all the money we need but we can’t climb up the hill to see the penguins.”



Ray Loewe records his “Changing the Rules” podcast from studio space at Willow Valley Communities, where he lives with his wife, Sandy.

retirement years, at some point he realized there was a piece missing from the puzzle.

“We did a pretty good job of helping people accumulate money, but we never taught them how to spend it,” he says. “Spending is what life is all about. It’s why you save for retirement. You don’t want to get to a point where you don’t have direction.”

Loewe began to discover that the people who were unhappy or had regrets were the ones who retired without a plan or a purpose. It’s not enough to simply keep

busy if you’re just meandering through life, he says.

So, he set out to learn the secrets of people he admired, those who designed the life they wanted to live and then started living it.

You might say Loewe has found some of his own retirement purpose by sharing the stories of how others found theirs.

He calls them “the luckiest people in the world,” and he’s interviewed more than 100 of them over the past two years for his podcast, “Changing the Rules.” They come from all walks of life. Among his past guests:

— A musician who now helps late bloomers achieve their hidden dreams.

— A former corporate executive who shares the ABCs of career success.

— A geographer who turned his passion for biking into a volunteer gig with Lancaster Farmland Trust.

“Every week we put a role model in front of people,” he says.

Originally, he started with guests that were 55 and older, until some younger listeners pointed out that the idea of finding out who you are and discovering your niche in life really applies to

HOW TO BE LUCKY

Want to be one of the “luckiest people in the world?” After doing more than 100 podcasts, Ray Loewe has identified seven mindsets that the luckiest people possess:

● **Mindset 1:** They are not afraid to change the rules. “When you’re living life by somebody else’s rules you’re living somebody else’s life,” Loewe says, paraphrasing Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. “Change the rules in your favor to change the way you do things.”

● **Mindset 2:** They always find a positive solution. “The luckiest people either have great days or learning days.”

● **Mindset 3:** They learn to use their internal power to be happy regardless of the situation. Happy is hard to do, Loewe says. It requires effort and mental exercise. “It’s a lot easier to be unhappy.”

● **Mindset 4:** They understand who they are and how they are perceived by others.

● **Mindset 5:** They know what they want and have the confidence to go get it. Doing what makes you happy may require uncluttering your life, Loewe says. “Usually, it means dumping something to make room for something else.”

● **Mindset 6:** They follow what is fascinating and motivating. “They’re busy, but they’re busy doing things that are meaningful to them as opposed to filling time and space.”

● **Mindset 7:** They stop worrying about aging and concentrate on living. “Just because you’re 65 or 75 doesn’t mean you have to stop being good at what you do.”

people of any age.

Loewe’s podcasts typically draw over 100 listeners, he says. And since they don’t allow for audience interaction, he also holds virtual weekly coffee and cocktail hours to give a limited number of people the opportunity to chat with guests and each other.

“The whole idea is to support each other,” he says. “People meet other people and get some ideas and support for how to revamp their life.”

Even though you need to live by your own rules, it’s OK to steal good ideas from

others when you’re trying to find direction in your own life, Loewe says. He can’t help but mention at this point that there are even some wily penguins in Antarctica that steal rocks from each other’s nests to protect their young.

Loewe will be the first to tell you he’s stolen some life lessons from others who are living retirement on their own terms.

Like John, a 103-year-old he met a few years ago at the National Senior Games in Birmingham, Alabama. Loewe, a competitive Mas-

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Book coach Suzette Mullen has story of her own

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Suzette Mullen describes her day-to-day world as a little triangle that takes her from the Lancaster Press Building condo she shares with her wife, Wendy, to her co-working space at the Candy Factory across the street, to Evolution Power Yoga down Harrisburg Pike, and back home again.

“I’m as happy as a clam with that,” she says. “It’s a very nice life.”

But it’s certainly not the life Mullen, a book coach, would

have imagined writing for herself more than 30 years ago when she got married and moved with her husband to Houston, Texas, to start a career in corporate law.

Mullen likes to tell her writing clients that a good memoir finds meaning in some life experience in a way that connects with readers.

The realization of her true sexual identity was the inspiration for Mullen’s own recently finished memoir, “Graveyard of Safe Choices,” but at its core, she says, it’s about coming into one’s true

self, whatever that may be. Her message to readers is simple: It’s never too late to say yes to your life.

For Mullen, 61, that “yes” came in her mid-50s, but the story begins much earlier.

The daughter of public school teachers, Mullen grew up in New Rochelle, New York, and graduated from Wellesley College and Harvard Law School. After moving to Houston, she worked for a general practice law firm handling mergers, acquisitions and stock deals. Later, she would enjoy

a second legal career, representing low-income families in the special education process. In between, she devoted her time to volunteering and raising the couple’s two sons.

After 25 years in Texas, Mullen and her husband returned to New York 10 years ago as empty-nesters, ready to start writing their next chapter.

“It’s definitely a time that people take stock of what’s next,” she says. “That was absolutely the case for me. I thought it would just be professionally, but it turned out to be personally, too.”

And she would soon discover that the two were inextricably intertwined.

Mullen considered a return to her law career, but after a period of discernment, she realized that was no longer her calling.

“When I really sat and listened to myself and all the things I loved to do, everything related to writing and editing,” she says “I was kind of like, duh. I had been doing all of this in many different capacities for years and was very good at it. When something comes fairly easily to you and you’re good at it, you don’t think too much about it.”

Taking the plunge into a new career was fairly easy. She began doing freelance editing and helping students craft their college and graduate school application essays. She also began writing a memoir — not the one she just completed, but a different one exploring her professional journey.

As part of that process, Mullen wrote about what she describes as an intense female friendship. After reading those pages, Mullen’s book coach commented that one scene sounded exactly like someone who is falling in love.

And then, what was there all along suddenly became clear.

“It’s possible to have many, many, many layers of denial,” Mullen says. “All of us have lived in a world where heterosexuality is the norm. This was a friendship that was very important to me,



In her recent memoir, Lancaster resident Suzette Mullen tells readers: It’s never too late to say yes to your life.



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WANT TO WRITE YOUR MEMOIR?

If you’re considering writing your memoir, book coach Suzette Mullen offers this food for thought:

● **Understand the genre:** A memoir is not an autobiography or the story of your life. “Memoir is a slice of your life, an examination of a particular experience,” Mullen says. “It has an arc. There’s something that’s compelling the reader to turn the page, just like you would in a good novel you can’t put down.”

● **Tap into the deep:** Why do you want to write about this experience? How did it change you? Some memoir writers want to pay it forward by writing the type of book they would have found helpful during that period in their lives.

● **Leave a legacy:** Memoirs don’t have to be for wide readership; they can just be a way to memorialize your story for family.

● **Write for yourself:** “Some want to write a memoir ... with this desire to understand some experience in their life, and that writing is a way to help process and understand what happened,” Mullen says. “For some people, that might be enough.”

● **Find a greater meaning:** “If you want to write a memoir that is going to be of value to somebody other than yourself or close family members ... you have to make some meaning out of your experience that readers will connect with.”

● **Be honest with yourself:** Writing a memoir is a satisfying and meaningful process, but it’s hard work. “If you got to the end of your life and you hadn’t written your story, would you regret it? If the answer is yes, lean into it,” Mullen says. Otherwise, spend your time doing other things that bring you joy.

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Leon Kraybill guides patients on aging journey

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Dr. Leon Kraybill is hoping to follow in the longevity footsteps of his father, who recently died at the age of 99. But that doesn't mean the 63-year-old isn't thinking about the inevitable.

"I've laid out my advance care planning, put it on a spreadsheet," Kraybill says. "I have seen the wisdom of deciding what I want and laying that out for my family members and being precise about that. I will absolutely not go multiple times to the hospital and do multiple tests that will give me a week or a month of life at a great cost."

As geriatrics division chief for Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Physicians Geriatrics, Kraybill meets aging face to face every day. He cares for those with more complicated medical conditions, many of whom have a short time frame till the end of life. Over the years, more than a few have been role models of sorts, helping him figure out how he might approach his own aging — and death.

However, caring for those closer to the end of life was not how he began his career. Kraybill grew up in Elizabethtown and jokes that he didn't get very far in life (physically, that is) since he's still practicing medicine in his hometown. After earning his medical degree from Temple University, he did his family practice residency at LGH.

"I chose to specialize in family practice following medical school because I admired the family practice doctors that I met," he says. "I found them to be approachable and down-to-earth people who care deeply about their patients."

He also liked the fact that family physicians deal with



Exercise is a key to healthy aging. Dr. Leon Kraybill's exercise of choice is pickleball, which he plays regularly at Stauffer Park.

diverse medical issues and see the connection between medical and emotional health, he says.

However, working with older nursing home patients inspired Kraybill to make a midcareer shift 20 years ago and seek additional training through a geriatric fellowship at LGH. The switch to geriatrics put him in a relatively small fraternity in the medical world. Currently, there are fewer than 8,000 geriatricians in the United States, a somewhat surprising statistic considering the U.S. Census Bureau projection that older adults will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history by 2034.

"Historically, geriatric care is not sexy or presti-

gious," Kraybill says. "There is the stereotype of the older individual as complaining and complicated and all you're doing is managing and all you're doing is managing bowel medications. That sometimes does not entice younger physicians."

And, it's also not true, he says.

Geriatrics is about more than treating multiple medical conditions like hypertension, diabetes and heart disease. It's about treating the patients and their families as individuals, he says, and recognizing that their health includes not only medical conditions but also mental health and psychosocial issues. Geriatrics is also about unanticipated opportunities, Kraybill says, noting he became a clinical infectious

disease expert thanks to COVID-19 and its effect on the elderly population.

"Patients rarely expect me to perform miracles and cure them of their diseases," Kraybill says. "Instead, they want to know what is going on, what are realistic expectations, where should they pursue cure and recovery, and where they need to accept what is. Primarily, they want someone who can honestly and respectfully look them in the eye and give them guidance on how to approach life and health."

All Lancaster General Health family practice residents now shadow geriatricians in their second year of training so they can see how rewarding — and even fun — this field of medicine can be. The geriatrics practice currently has 16 geriatricians, an unusually high number for a community practice, he says.

That's not enough to take care of every 80-year-old in Lancaster County, Kraybill says. Then again, not every 80-year-old needs a geriatric practice.

So who should see a geriatrician?

"It is less defined by age than it is by conditions and frailty," Kraybill says. "We have some 85-year-olds who are spry and doing life and are not very complicated. And we have some 55-year-olds that are physiologically aged. ... Not everybody at 68 has to go see a geriatrician."

Kraybill's practice focuses on complicated, frail individuals who require more care and who often fall through the cracks at a standard medical practice. Rather than using age as a criterion, the practice has more of a screening protocol. They look at issues such as whether a patient is having more difficulty getting in a car or an elevator; whether

5 TIPS FOR AGING WELL

● **Exercise:** Diet, multivitamins and over-the-counter medications do little to improve health or quality of life after age 65, but exercise has proven benefits, Kraybill says. A minimum of 150 minutes of moderately intense aerobic physical activity each week (30 minutes per day, five days per week) can improve balance, stability and mobility, which means you can move around your home better, live independently longer and get out and socially connect with others. Exercise also improves bowel function and releases endorphins that make you feel more positive. Ideally an exercise regimen will include at least two days per week of weight-bearing activities including strength and endurance training and flexibility exercises. Possible exercises include brisk walking, easy jogging, treadmill, elliptical trainer, biking, swimming and dancing. If orthopedic problems limit your exercise or safety, consider water exercises or a stationary cycle. If you have not been exercising recently, start at 10 or 15 minutes per day.

● **Evaluate medications:** "I have probably helped as many people by stopping medications as I have by starting them," Kraybill says. Older patients are more sensitive to the side effects of medications and sometimes the benefits do not outweigh the drawbacks. Be particularly wary of over-the-counter medications. Many sleep aids, for example, contain diphenhydramine, which can cause falls, constipation, dry mouth and confusion.

● **Stay social:** Connecting with people is important, whether it's through family, church or a civic organization. Having something you care about or a goal in life keeps you engaged.

● **Keep learning:** "Learn throughout your life and that will help you live longer," Kraybill says. Take up a new hobby, read, have an interest in other people, new ideas and new skills. It will also make you more interesting to others.

● **Have an advanced care plan:** Ask yourself how you want to live the remainder of your life and communicate those wishes to others. Kraybill says patients generally fall into three categories: those earlier in life who want to pursue all tests and treatments to prolong life as much as possible, those near the end of life who want to focus on comfort and being with loved ones, without trips to the hospital or aggressive care, and those in the middle who may not want aggressive or risky care but will accept treatment that doesn't require a lot of discomfort or effort. Long before life changes occur, choose a power of attorney who will make medical and financial decisions for you if you can't do it for yourself.

dementia is setting in and complicating their ability to take medication, care for themselves and communicate; whether they have multiple medical issues or hospital stays.

"When all of that stuff starts piling up on each other ... it's often appropriate," he says. "When you're at a point in life when you're saying, 'I love life. I don't want to give up life. It's getting so hard ... I'm looking to how I can transition to more com-

fort and palliative care.'"

Kraybill acknowledges that many who fall into that category may already have wonderful family physicians who treat older patients, and they should remain with that care. It all depends on the individual.

At the geriatrics practice, routine visits tend to last longer and include broader discussions about whether to continue or discontinue medications as well as ad-

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Mullen

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but I had struggled with it for 15, 17 years. I didn't have the language to articulate who this person was to me. I really feel like I kind of wrote myself out."

The personal epiphany, however, was much harder to deal with than the professional one.

"I had a very solid marriage. I had a very nice life," she says. "I was married to a lovely man. I loved him. He loved me. From the outside, it all looked really perfect."

Mullen spent 18 months struggling with how to deal with this life-changing revelation. She had never been a risk-taker, she says. Should she continue to play it safe or should she free herself from a cage of her own making? Did she have the right to pursue her own happiness at the expense of everyone else's? Her husband reminded her that there was

no path forward that did not involve pain.

"Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that I wasn't willing to go to my grave without knowing who I really was," she says. "It was the most terrifying moment of my life. ... Leaving a marriage, leaving a life, even when it's the right thing, is still a big loss."

While going through her divorce in 2017, she visited the one person she knew in Lancaster. Five weeks later she decided to move here.

"I had never been here, never thought about coming here, and when I came here, it was just like things started lining up," Mullen says. "Sometimes I think we don't know what we need or what's home for us until we actually see it and we're actually there."

Being true to herself personally helped Mullen discover the professional life she had longed for, too. In 2019, she earned her certification as an Author Accel-

erator book coach, and now works with LGBTQ writers and allies to start and finish their memoirs and nonfiction books. She is a founding board member of the Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition.

She also found time to complete her own memoir. Her main audience is primarily readers at midlife, she says, but not necessarily people who are questioning their sexuality or contemplating the radical changes she made in her own life. It could simply be someone who has deferred their own dreams or who fears leaving the safety of the unknown, she says.

"It is not too late to say yes to whatever it is you feel authentically called to," Mullen says. "Now that I'm on this side of it, even though it was very difficult, there's no regrets. And there's no regrets about the past life, too. I've been very fortunate to have had a number of very meaningful and lovely chapters in my life, and this is a new chapter and it's exciting."



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Kathy Frey fearless in business, style

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Those who know Kathy Frey as the vibrant and fashionable owner of Festoon, a boutique clothing and home decor store on North Duke Street, may be surprised to learn that her entrepreneurial success has its roots in something a bit more bland: Celery.

To be fair, those humble beginnings were more than 60 years ago.

“When I was very young, I was taught to work really hard,” recalls Frey, 71. “I had my own business at 9.”

That business was loading up bushel baskets of celery at Kreider’s Celery Farm and selling it along a route in her neighborhood.

“I just had that entrepreneurial desire ever since then.”

Frey’s journey from celery peddler to boutique owner has been paved with hard work, a bit of serendipity and a vow to never let fear get in the way of the next opportunity.

“I have a burning desire to do whatever I do with my whole heart,” she says. “It’s worked well for me.”

After attending the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, Frey got her first opportunity with Hager’s Department Store, doing fashion illustrations that appeared in the Lancaster newspapers.

Later, she would answer an advertisement for a delivery job at a Marietta flower shop, an opportunity she would soon parlay into another avenue for artistic expression: training with well-known floral designers.

“The flower shop came up for sale and I went to the bank, and they saw my determination and loaned me the money,” she says.

She owned Kathy’s Flower Werks for 18 years.

“In between my flower shop and the next part of my life, I said out loud, ‘If I ever open up another business, I would call it Festoon,’” Frey says. The word is festive. It describes a celebratory garland of flowers, sometimes appearing as a hand-carved architectural feature above a window or door. “It just seemed to fit,” she says.

In 2004, that opportunity came, ironically in the former Hager Department Store building where she had gotten her start. By that time, the building was home to condos, a restaurant and boutique-style shops. When her lease ran out eight years

ago, she moved Festoon to its current home in a spacious former firehouse on North Duke.

The festive shop is an eclectic mix of everything from clothing and accessories to books, candles and home decor, much of it locally made, including Frey’s own clothing line, Selga, which she launched in 2017.

“I’ve always been in the world of color and fashion and design. It’s just been a really wonderful evolution of who I am and my creativity,” Frey says. “I’m here living my dream and being part of a great business community here in Lancaster. One thing always led to another.”

Fashion is yet another form of artistic expression, and for Frey, that too has been an evolution of sorts. There were times in her life, she says, when her profession dictated a certain look, but these days she approaches fashion like she does the rest of her life — without fear.

“I’ve personally evolved into the person I am now by just realizing it’s all in your body language, it’s all in how you carry yourself, it’s all in your self-confidence and finding a way to love yourself no matter what,” she says. “It allows me to be just exactly who I am. I’ve always been a free spirit and I’ve now fallen right back into that wonderful way of believing in myself.”

Frey describes herself as a woman of faith and says that belief system has helped her not only to succeed but also to develop the confidence to be herself. She also stresses the importance of surrounding yourself with positive people and says she would never discourage someone from expressing who they are by what they wear.

Frey believes that discovering who you are through the art of dressing has no limits — no matter what your age. There are no fashion do’s or don’ts just because someone is over 50, or 60, or 70.

“I really believe that whatever makes you feel good-looking in the mirror is what you should wear,” says Frey, who describes her own favorite style as boho chic. “If someone really feels as though they want to wear a bikini at age 80, I encourage that. ... I’m wearing bib overalls. I find I’m more myself now than I’ve ever been. It’s about just being happy with looking in the mirror.”



Kathy Frey shows her style at Festoon, her boutique in downtown Lancaster.

FASHION FOOD FOR THOUGHT

● **Be yourself:** “Be comfortable in your own skin and wear clothing that makes you feel that way.”

● **Take risks:** If you want to explore new looks, do it. “A good sales professional can lead you into a different style, if you’re ready for that,” Frey says.

● **Have some essentials:** “I still believe a great pair of jeans is important, if that goes along with your personality,” she says. Her other must-haves: a fabulous white shirt, a signature pair of earrings that works with just about anything, and a good choker necklace that she can layer with other jewelry.

● **Take care with color:** While she doesn’t think women should feel the need to change their style just because they are aging, Frey does note that skin tone and hair color really do dictate what colors look best. “If you’re gray or blonde, you sure can wear those brighter colors and not be afraid of wearing a beautiful hot pink in the summertime or a gorgeous teal,” she says. “However, as we go into the fourth quarter or the last part of the year when color palettes do change, you certainly can work with your gray hair in warming up those colors with olives and warm chocolate browns.”

Loewe

Continued from 4

ters swimmer, was between events when he encountered John holding a stack of medals for the shot put, discus, hammer throw and javelin.

John may be more of an exception than the rule, but the number of people reaching 100 and beyond is growing rapidly. A 2016 Pew Research Report estimated that the world centenarian population could grow eightfold by 2050, reaching almost 3.7 million.

That fact gives Loewe pause when he considers the next quadrant of his life.

“Do I want to be like John, or do I want to be sitting on a nursing home doorstep in a wheelchair?” he says. “If I’m lucky enough to live to be 100 ... what am I going to do with the next 20 to 25 years? Am I going to waste them or am I going to put some direction to it and try to look at the value I can put at the table?”

A desire to make the most of those years spurs him to follow John’s example and continue swimming and staying active.

“Make sure you’re healthy enough to live well,” he says. “And make sure you can walk up the hill to see the penguins.”

Loewe is in search of Lancaster County residents to interview on his podcast. For more information or to subscribe to his podcast, visit www.theluckiestpeopleintheworld.com.

Kraybill

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vanced care planning.

As much as Kraybill tries to comfort his aging patients and guide them as they try to make the best life decisions, they have given him something in return. Throughout his career, he’s watched those ahead of him in life, he’s observed how they’ve handled the challenges of aging, and he’s learned.

“I think my plan is to fight hard at my health and try to prolong that and maintain that and do whatever I can to be independent and engaged and participatory,” he says. “My patients have taught me a lot about acceptance of what is. I have seen people deal with great suffering with great dignity. My goal at that point of life is to mirror them and walk gracefully through the end of life with as much connection with the people I love around me as possible.”



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