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IN THIS ISSUE

MENTAL WELLNESS

Exploring effective
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PLUS

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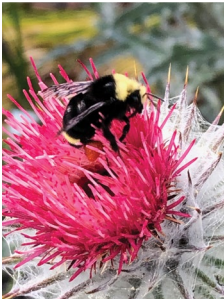
Hundreds of subscribers receive the Town Crier in neighboring communities as well as out of state. The Town Crier can be purchased at newsstands in Los Altos and Mountain View.

Thank you for reading the first edition of Total Wellness, the Town Crier's health-centered magazine. Learn about ways to encourage mental well-being, the positives of gardening, what injuries young athletes are facing and how to age comfortably.

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Youth sports injuries

ON THE RISE



ILLUSTRATION BY SKYLAR CHUI | TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

BY CURTIS DRISCOLL

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While sports participation can benefit a kid's mental and physical health, coaches and doctors have noticed an increase in the number and severity of sports injuries in recent years.

Dr. Tristan Juhan, an orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine with El Camino Health System, said a recent study from 2007 to 2022 showed a 30% increase in anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) knee injuries.

"I think all of us, as sports physicians and team physicians are concerned about the upward trend," Juhan said.

Juhan noted many factors are at play, like early specialization in sports, increased competitiveness for college scholarships and increased sports training. Injuries are also more common and severe due to fatigue and increased strength and speed in competition.

It used to be uncommon to see younger adolescent ACL injuries, but Juhan noted kids as young as 12 and 13 needing surgery is not unusual at all now. ACL surgery is the most common, but he does see shoulder injuries from swimming and water polo, along with knee and shoulder injuries in volleyball from repetitive use. For girls, soccer is the top sport for knee injuries, followed by basketball and lacrosse. For boys, knee injuries are most common in football, lacrosse and soccer. There has also been an increase in the number of youth athletes who need physical therapy from overuse injuries ranging from elbow pain for baseball players to chronic shoulder pain for volleyball players because they often go straight from the high school season into club season.

What Juhan hears most from kids is the pressure to perform at their best, whether on the junior varsity team or playing travel volleyball during a recruitment year to get noticed for college. Juhan hopes to encourage kids to tell people about their injuries so they can continue playing safely.

"So, they are really worried about what the step ahead is and always just wanting to play," Juhan said. "They always just want to play."

Juhan encouraged parents and coaches to educate themselves about >





Mountain View forward Jaden Feller holds off a defender during a game in the 2023 season. PHOTO BY T. MALLIE BRAITHWAITE | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER.

“ I think we need to be better at checking in with our young athletes about their level of fatigue, about soreness, about areas of pain,... ”

~ DR. TRISTAN JUHAN ~

muscular training, preventative exercises and body conditioning. He also recommends checking in with youth athletes about how they are feeling.

“I think we need to be better at checking in with our young athletes about their level of fatigue, about soreness, about areas of pain, what’s good to play through, what’s not good to play through and being honest about how our body feels and the amount of pressure we are putting on it,” Juhan said. “I think the days of just gritting your teeth and playing through it or grinding out another game when you are putting yourself at risk are ideally moving out of our collective consciousness.”

Coaches’ perspective

Los Altos High baseball coach Gabe Stewart played during a time when no one was using pitch counts. When pitching, Stewart would tell coaches he was fine when he wasn’t because he worried about letting his teammates and coaches down. His arm no longer looks how it should because of his injuries and his experience has molded his coaching approach. Stewart errs on the side of caution, removing players if they look fatigued, and warns parents and children to do their due diligence when considering training methods.

“I came from a different era,” Stewart said. “I had the mentality that even when my arm was on fire, you just shut up, and you pitched, so I am totally sensitive to telling my players, you don’t need to do that, you don’t need to gut it out.”

St. Francis High baseball coach Erik Wagle, who played college baseball and was an associate scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers, said arm injury increases at the high school level are due to the amount of competitive pitching people now do. Wagle is also the president of the Kinetic

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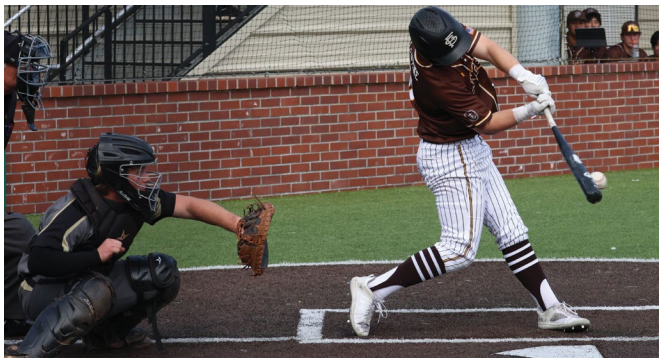
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St. Francis senior Brent Valentine hits an RBI during a game against Archbishop Mitty during the 2024 season. PHOTO BY ALAN HWANG | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER.

Performance Institute in Morgan Hill, serving high school, college and pro baseball players. He prioritizes arm care to reduce injuries and wants to see players get physically stronger through elbow and shoulder strengthening exercises to reduce fatigue, along with having a more logical competition calendar. He noted that kids now play 10 to 11 months of the year because of travel baseball and tournaments.

“That is the number one culprit,” Wagle said of the playtime increase. “The data is clear that when you play that much baseball, you are dramatically increasing your chance of injury.”



Mountain View High School defender Valen Spade competes for the ball during a soccer game in the 2023-2024 season. PHOTO BY T. MALLIE BRAITHWAITE | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER.

He noted competitive pitching more than eight months out of the calendar year increases the chance of an arm injury by 61%. At the major league level, 70% of arm injuries happen in the year’s first two months. He tries to design throwing schedules over the year to ensure pitchers have enough time to ramp back up and to watch for different types of soreness. Wagle said



most pitching injuries happen in a state of fatigue when athletes are not strong enough to take the stress on the body, with soreness telling an athlete what part of the body is fatigued. He also relies on technology to get baseline measurements of pitchers’ strength and range of motion, so if the numbers dip below the baseline numbers while throwing ramps up, they can intervene and reduce workload.

“If you go out right away and throw 80 to 100 pitches early in February or March, especially if you haven’t built up properly, you’re putting yourself in a dangerous window, theoretically, where you can break down,” Wagle said. ❖



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THE NATURE CURE:

*Being in nature can help
your health*

BY TANYA KUCAK

Spending time in gardens and parks can not only make you healthier and happier, it can also make you more resilient and “a better member of civilization,” Florence Williams said in a keynote talk at last fall’s Wild Wonder conference. Williams has traveled around the world to interview scientists studying the connections between nature and mental health. She wrote about this research in her book “Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative.”

For instance, in Japan, she learned that 15 minutes of walking forest therapy trails resulted in reduced blood pressure, lower heart rate and lower levels of stress hormones. In South Korea, “healing forests” are “managed for mental health and well-being.” Denmark has 12-week horticultural therapy programs for people with severe depression, which are “the most successful return-to-work intervention” there.



Creating beautiful gardens can connect people to nature and reduce stress. PHOTO COURTESY OF TANYA KUCAK.

On a larger scale, epidemiological studies have shown strong connections between health and living within one kilometer of green space: lower incidence of 15 stress-related diseases in a Netherlands study of 400,000 people; and lower mortality rates in a UK study of 10,000 people, after adjusting for income. In effect, Williams said, green space is a “social-leveling device”: the lower-income people in the UK study who lived near green spaces had a “gain in health

equivalent to a much higher income.”

In the lab, cognitive neuroscientist David Strayer measured brain activity in people before and after a walk on a nature trail vs. a walk along a busy street. The nature-walkers reported

fewer negative thoughts after their walk. Strayer found the brain region associated with rumination – self-referential, self-critical and negative thinking – had less activity in those who took the nature walk.

What parts of the brain are activated instead? As a backpacker, Strayer noticed that his best ideas came after three days, so he gave people creativity tests and found almost 50% improvement in creativity after three days of backpacking. Time outside and away from cognitive demands (including phones) increases activation in the parts of the brain associated with empathy and sensory perception. Instead of being consumed by inward dialogue, the brain becomes outwardly focused. >



From left to right: Juniper bonsai. Yellow rose blooming. Aeonium Pink Witch. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHEL Y. ECHEVERRIA.



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Common poppy blooming. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCY CHEN.



From left to right: Hydrangea Nikko Blue. Green Japanese Maple. Camellia Sasanqua blooming. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHEL Y. ECHEVERRIA.

Simply showing people a photo of a whale or a waterfall, versus a mall or highway, induces people to give more to charity and “act in ways that are more pro-social and less self-interested,” Williams said. People who were asked to draw themselves in the landscape at Yosemite, versus Fisherman’s Wharf, drew themselves as smaller. “This little bit of ego depreciation in the face of grandeur makes us feel more connected to everyone else, and that’s incredibly good for mental health,” she said. “Big shifts can happen when you’re outside in nature, open to awe.”

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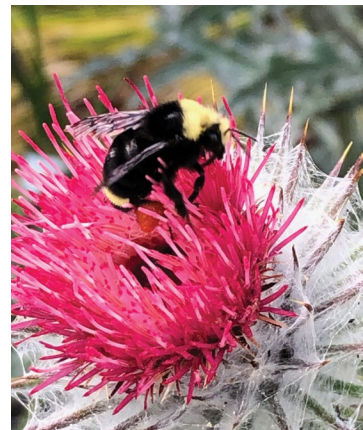
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In Utah, at the Human Connectome Project, Dr. Paula Williams found that the people who had the most connections in the brain also rated themselves as most sensitive to beauty and to experiencing awe, and were most resilient to life stressors.

Awe is something mind-blowing (defined as “an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that transcend current frames of reference”). Williams observed that people can toggle between awe and self-referential thinking, but “the more time you spend in awe, the less time you’re going to be spending on dramatizing your problems.” Awe is “a pathway to mental health,” she said.



Creating beautiful gardens can connect people to nature and reduce stress. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TANYA KUCAK

And you don't have to travel far to experience awe and begin to transform your brain. To get what psychology professor Dacher Keltner calls microdoses of awe, just go outside, find something beautiful and pay attention to it. "Take three breaths in the presence of this beautiful whatever it is," Williams said. If you can't go outside, find something indoors that engages your senses – a bowl of soup or a house plant, she suggested. Doing this at least once or twice a day for six weeks is linked to a reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as significant reduction in physical pain symptoms. "Beauty is this secret weapon that people don't talk about," she said. "You can become better at it."

"Nature is a bridge," Williams said. "There's beauty everywhere," and the more we can learn to cultivate a sense of awe, "the closer we will feel to each other, the more we will feel like we can solve problems" and become a better citizen of the world. Because it enhances pro-social behaviors, experiencing awe can help us feel "more positive about our future and who we are." ✿

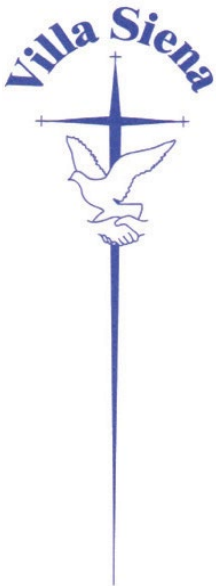
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From left to right: Bottlebrush tree blooming. Chamomile flowers. Radishes in raised garden bed. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LUCY CHEN.

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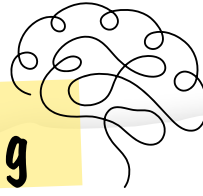
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Maintaining

MENTAL HEALTH

BY DR. DANIELLE KAMIS

In today's fast-paced world, where stress and uncertainty seem to be constants, maintaining stable mental health has never been more crucial. Coping mechanisms play a pivotal role in helping individuals navigate life's challenges while fostering resilience and well-being. Let's delve into some effective coping strategies and their benefits for overall mental health.

01



Exercise

- **Mindfulness and meditation:** Practicing mindfulness and meditation involves being present in the moment, observing thoughts and sensations without judgment. Studies have shown that regular mindfulness practice can reduce stress, anxiety and depression while enhancing emotional regulation and cognitive function.

02



Friends

- **Physical activity:** Engaging in regular exercise not only benefits physical health but also has profound effects on mental well-being. Physical activity releases endorphins, neurotransmitters that promote feelings of happiness and reduce stress. It also provides a healthy outlet for managing emotions and improving self-esteem.

03



Creativity

- **Social connections:** Maintaining strong social connections and support networks is vital for mental health. Spending time with friends and family, or participating in group activities can provide emotional support, reduce feelings of loneliness and boost mood and resilience.

- **Creative outlets:** Engaging in creative pursuits such as art, music, writing or gardening can be therapeutic and help channel emotions in a constructive manner. Creative expression fosters self-discovery, enhances problem-solving skills and promotes relaxation and stress relief.

- **Healthy lifestyle choices:** Prioritizing a balanced diet, adequate sleep and limiting substance use can significantly impact mental health. A nutritious diet and sufficient sleep support brain function and mood regulation, while avoiding excessive alcohol or drug consumption helps prevent negative effects on mental well-being.

- **Seeking professional support:** It's essential to recognize when additional support is needed and to reach out to mental health professionals. Therapy, counseling or psychiatric interventions can provide valuable tools, coping strategies and emotional support tailored to individual needs.



Exercise is important to maintain mental wellness. It can be done individually or with others, like by enrolling at a studio like Alkalign Studios, pictured, which now operates as a fully online studio, or by exercising with friends. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS | TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

There are many benefits of effective coping mechanisms, including:

- Reduced stress and anxiety levels
- Improved emotional regulation and resilience
- Enhanced overall well-being and life satisfaction
- Better cognitive function and decision-making
- Strengthened social connections and support networks
- Prevention of mental health disorders and relapse


Incorporating healthy coping mechanisms into daily life can have profound positive effects on mental health and overall quality of life. By prioritizing self-care, seeking support when needed and adopting resilience-building strategies, individuals can nurture their mental well-being and thrive amidst life's challenges. 💙



Danielle Kamis, M.D., is a licensed psychiatrist with a practice in downtown Los Altos.

For more information on her practice, specialties and services, visit kamismd.com.





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Aging in place is popular and possible, but you have to prepare

BY BRUCE BARTON

Aging in place – living at home in the late stages of life – is an increasingly popular trend among older adults these days. Approximately 77% of Americans age 50 and older polled in a recent survey preferred aging in place, according to Forbes.

“My mother just turned 100 two weeks ago,” said Dr. Michael Kan, a primary care physician and hospitalist for El Camino Health. “We took her to all these assisted living, skilled nursing facilities, and she (wanted) to live at home. So she is, at 100, still living in her own independent home.”

Living at home provides several obvious advantages, including independence, being in familiar surroundings and remaining closer to family and friends. But experts said preparation is key to the optimal living in place experience.

“Being a family doctor, I always think about preventative care and medicine,” Kan said. “So I think, as a young person – and this really helped my mother – if you can sign up for long-term care insurance, because it’s not a standard benefit of Medicare, people who have it have so many more options, and the amount of resources

they have is like just another level of care. ... Planning ahead helps people tremendously.”

The commitment of family also is a big factor.

“As a young family doctor, I was trained that you take care of people cradle to grave. And now as a physician with more than 40 years’ experience, I can tell you, it’s more like you take care of people, diapers to diapers. So the challenge to the families is that as their parents and their loved ones age, you have to start changing their diapers and stuff like that. It’s a time commitment.”

There are a host of programs available, Kan said, for issues like ensuring good nutrition and diet, and providing a social outlet.

Meals on Wheels and the state Department on Aging, for example, bring meals directly to seniors’ homes. For underserved seniors, Mountain View-based Community Services Agency offers a Senior Lunch and Nutrition Program at the city’s senior center.

Ensuring social health is one area where the senior living communities may have a greater benefit than living in place. Dr. Kan noted his 93-year-old mother-in-law blossomed socially

with a move to such a facility. But he also noted numerous daycare programs where independent seniors can join to meet social needs.

“I was looking at the pros and cons of being in a facility versus being home,” Dr. Kan said. “And certainly loneliness is a big thing, especially when they become transportation challenged, that’s the biggest thing, because they have a hard time getting to the senior programs. ... One of the biggest challenges for the family is that (caring for seniors) is so care intensive, that there actually are support groups where you can get respite care. Caregivers are just really challenged, and it is so hard. This is a growing problem in the United States. But there are resources and things that are developing.”

Such resources include social workers and apps that help connect to in-home health services.

To get started on finding these resources, options include starting with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), aarp.org; the Bay Area Council on Aging, ioaging.org; the Northern California Alzheimer’s Association, alz.org/norcal; and the Community Services Agency, csacares.org. ☀



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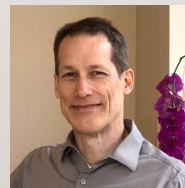
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