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ACTIVE AGING

in 2021

How to Live Well into Your Later Years

by **Leslie Dinaberg** • photos by **Erick Madrid**

Santa Barbara is a great place to live no matter your age, but it takes many people a number of years — and perhaps a successful career or two — to start calling our shoreline home. That means there are plenty of people living their best later lives here, which is why we started our Active Aging Guide in 2018 to help navigate

the endless options for staying healthy, striving for wellness, and living even longer.

This is the fourth annual edition of this promotional section, in which sponsors suggested trends, techniques, and talented experts from their organizations to our editorial team. Then Leslie Dinaberg

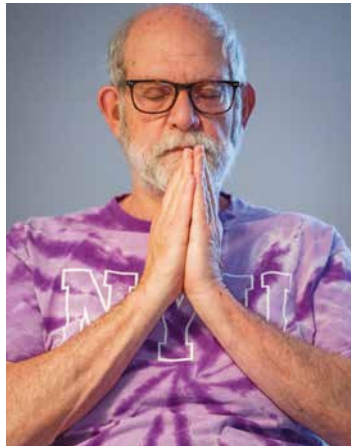
took those nascent ideas, put on her reporter's cap, and turned them into engaging articles that cover a wide range of topics, from bone, brain, and sexual health to volunteering, nutrition, and even drum circles.

Read on, and age well.



FACES OF FITNESS

There are myriad means of keeping fit through your entire lifetime in Santa Barbara. For low-impact, high-quality movement, the YMCA hosts chair yoga classes (left), in which participants can get the stretching and centering benefits of the practice at personalized intensity levels. Similar advantages are found in aqua-aerobics, such as the classes taught at Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club by Dayna Jordan (right). And then there's the always awesome option of lawn bowling (top right), where strategy and sunshine converge to keep minds and bodies healthy.



TURNER MEDICAL ARTS

Offers Treatments for Inside and Out

Looking good and feeling good are intimately intertwined for many people. Turner Medical Arts (turnermedicalarts.com) in Montecito is a multispecialty practice that fits the bill with a focus on anti-aging medicine in a wide variety of specialties that are unusual to find under one roof.

"Our philosophy on aging?" asked Dr. Duncan Turner, the obstetrician/gynecologist in charge. "Honestly, it's no fun. But we can make it easier with individualized, evidence-based treatment plans and care you can count on."

After concentrating on the obstetrics side of women's health care in Santa Barbara for more than 40 years, Dr. Turner is now focused on hormones and sexual health to optimize total health. He uses both new technologies and new applications of older technologies to perform minimally invasive procedures that promote vaginal rejuvenation, improve sexual health, assist hormonal replacement, and discourage the aging process.

The team also includes Kirsten DiBenedetto, who assists with contraception and early preg-

nancy through menopause and beyond; Dr. Alan Viglione, who specializes in anti-aging internal medicine; plastic surgeon Dr. Michael Giuffrida, who handles body contouring and liposuction; oculoplastic surgeon and injectable aesthetic expert Dr. Joseph Chang, who focuses on cosmetic eyelid and facial injections such as Botox; Mary Sidavanh, who oversees IV hydration therapy and medical-grade weight management treatments; and Caitlin Bozek, whose specialty is injectable treatments for hair loss, erectile dysfunction, urinary incontinence, and more.

"Despite different specialties, the byline of our practice is care you can count on for a reason," said Dr. Turner. "We feel very strongly about our brand being well-portrayed by all of the practitioners and it's not by chance that we have the group that we have. Despite having different specialties, all of us focus on providing every resource we can for the internal and external wellness of our patients."

See turnermedicalarts.com.

Vista del Monte's drum circle keeps residents engaged and active.



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The (Drum Circle) Beat Goes On at **VISTA DEL MONTE**



and Thursday. “When we tell people we are doing a drum circle, they are very willing to come to that activity, and we typically have at least a dozen people if not more.”

First are exercises to warm up their hands and get energized. Then Hellstern uses a 70-inch computer screen to broadcast images of nature or from a particular country or culture that’s especially stimulating. “Then we start the drumming,” she said, explaining that groups are typically led by Karen Rojas. “We’ll just do different rhythms, and we’ll have the residents repeat those. And we always incorporate having the residents do their own little rhythm, and so it’s just one person doing their rhythm, and we all repeat it.”

The music, the exposure to community, and the physical activity are all beneficial. “A lot of our residents have mobility issues or are non-ambulatory,

so we tend to just use hand movements — although if people want to tap their feet, that’s definitely encouraged,” said Hellstern. “The movement of the arms or the drumming itself is a really good movement. It energizes the whole body and the sound waves, because the drum is on their body — they really feel it as well as hear it.”

And there’s science as to how this helps people with memory issues. “They have

People of all ages benefit from music therapy, with especially positive changes for people with autism; visual, motor, emotional, hearing, or cognitive disabilities; or high stress levels. With these benefits in mind, the residents and staff at Summer House — which is the memory-care unit at Vista del Monte retirement care community (vistadelmonte.org) — regularly participate in drum circles.

“The sound waves and the sound of the drums and the feel of the drums are very powerful for those who have cognitive issues,” said Helene Hellstern, the life enrichment director for Vista del Monte, where residents gather in a common area called The Alcove every Tuesday



determined that music in particular sets off most areas of the brain,” she said. “And not just drumming, but other music often triggers their long-term memory.”

The drums have become a therapy tool beyond the circles as well. “Sometimes, we will just get the drums out if whatever we have planned isn’t quite working — everyone responds really well to that,” she said. “A truly holistic healing approach, group drumming breaks down social barriers, promotes freedom of expression, nonverbal communication, unity, and cooperation.”

See vistadelmonte.org.



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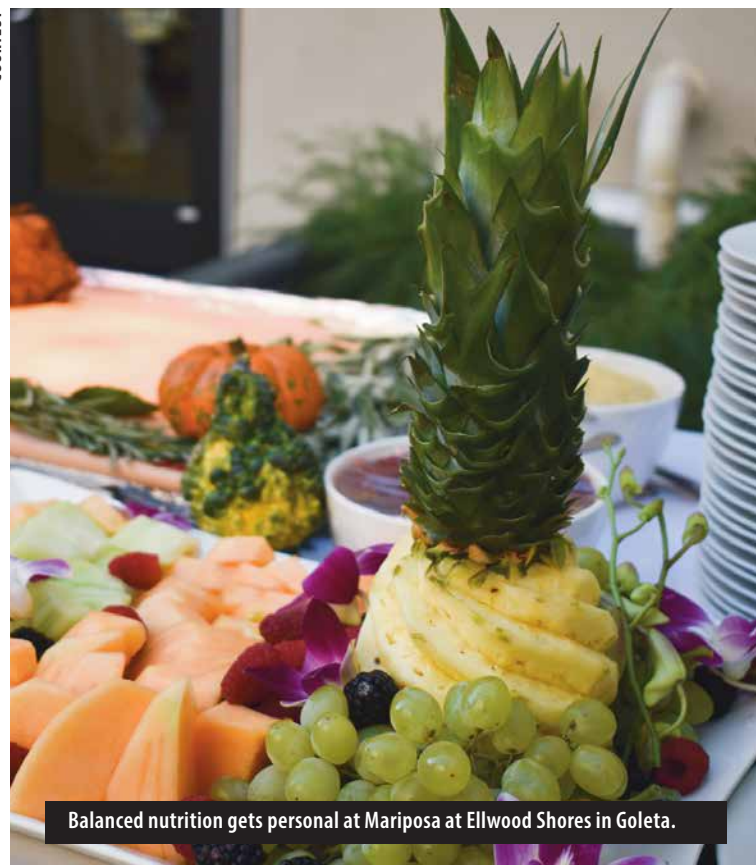


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Nutrition Tips for Brain Health

COURTESY



Balanced nutrition gets personal at Mariposa at Ellwood Shores in Goleta.

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Diet and exercise is the key to good health at any age, but particularly as you grow older. Current research says a brain-healthy diet encourages good blood flow to the brain, is low in fat and cholesterol, and includes vibrant foods rich in antioxidants. Like the heart, the brain needs the right balance of nutrients to function well. To be most effective, a brain-healthy diet should be combined with physical and mental activity and social interaction.

Peter Do, senior director of Culinary Services at Westmont Living (westmontliving.com), which owns Mariposa at Ellwood Shores in Goleta, says there are a variety of foods that help to maintain brain health. He recommends:

- Eat in moderation; increase intake of protective foods that may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke and protect brain cells.
- Avoid artery-clogging saturated fats and cholesterol that can put you at higher risk for Alzheimer's disease.

"Remember to stay away from trans-fats, and stick with mono- and poly-unsaturated fats such as olive oil or avocado oil that are very good for you," said Do. "The preferred preparation is to bake or grill and not to fry. But if you want to fry something, then use canola oil, which is cholesterol-free. Also, when eating something like chicken, it is okay to grill it with the skin on to keep the meat moist, but remove the skin before serving and eating it."

- Eat dark-skinned fruits and vegetables, which have the highest levels of naturally occurring antioxidants. These include kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, broccoli, beets, red bell pepper, onion, corn, and eggplant. "Celery is also a great source of antioxidants," said Do. "Garlic also plays an important role in healthy eating. Chinese dishes have a lot of ginger and garlic, both of which makes them more healthy."
- Choose vibrant, antioxidant-rich fruits such as plums, prunes, raisins,

Cont'd on p.11

Step Up to Help Seniors at the **FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY**

Providing a voice to the vulnerable is the role of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman representative, a volunteer program of the Family Service Agency (fsacares.org). Through regular visits to Santa Barbara County's 14 skilled nursing facilities and 119 assisted-living facilities for the elderly, Ombudsman representatives get to know the residents and advocate to improve their quality of life.

The program covers the entire county, from Carpinteria to Santa Maria, with more than 5,000 people under its watch. "We are the extra pair of eyes and ears who help them and advocate for them," said Marco Quintanar, who started working in elder care as a kitchen worker in a long-term care facility 30 years ago. Today, he is a leader in senior care and advocacy as the supervisor for the Ombudsman program, visiting facilities himself as well as providing training and support to volunteers.

Retired aerospace engineer Mike Leu would be considered a "super volunteer" by any measure. "I was

looking for a way to stay active and reapply my skills to something that was new and useful," said Leu, who stumbled on a newspaper article about the program (run by a different agency at the time) about 10 years ago and thought it looked interesting. He reached out, was trained, and jumped right in, enjoying the work so much that he now covers 23 different facilities and puts in about 70-80 hours a month in volunteer time.

But both Ombudsman superstars caution that prospective volunteers should not be intimidated by Leu's level of work. Volunteers can commit a little time, or a lot, depending on their interest and availability.

"Part of the beauty of the Ombudsman program is you can scale it up or you can scale it down pretty much as far as you want," said Leu. "If you only want to put in a few hours a week at three or four small facilities, you can. And then, if you're like me and you're out of control, you put in a lot!"

Today, there are just seven volunteers covering the entire county, so Quintanar hopes to double that number at his next Ombudsman volunteer



Marco Quintanar is a veteran employee of the Family Service Agency.

Cont'd on p. 11

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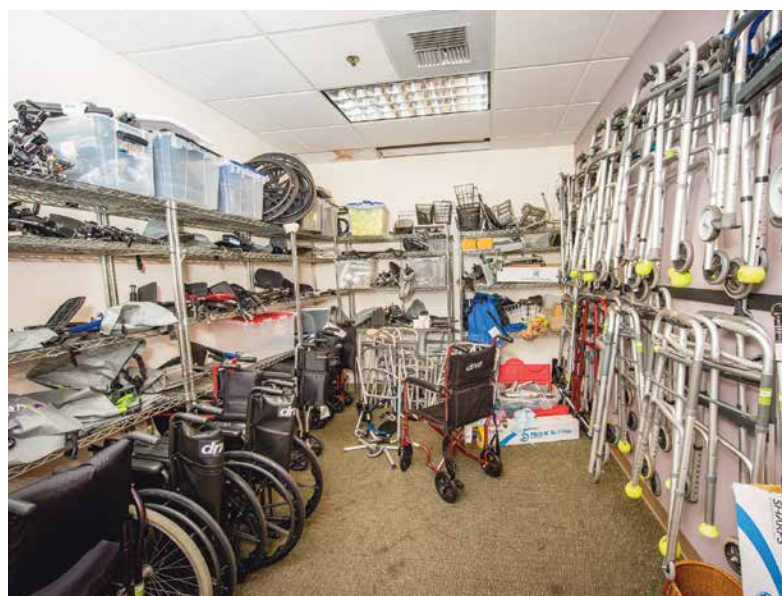
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Fall Course Catalog available in late August



VNA Health Loan Closet employees, from left, Megan Cameron, Susi Torres-Cruz, Dusty Keegan, and David Moorman



Borrowing Medical Basics from VNA HEALTH'S LOAN CLOSET

The concept of helping patients get the services, assistance, and equipment they need during an illness or injury is so simple. But as anyone who's ever navigated our health-care system can tell you, the reality can be incredibly complex and frustrating.

The Loan Closet — owned and operated by VNA Health (vna.health) and serving Santa Barbara County since 1908 — is the exact opposite of most health-care hassles. Staffed by David Moorman and Megan Cameron, with support from VNA's COO Dusty Keegan and administrative assistant Susi Torres-Cruz, this warm and welcoming crew serves more than 4,000 residents each year with free short-term loans of basic medical equipment such as wheelchairs, crutches, knee scooters, walkers, shower seats, and more.

While appointments are preferred, Moorman explained, “We welcome walk-ins. You never know when trauma is going to occur. We never turn anyone away. If someone shows up with a broken ankle, we try to help them. We take care of everyone. The benefit of an appointment is that we can make sure we have the equipment that they're looking for and have it ready for them.”

Getting things ready includes sanitizing and repairing an impressive array of equipment to make sure it's all in tip-top shape to be ready to loan out. “We really try to make sure that when people get equipment that it's up to snuff,” said Moorman, who does most of the repairs himself. “They're not just feeling like they're coming down here and getting something for free and it's junky. We actually take time and put a lot of money into our supplies to make sure that the things are refurbished.”

Fitting the equipment and training people on how to use it — including sending them home with written instructions — is also an important part of the service, which is

completely supported through private donations and contributions. In fact, people don't always know exactly what they need until they come in, like understanding the difference between wheelchairs and transport chairs. “You can be pushed in either, but wheelchairs are for people that are strong enough to be independently mobile and are much heavier to move in and out of cars,” said Cameron. “It's 20 pounds versus 50 pounds.”

That means asking the right questions. “There's not one cookie-cutter answer for everyone, so we try to nail that down and get to the bottom of it,” said Moorman. Added



David Moorman repairs a wheelchair

Cameron, “Often we have them try out what's going to work at home, and they can see all the different shower chairs and benches and work with the walker and be able to figure out what really works before they purchase it later on.”

As a free community service, the Loan Closet is open for anyone. “We get Hope Ranch; we get Montecito; we get the Eastside; we get the Westside; we get the entire community,” said Moorman. “We try to take care of everyone to the best of our ability.”

See vna.health.



Fun Facts about the Loan Closet

Most commonly borrowed items:
commodes, shower seats, and walkers

Most surprisingly useful items:
grabbers, sock aids, and leg lifters

Hardest to come by and often requested item: “Bed rails are gold.”

Unusual items: Hoyer Lifts, which help those with mobility challenges get out of bed or the bath without the assistance of another person; and U-Step walking stabilizers, which are designed to prevent falls for neurological conditions like Parkinson's

Surprising item that's always needed:
tennis balls, to put on the bottoms of walkers

WESTMONT LIVING

Cont'd from p. 8



blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, oranges, red grapes, and cherries.

- Cold-water fish containing beneficial omega-3 fatty acids are the best. Some examples are halibut, mackerel, salmon, lake trout, and sardines.

- Eat nuts, such as almonds, pecans, and walnuts, which are a good source of vitamin E, an antioxidant. "Nuts can be a good substitute for people who need omega-3 but do not like the taste of seafood," said Do.

When asked about nutritional supplements, Do explained, "Not all food experts mention supplements because they are focused on a healthy eating program. However, we know that there are supplements which are especially supportive of brain health such as vitamin E, or vitamins E and C together, vitamin B12, and folate.

All may be important in lowering your risk of developing Alzheimer's. A brain-healthy diet will help your body use these vitamins effectively. Remember, for the best absorption, always take vitamins with food. You should check with your medical provider about which vitamins and how much are safe for you."

Westmont Living communities such as Mariposa at Ellwood Shores customize their dining program and take advantage of seasonal produce. "Santa Barbara has great local produce, and we work with many local companies," said Do, who frequently offers salmon and fresh fish from nearby waters. "Our residents enjoy the trout and halibut and love tuna. There are also more vegetarian options such as tofu and eggplant dishes."

The facility's Dine Your Way program connects culinary directors with residents on a monthly basis. "So there are no one-size-fits-all menus," said Do.

See westmontliving.com.

FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY

Cont'd from p. 9

training this fall. "You have to be wanting to help other people," said Leu of what they're looking for in volunteers, which also includes being self-motivated, comfortable in communicating with people, and then ready to solve problems in complex situations. "The reward in this thing is you're demonstrably improving somebody's quality of life."

In his 30 years, Quintanar has seen a wide range of residents and issues. "Nowadays, because of the advances in technology and everything, people are living longer," he said, which means caregivers have to deal not just with aging but with advanced mental illnesses, like someone living for 20 years with Alzheimer's. "That makes things harder because ... they have

some behavioral challenges. It is hard on the families, and it is hard on the resident and hard on everybody who is around them. It's not their fault, but they need care. So that's why we are there."

Both men agree that this work is very rewarding. "If you make a difference in the life of someone, even just listening to that person, that makes you feel very good," said Quintanar. "And you don't need anybody to say thank you."

To learn more about becoming a Certified Ombudsman volunteer, or other ways to support Family Service Agency's programs for seniors, call Marco Quintanar at (805) 922-1236 or visit volunteer4seniors.org.

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Connect, Discuss, and Explore at VISTAS LIFELONG LEARNING

Learning new things and maintaining a vibrant social life are two of the key pillars that experts say will keep our brains sharp and healthy. This is exactly what the nonprofit Vistas Lifelong Learning (vistaslifelonglearning.org) offers to the community.

This volunteer-run organization, which started in 1999, is dedicated to keeping aging brains nimble with ongoing educational programs on a wide variety of topics. Recent courses included Foods That Changed the World (exploring foods that have changed the world in profound and delicious social, political, and economic ways); Unpacking the Dementia Epidemic (current thinking about the causes of dementias, dementia management, and how to stay on top of new developments); and Politics and Religion in Verdi's Operas (with audio and video extracts from modern performances of the operas).

The depth and variety of the programming is impressive, but the social component of Vistas is equally important to its success. "I think of all the connections that people find through Vistas," said President Jim Hemmer. "There are two book clubs; there's a short story class; there are memoir writing classes. And in our in-person pro-

grams—which moved to Zoom during the pandemic and will resume in the fall—there's always a 20-minute coffee break in the middle so people can socialize and see old friends and meet other similarly situated people."

For Hemmer, who retired from a career as an attorney in Chicago and moved to Santa Barbara with his wife, Francine, in January 2017, becoming part of Vistas has been a great way to engage his brain and find a community. Though it's not a requirement, many of the Vistas presenters are members as well.

A longtime history buff, Hemmer found his way to the organization through a presentation on the Silk Road that he made to a luncheon group called The Cosmopolitan Club (sbcosmo.com). A Vistas member suggested he present to that group, and the response was so positive that Hemmer ended up teaching three different courses on the journey of the historical Silk Roads through China's current efforts to reinvigorate them today.

"Vistas really attempts to satisfy this desire to learn



Vistas members learn a lot about the world during regular lectures.

things, and being a presenter is a wonderful way of doing that," said Hemmer. "Taking other people's classes is also great. I find that because I'm busy preparing presentations, I don't have time to take all the classes I'd like to. I've been very busy during the pandemic, and it's just great."

Vistas is a small group, explained Hemmer, fluctuating between 300 and 400 members, and is not affiliated

Cont'd on p. 14

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An innovative sensory stimulation program —involving nature, scents, sounds, and colors to constantly provide pleasant sensory stimuli that promote wellness— helps assisted-living and memory-care residents at Villa Alamar (villaalamar.com) and Alexander Gardens (alexandergardensal.com) maintain their high spirits and positive outlook. Developed by owner/partner/administrator Mitch Leichter, this Sensory Integration Program for the Advanced Stages of Dementia is seeing great success.

“Our staff is consistently engaging the residents in a proactive manner, where in the past it was reactive,” reported Leichter. “The staff has learned how to interpret body language from nonverbal residents and have implemented appropriate reminiscent and redirection opportunities predicated on sensor stimuli criteria. In many incidents, an increase in medication has not been needed for some residents experiencing behavioral situations, and in other cases, medications have actually been decreased.”

Leichter explained more about the program to me below, and what follows is a portion of our conversation, edited for clarity and length.

Do you use the sensory integration techniques for both memory-care and senior assisted-living patients? We’ve really focused a lot on Villa Alamar,

which is our memory care. It’s a translucent theory that can apply to anyone, but I’ve had more success in the implementation with memory-care dementia residents in the years that I’ve rolled it out. This is really nice to see the effect.

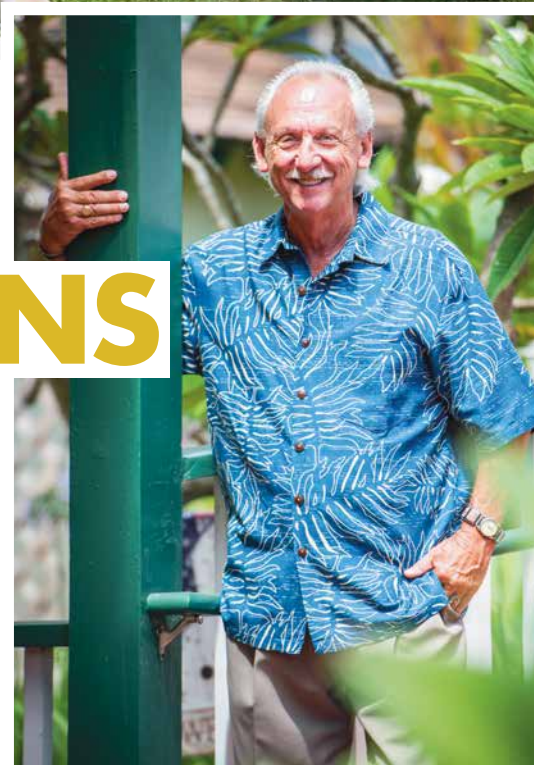
What are some of the different impacts with people in memory care? The whole focus of sensory integrations is to rethink traditional care. If you try to create a traditional activity program with a resident that has dementia, you’re making poor assumptions. You can’t assume they are cognitively able to do it, for example, if you say “move right; stand up; sit down.”

We have a huge, beautiful courtyard at Villa Alamar, and we let nature be our program. We have wind chimes, bird feeders, fountains, gardens, our furniture is multicolored for sensory pickup, and we also have classical music playing. The theory is you want to create a Zen moment for your dementia residents.

If Mrs. Johnson is sitting down by the fountain and she’s watching the birds eating out of the bird feeder, you want to create that Zen moment, and then you want to perpetuate it. Even at lunch time. Rather than stop her from getting in the moment, we work together, and we allow that moment to perpetuate. And we’ll bring lunch to her and not upset what we tried to do to begin with.

By doing that, we can decrease the behavioral medication, because we’re not moving them around. The staff has been taught to be part of the program, not depart from the program. We let nature do the work, and it’s just magnificent.

That sounds like a very humane approach. Does it help everyone? I have incredible employee retention across both of my properties. Because if you walk into a place that smells good and sounds good and looks good, and the staff realizes that I’m not a corporation—we’re independently owned—they know that we’re focusing on a wellness program. And it’s not just a wellness program for residents; it’s



Alexander Gardens and Villa Alamar owner Mitch Leichter uses sights, sounds, and more to keep residents and staff at ease.

a wellness program for the employees as well. And it works.

It’s the same philosophy in a different situation that we use with the residents, and also when the families come in. It basically slows your cadence down. It slows your heart rate down, it slows you down, and that’s the whole theory of sensory integration.

The term I use is “holistic modalities,” and the fact is that we can reduce the amount of behavioral medications by modifying our program. It works wonders.

Is there anything else we should know? When a family has to place a loved one in memory care or assisted living, there’s a lot of guilt and anxiety. Our job is to provide the sensory integration approach so that they can calm down and also feel good about their choice. It’s been remarkable at both of our properties—we get the comments all the time. “What’s that smell?” And “Oh my gosh, look at that bird feeder, and that wind chime sounds magnificent. When can I move in?” So I hear that and I’m thinking, “Okay, good, it’s working.” [Laughs.] We want to be holistic in our approach and not force medication onto anybody unnecessarily.

See villaalamar.com and alexandergardensal.com.



VISTAS LIFELONG LEARNING

Cont'd from p. 12

with any college or other institution. Programs are open to the public for a small fee, and the fees are less for members. (Annual membership fees are \$40 per person for email-only communications and \$50 for snail mail, with individual classes averaging \$9 per session for members and \$14 for nonmembers.)

"It's a really varied and interesting group of people," Hemmer says. The mostly retired members come from very diverse careers, ranging from former judges, teachers, and docents to social workers, librarians, and secretaries, just to name a few.

Upcoming programs in the fall include a reprise of the Silk Road series; the short history of cryptography; the writer James Baldwin; climate change and the impact on the Great American Waterways; criminal procedure; economic issues; and

the social safety net in the U.S., with additional courses and details still being finalized.

"We have a very, very wide palette. There's somebody for everybody," said Hemmer. "It's a wide variety of programs on science, history, current events, music and fine arts, and so on."

Research suggests that humans learn better in social environments. "The brain is triggered more through discussion and questions than from solitary activities such as independent reading," said Hemmer. "So it turns out that Vistas' cooperative spirit that we're all in it together and we get our ideas from other members is particularly beneficial in the case of seniors."

See vistaslifelonglearning.org.

BOMBSHELL PICTURES / MONTY M. MIRANDA



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OSTEOSTRONG

Builds the Bones of Skeletal Health



OsteoStrong owner Yvonne Parsons (inset) and her fans say that their program builds critical bone strength.

My mother was taller than me when I graduated from college, but now I tower over her. Not because I had a twenty-something growth spurt, but because she's been plagued by osteoporosis, which literally means "porous bone."

This horrible condition, which causes the bones to become more porous and fragile, greatly increasing the risk of painful and often disabling broken bones, is a tough one to treat and an impossible one to cure. They think my mom's osteoporosis was caused by chemotherapy, but genetics and aging are factors too.

So naturally I was intrigued when I wrote about OsteoStrong (osteoststrong.me) for last year's Active Aging guide. But at that time, because of the pandemic, the wellness studio was closed to the public, and I wasn't able to try out the machines for myself.

This year, I finally got to check out the rather novel bone-building exercise approach designed to stimulate bone growth through delivery of high-intensity loads. A franchise operation owned by Yvonne and Jim Parsons, the OsteoStrong program uses special exercise machines that deliver intense bone-stimulating loads through four near-maximal isometric exercises.

"The most important thing is that you compress the bone and the axial," explained

Yvonne of how it works. "And if you noticed, when you were doing each piece of equipment, nothing moves. We get into position and it's robotic in that sense, but once you get on, nothing moves except you, and it's the compression of the bone that stimulates the adaptive response."

The circuit itself takes only about 10 minutes, which is certainly efficient. I didn't work up a sweat because, as Yvonne explained, "It's only about the adaptive response. A good analogy is that it's like if you walked into a dark room and your pupils expanded. You go to a gym to get your muscles strong, but you go here to get your skeletal strength."

The machines work on the principle of "osteogenic" loading. These super-resistance machines cover every section of the body — a chest press, leg press, core pull, and skeleton-stressing vertical lift — and they resemble weight machines with feedback monitors. Clients come in once a week, stand on vibration platforms to warm up, then exert 30 seconds of all-out force at each workout station.

All in 10 minutes! Seriously, I saw at least three people cycle through as I interviewed Yvonne.

Although my one session at OsteoStrong was not enough time to report any results, nothing hurt afterward, and the people I saw come in seemed to be all smiles with a little extra spring in their steps. There are certainly loads of happy customers, as their video testimonials attest to (osteoststrong.me/video-gallery).

"People love it," said Yvonne. "It's fast, it's very safe, and it's so efficient. It seems like it's not real, but it really is. We can't say that we cure anything or anything like that, but we have many members who come in and they've had their T-score [a measure of bone density] measured, and they come in, and the next year when they get it again, the T-score has improved and bone

density has improved. ... When your bones are stronger, you're not having that fear of fracture if you fall. It's like when you walk off of a curb, people go, 'Oh no, I don't have any problem with that anymore.' Their balance and agility has improved."

Check it out yourself for free. Call (805) 453-6086 or email santabarbara@osteoststrong.me to set up an appointment. See osteoststrong.me for more info.



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