

PROMOTING SENIOR WELLNESS



PICPEDIA

EARLY RECOGNITION AND INTERVENTION IMPORTANT FOR BEST STROKE RECOVERY OUTCOME

By Jennifer Singley
The Hickman

According to the CDC, 795,000 Americans will experience a stroke each year. Early recognition and intervention are extremely important in producing the best recovery outcome when a stroke occurs, as well as knowing the risk factors and ways in which to prevent strokes from occurring in the first place. You could save a life, including your own.

Risk factors for stroke

Several factors increase a person's risk of experiencing a stroke:

- Age (risk increases over age 65, though strokes can affect people of all ages)
- Obesity
- Diet high in sodium and low in fiber
- Lack of physical exercise

- Being a smoker
- Medical conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease or diabetes

Types of strokes

- **Ischemic stroke:** accounts for 80% of all strokes, and involves a blockage in an artery that cuts off oxygen and nutrients to the brain
- **Hemorrhagic stroke:** accounts for 20% of all strokes and involves an artery that ruptures, spilling blood into the brain
- **Transient ischemic attack (mini stroke):** an episode with symptoms that are like a stroke, but that go away and do not cause permanent damage. However, mini strokes are usually a warning — according to Mayo Clinic, 1 in 3 individuals who have a transient ischemic attack will eventually have a stroke, often within a year. Furthermore, the risk of a stroke is especially high within 48 hours

after a mini stroke takes place.

Symptoms of stroke

Know the following symptoms of stroke, seen in both men and women:

- **Numbness or weakness in face, arm or legs, especially on one side**
- **Confusion, including trouble speaking or understanding speech**
- **Trouble seeing from one or both eyes**
- **Trouble walking or problems with balance or dizziness**
- **Headache, especially if severe with sudden onset**

Time is of the essence when it comes to detecting stroke — every minute counts from the first moment symptoms appear, as some treatment options for stroke are only available within the first 3 hours of symptom onset.

The acronym F.A.S.T. is a helpful

way to remember what to do if you think you or someone you know might be having a stroke.

- **Face:** Ask the person to smile. Is there drooping on one side of the face?
- **Arms:** Have the person raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a short phrase. Do their words sound slurred?
- **Time:** Note the time symptoms start; call 911 immediately if any of these symptoms are present, even if they go away. Get the individual to a hospital as quickly as possible.

Stroke prevention

Many strokes are preventable. Maintaining a healthy weight, consuming a diet of limited processed foods and getting regular exercise such as walking decrease the risk of stroke. Refrain from smoking

and limit alcohol consumption, as well as control your blood pressure and cholesterol. If you are diabetic, be diligent in tracking blood sugar levels.

The Hickman offers an inviting option for those seeking assistance after a stroke. Located on a tree-lined street in the heart of downtown West Chester, residents enjoy the convenience of home-cooked meals, housekeeping, social programming and 24/7 security as well as easy access to all the borough has to offer, including restaurants, shops, theater, parks and walking trails. Call 484-760-6300 to schedule a tour and see how The Hickman is the right place for you.

Promoting Senior Wellness is provided by The Hickman, a Quaker-affiliated licensed personal care home in West Chester. Visit www.thehickman.org or call 484-760-6300.

HEALTH

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

By Courtney Diener-Stokes
For MediaNews Group

Almost six years ago I was on my way to pick up my aunt on a Sunday afternoon to run some errands. When I arrived, something didn't feel quite right.

I had just gotten off the phone with her about 15 minutes prior to let her know I was on my way, yet she didn't come out when I texted her to let her know I was in her driveway with my three young kids in tow.

I waited a bit thinking she was in the shower. This time I called her. Again, no answer. At that point, due to growing concern, I decided to get out of the car to investigate and peeked in the window as I was on my way to the front porch door.

I couldn't believe what I saw. My aunt, who was in her mid-60s, was lying on the ground in the middle of her living room appearing motionless. I immediately called 911 as I quickly made my way inside. They guided me through how to best support her until the medics arrived. As I approached, her eyes were open and she was trying to get her head off the floor. She had lost full functioning of the rest of her body. It

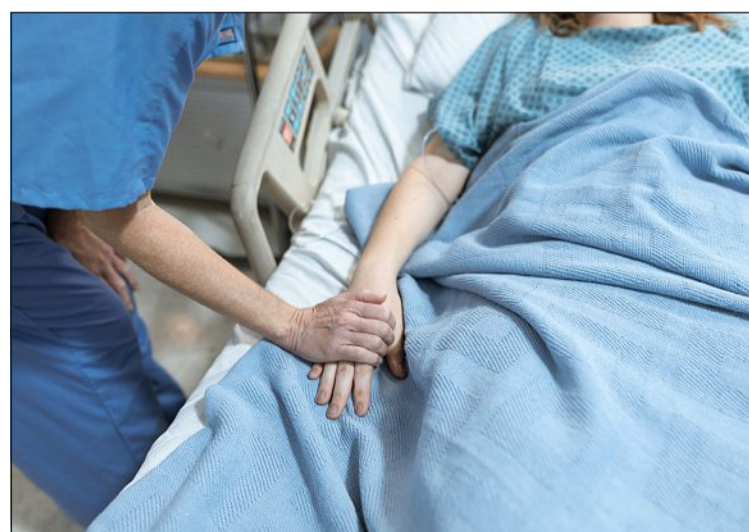
was determined she had a stroke.

Less than a year prior, she moved to the Oley Valley to be closer to family, and she was a ball of fun. I adored having easy access to spend time with her, but on that day in 2016 the fun came to a crashing halt. I would never be able to have a two-way conversation with my aunt again because she never regained her speech, and the rest of our time was spent in hospital rooms until she passed away due to other health complications in 2017.

This month is National Stroke Awareness Month, and according to the National PACE Association, goals of this year's campaign are to help reduce stroke risk and take people behind the scenes of what happens when someone experiences a stroke.

There are many ways you can participate during this month of awareness that surrounds a leading cause of death in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Stroke is also a major cause of serious disability for adults.

Some of the guidance offered centers on prevention, such as the Steps to Stop Stroke step challenge that is aimed to promote regular physical activity, which



RODNAE PRODUCTIONS

One of the initiatives of Stroke Awareness Month is centered on stroke prevention.

can reduce one's risk for stroke.

There are other ways you can take action and commit to making a change to improve a stroke risk factor. They include eating a diet that's low in saturated fats, trans fat and cholesterol; if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation; and discontinuing the use of tobacco.

Overall, making healthy lifestyle choices can lower your

risk of stroke just as unhealthy choices can increase it. It's ideal to discuss any lifestyle changes with your health care team.

Taking action in a timely manner can mean all the difference when it comes to effective treatment because according to the CDC, the stroke treatments that work best are available only if the stroke is recognized within three hours of the first

symptoms. If a stroke patient doesn't arrive at the hospital in time, it can limit options for effective treatment.

Signs of stroke to take note of, for both men and women, according to the American Stroke Association, include sudden numbness or weakness in face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or difficulty understanding speech; sudden trouble seeing out of one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or lack of coordination; and a sudden severe headache with no known cause.

If you or anyone experiences any of these symptoms, call 911 right away. It's important to note the time when any symptoms first appeared. If you experience symptoms, the CDC recommends not driving yourself to the hospital and instead let someone else drive you or call 911 to get an ambulance so they can begin lifesaving measures on the way.

If you share these helpful tips with friends and family during National Stroke Awareness Month there is a chance you might help save a life.

SPOT OF T

A glimpse of life behind the COVID curtain

By Terry Alburger

It was inevitable. I am currently on the other side of the COVID curtain. The inside. It is from this new vantage point that I decided to share my experiences. Perhaps something here might help you should the need arise.

Aside from being sequestered from humanity, life went on after my positive test. There is the initial self-pity, of course. But then it occurred to me — perhaps I gained more than I lost. I could get some rest, some quiet time and the ability to work at home. No phones ringing or people stopping in my office. For a week or so, I would be in a COVID fortress. How bad could it be?

The first two days were manageable. Not fun, but manageable. It was like a ramped-up allergy attack. I managed to get some gardening done.

“Nice. I’ll stay home, get my yardwork done, get caught up with household stuff and even work from home. Wow, a week of time on my hands! Going to be great, right?”

Day three changed my mind.

First piece of advice: do not be lulled into a false sense of security. Day three felt like a concentrated allergy attack on steroids. Intermittent fever soon decided to make its appearance into the COVID mix. It created a cohesive COVID choreography. And remember that energy that I had on day one? Yeah, it hit the highway. The gardens and housework, they would have to wait. COVID, the energy thief, had struck in earnest.

COVID is a lot like a roller coaster. The symptoms come in peaks and valleys. I was chugging along, doing fine, thinking



PIXABAY

“this isn’t so bad,” when suddenly I faced a quick decline. Coughing, bouts of fever, sore throat, all usually hitting at night. It felt endless, this downhill spiral. But by morning, after intermittent sleep, flu meds and a hot shower, smooth sailing returned. Briefly.

The next few days continued, a smooth ride, immediately preceding the next torrent of symptoms. After a week, shortness of breath became the rule the day. It was pronounced, even cut my phone conversations short. Deep breaths. Expand those lungs. If you have access to a pulsox (pulse oximeter), use it.

Though I just couldn’t seem to catch my breath, my O2 remained good. And yet, frivolous things like walking to the bathroom or sitting up for too

long or talking had all become major feats. I presumed it to be just another part of COVID’s cavalcade of symptoms. It’s like a giant “Price is Right.”

OK, you can now trade your fever symptom forwhat’s behind door number one ...drumroll please!

Shortness of breath! Lucky you!

Be prepared. The best defense is to fight back. Rest when you have to, but do as much as you possibly can when you find energy. I created a COVID toolkit and kept it close at hand at all times: tissues, Lysol wipes, Pulsox, cough medicine, cough drops, thermometer, masks, water bottle, phone, charger. I was indeed ready for any COVID apocalypse! You never know what you might need!

Try to keep moving. At

one point, I meandered outside for a short walk in the backyard. How is it that the simplest of tasks can eat up so much energy? But you know what they say about “Sunshine on my shoulders...” it certainly did make me happy. Exhilarating but exhausting.

As the day count hit double digits, I was confused. I truly expected to be better and back to work in a week. On day 10, I got up early to test myself, fully expecting to return to work. My clothes were laid out, my work computer was packed neatly in my briefcase, I was ready to go. Fifteen minutes later, I neatly unpacked my work computer and files, grabbed my coffee and returned to my home office attire (sweats) and workspace (couch). Sigh. It was positive.

Three days later, I’m

still here, not knowing what the next few days will hold. As far as prisons go, this one wasn’t so bad. I know I must be nearing the end of this COVID journey. I’m still on the inside of the COVID curtain, but I hope that soon I’ll be able to throw that curtain wide open and dash out.

There are many lessons learned from my continuing COVID experience. First and foremost, never let your guard down. I was lured into a false sense of security. I won’t be fooled again. My mask will once again be part of my daily wardrobe.

Also, never underestimate the power of a hug from a loved one. Something that was always a part of my daily life was suddenly removed. Hugs are powerful things — don’t take them for granted. I can’t wait to re-

plenish my supply. People are very kind. I have received so much help and love from all around me. Pride takes a back seat with you have COVID. Accept all offers of help. You’ll need it.

I am reminded what social creatures we humans truly are. On an average workday, I must interact with 30 or 40 people, easily. To suddenly become a solo act is difficult to say the least. There is much to be said for the camaraderie of good co-workers and friends.

I have to wonder how much worse this would be without vaccinations and a booster. I’m very grateful to be fully vaxxed.

I truly hope you don’t need any of the above information, but if the need arises, I hope these random musings might be useful. Stay safe!



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TRAVEL

With COVID still a concern, is it safe to plan a summer vacation?

By John Grimaldi

To say that the coronavirus pandemic disrupted our lives is an understatement if there ever was one, and the current respite — albeit potentially short-lived — is a welcome glimpse of a return to normalcy.

For example, in the good old days of a virus-free world, many of us would be planning summer vacations right about now. It's a nice idea but it begs the question: is it safe?

Dr. Sara Suliman of the University of California San Francisco has a background in immunology and infectious diseases, and she offered the Boston Globe this piece of advice: "Since the pandemic is unlikely to disappear and life needs to continue, it may still be worth proceeding with personal travel plans, while taking advantage of all available protective measures. People should weigh the pros and cons of travel, and prioritize less risky travel modes, like cars, where possible."

In the same article, Harvard epidemiologist Dr. William Hanage suggested that if you are considering booking a vacation this year: "Book something you can cancel. Then reassess when your trip is closer. Remember, it's not only about the chance of being infected, but also the chance of restrictions being implemented wherever you are vacationing. It wouldn't be fun quarantining for a substantial portion of your stay."

Another piece of advice is offered by Rebecca Weber, CEO of the Association of Mature American Citizens: make sure your insurance is up to date.

"In addition to making sure that your health insurance will cover you no matter where you travel in the U.S. and abroad, you might want to purchase travel insurance," she said. "It may also be wise to look into purchasing a travel assistance plan as well. There is a difference.

"Travel insurance covers monetary losses that you may incur while traveling. Travel assistance plans help pay for things such as an emergency medical evacuation and travel arrangements, a nurse escort, a traveling companion and other emergency costs you might encounter if you get sick or hurt while traveling. It can even provide emergency cash advances."

As adventuresome as you might feel, it's a good idea to keep your travel plans as simple as possible and to do some research as regards the level of COVID danger at your planned destination.

For example, the Centers for Disease Control has an updated international list of destinations based on COVID risk assessments on its website, www.cdc.gov. Meanwhile, the nonprofit Act Now Coalition offers an online resource that monitors domestic COVID risk levels.

Weber also stresses that it is above all the items on your travel check list that you are vaccinated against the COVID virus and, of



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

National parks such as Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah might be an option for a vacation location with COVID still a concern.

course, that you consult with your healthcare provider. He or she will tell you whether it is a good idea, health wise, to go where you are planning to go and how you are planning to get there. At the least it will give you peace of mind and help ensure a very bon voyage.

One final thought. Arguably, among the safer vaca-

tion destinations that you might want to consider if you are planning a getaway is the great outdoors.


Particularly for those seniors who wish to get out and enjoy fresh air and scenic beauty, there's no better deal than an annual National Park Pass for \$20 or a lifetime pass for \$80. Up to three additional people in a vehicle

are admitted free with the cardholder. Passes may be obtained at www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/fee-free-parks-state.htm.

As for the status of the pandemic, the master of the malaprop, Yogi Berra, once said, "It ain't over until it's over."

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature

American Citizens, www.amac.us, is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local congressional districts throughout the country.



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HEALTH

A NEW PHILOSOPHY FOR DEMENTIA CARE



COURTESY OF THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

From left, Robert Duchynski, Carol Duchynski, Marjorie Miller, Janet Ustaszewski and Richard Odenweller participate in a program about dementia at The Highlands at Wyomissing.

By Kevin P. DeAcosta
The Highlands at Wyomissing

Most people feel a of sense despair when a loved one receives a diagnosis of dementia. But it doesn't have to be that way.

According to Dr. John Zeisel, internationally known expert on dementia care and treatment innovations, "With some work, we can adopt a feeling of hope." Zeisel was at The Highlands at Wyomissing in Berks County last month to speak to residents as well as community members. Zeisel delivered the keynote during the facility's first community impact symposium to highlight a new philosophy of memory care called the "I'm Still

Here" approach. "To take part on this groundbreaking symposium was an honor," said Zeisel, co-founder and CEO of Hearthstone Alzheimer Care. "Caregivers shared their stories, while I shared lessons I have learned over my years in the field. "My main message is that meaningful engagement — not just tossing a ball back and forth — is actual treatment for the disability of dementia. Engagement replaces the four A's of Al-

zheimer's — anxiety, agitation, aggression and apathy. Techniques are available to successfully carry out the basic form of engagement with those living with dementia, conversation." While dementia is a common condition, it is also often misunderstood. During the event at The Highlands, the program included dementia simulation activities to promote awareness and empathy of the challenges senior adults have manag-



COURTESY OF THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

From left, Robert Duchynski, Carol Duchynski, Marjorie Miller, Janet Ustaszewski and Richard Odenweller

DEMENTIA » PAGES

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COURTESY OF THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

From left, Dr. Eve Kimball, Doris Grassi-Moore and Ardelle Nagle wear goggles to simulate obstructed vision during a program on dementia at The Highlands at Wyomissing.



COURTESY OF THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

From left, Emma Hefner, David Thun and Barbara Thun participate in a program about dementia at The Highlands at Wyomissing.

Dementia

FROM PAGE 4

ing in a world with dementia.

People were able to simulate obstructed vision through wearing goggles that simulate loss of sight, noisy headphones to create distracting sounds and replicate hearing loss and special gloves to simulate a declining sense of touch.

The Alzheimer's Association says by 2050, the number of Americans who experience dementia will surpass 13.8 million, slightly more than the current population of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

With numbers increasing, the need for more people to understand how to support those living with dementia is also growing.

"You see your loved one for who they are and realize you can make a positive difference in their

lives," said Zeisel, whose book "I'm Still Here: A New Philosophy of Alzheimer's Care" is available through most major online booksellers.

The Highlands is committed to being a nationally recognized leader in healthy aging as part of its goal to offer the highest quality of life for its residents.

A priority in this effort is to assure an environment that continuously improves as new health science develops. A major focus for healthy aging is the field of memory care.

"Dr. Zeisel has used his experience and insights over the years to create the 'I'm Still Here' approach, which is filled with principles that underpin The Highlands at Wyomissing's care philosophy," said Kevin P. DeAcosta, The Highlands president and CEO.

The "I'm Still Here" approach, is a progressive memory care program designed to improve the quality of life for senior

adults with dementia using nonpharmacological "ecopsychosocial" interventions.

Zeisel, a sociologist with a background in design, focuses on interventions in care with an emphasis on the physical environment and engagement. He has authored numerous academic articles about treatment alternatives that do not rely on conventional pharmaceutical therapy.

The Highlands has established two partnerships to meet its commitment to offering a cutting-edge environment

for memory care. These relationships include a research and educational relationship with Drexel University and the implementation of the "I'm Still Here" progressive memory care program for Aspire Memory Support by Hearthstone Institute.

"The Highlands and Drexel collaboration will aim to improve the quality of life of older adults and their caregivers — family members and formal providers — through preventing or managing chronic conditions, enhancing

active and purposeful living, and enabling aging in place," DeAcosta said. "Further, both entities seek to disseminate and implement evidence-based, high-quality programs for The Highlands' memory care environment, and in doing so serve as a model to inform the field of best practices in dementia care."

"The Hearthstone Institute is pleased to partner with The Highlands to make sure that Memory Support residents, as well as residents throughout the beautiful campus,

achieve the wellbeing they deserve," Zeisel said.

Too many people, Zeisel said, see a family member's dementia diagnosis as a source of anxiety, agitation, aggression and apathy.

"But it doesn't have to be that way," Zeisel said. "With the 'I'm Still Here' philosophy, you start seeing the person for who they are today and appreciating the abilities they still offer."

Kevin P. DeAcosta is president and CEO of The Highlands at Wyomissing.

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The Literacy Council of Norristown serves some 300 adults each year in the greater Norristown area of Montgomery County..

Literacy Council and RSVP form planning dream team

RSVP

When Eileen Hallstrom became executive director of the Literacy Council of Norristown last June, change was in the air.

“We were starting to come out of the pandemic,” she said. “Our board had new members. As we looked at our prior strategic plan, we realized we needed to refresh it.”

The Council serves some 300 adults each year in the greater Norristown area of

Montgomery County. About 200 are learning English as a second language (ESL). Others are receiving basic education in reading, writing and math.

Hallstrom and other senior leaders wanted to expand into family literacy, providing programs for parents while their children receive reading support. But how would they get there?

A strategic plan “is a roadmap of where you want your organization to go,” said RSVP board chairman Ron Gawel.

RSVP, which connects Philadelphia-area volunteers to community service opportunities, has helped dozens of area nonprofits through its Volunteer Executive Consultants (VEC). The group has 26 active projects focused on strategic planning, board development, fundraising, management, marketing and communications.

“VEC came highly recommended,” Hallstrom said.

In her previous jobs, most recently as Youth Job

Center’s director of strategic initiatives, Hallstrom had worked on several strategic plans.

“To get outside help to create a plan can cost \$30,000 to \$50,000,” she said. “And what you come up with in the end might not drive your organization forward.”

VEC’s services are free to nonprofits.

High-powered team

After Hallstrom con-

PLANNING DREAM TEAM »

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VEC WORKSHOP

RSVP offers free virtual workshops to nonprofits. The final spring 2022 workshop, “Strategies for Boosting Your Board’s Engagement,” will take place on May 24 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. via Zoom.

“A committed board is critical to success in every aspect of your nonprofit’s operations,” VEC program manager Sheri Wilensky Burke said.

The workshop will be led by RSVP board chairman Ron

Gawel and board member Gene Davidov, a retired corporate senior strategist. For more information and to register, visit vec-rsvp-board-engagement.eventbrite.com.

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QUALITY OF LIFE

Study: Washington state tops list of where seniors are 'living better lives'

By John Grimaldi

The isolation triggered by the pandemic has caused many seniors to re-evaluate their living conditions, particularly those who are living alone.

"To be sure, the lack of nearby or live-in family members ranks high in considering a move to a more senior-friendly locale," said Rebecca Weber, CEO of the Association of Mature American Citizens.

And Weber points out that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates there are currently some 10.6 million seniors 65 and older who are still in the workforce, and if you are one of them you'll want to seek out worker-friendly locales.

She said the BLS estimates that the number of 65-plus seniors still working is expected to increase to 16 million by 2030, including 32% in the 65-74 age range and nearly 12% in the over-75 range.

So, if you're a senior and looking to make a move, how do you pick a place that can address your needs?

Many of you, if not most of you, would probably pick Florida as the ideal destination. If nothing else, Florida is noted for its climate and has long been considered the place to go when you retire.

But a new study conducted by the senior housing experts at Seniorly.com put Florida in 28th place in its list of states where older citizens are "living better lives."

"Florida, for example, which has long been thought of as a primary retirement destination, was in the middle of the pack," Seniorly said. "This is likely



A new study shows that the outlook for seniors has improved in the U.S.

due to the nuances of our analysis, which sought to determine which states have made the most progress when it comes to improving the lives of older adults. So, that means a state like Florida probably didn't have as far to go as others."

Seniorly's analysis compared all 50 states and the District of Columbia and had a potential top score of 306 across four main categories: physical health, mental health, finances and social lives.

"While no states reached that lofty goal, a couple of them got fairly close," Seniorly said. "Washington was the top state overall, scoring 248.8, just two points ahead of second-place finisher, North Dakota. Washington's winning performance was powered by its strength across three of the four categories, ranking second in physical health and social factors and fifth in finances."

Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont ranked third, fourth and fifth.

The states with the lowest scores were Hawaii, Arkansas, Utah, Michigan

and Nevada.

AMAC reached out to Seniorly for a pre-publication comment on the article.

Their reply: "Much of what you read about seniors is often negative. In our work with seniors and their families we've seen remarkable improvements in quality of life, health and happiness. We conducted this study to show where in America the outlook for seniors has improved the most. Even the states that ranked lower in our analysis are still better off than they were 10 years ago. While COVID-19 was devastating, the lives of seniors as a whole are improving."

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens, www.amac.us, is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country.

Planning dream team

FROM PAGE 6

tacted RSVP, VEC program manager Sheri Wilensky Burke asked Gawel to head up a strategic planning team for the Norristown literacy group. Gawel, a retired senior executive with Lockheed Martin, has headed up some 75 projects in 15 years of volunteering for VEC in addition to chairing the RSVP board.

Gawel and Burke selected four of VEC's 60 volunteers, most of them retired managers and professionals, to help the literacy council.

"We looked at marketing, finances, programs and management," Hallstrom said. "Each area had a champion on the VEC group, and we were able to focus on each topic in turn. They were very-no-nonsense. We got to what mattered quickly."

The VEC team included retirees Jane Forth, who was a trade association executive; Barry Stein, Ph.D., formerly a technology investment executive and advanced computer researcher; Melissa Rodkin, who was an IKEA supply chain manager and financial administrator; and Stan Warchaizer, former vice president for intelligence systems at Lockheed Martin.

For the Literacy Council of Norristown, board chairman Cliff Hirst "really led our board through the process," Hallstrom said. "He took a lead role in making sure everyone understood the process and making sure it went smoothly."

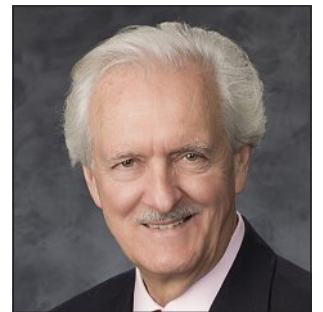
In the blink of an eye

"We received the request in September and finished in four months," Gawel said. "I was so impressed with the Literacy Council of Norristown team. They came in with broad goals and details of how to get there. It was amazing. They are one of the best clients I've ever worked with."

Gawel particularly credits Hallstrom and Hirst, a long-time administrator for the Norristown Public Library.



Eileen Hallstrom



Ron Gawel

"The plan added specificity and context to what the center is doing," said Elaine Green, an ESL tutor and member of the council's strategic planning team.

She is also a VEC volunteer and former board chairwoman of the Philadelphia Center for Literacy.

"We developed the plan from a SWOT analysis, which studies Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats," she said.

"In the blink of the eye, we had a strategic plan and a really good one," Hallstrom said. "It is giving flight to our programs and our mission. There's a great energy now."

She said the Literacy Council's new family literacy initiative includes a library area "where people can come and get free books. Having books in the home can make a huge difference, and an adult is 90% more likely to achieve literacy goals if family members are involved with their learning."

"The plan includes teaching parents while the day-care center is teaching their kids, with joint parent-child programs," Green said.

Meanwhile, the council's ESL program has helped "a lot of Afghan refugees" and "we're just starting to help Ukrainian refugees" to learn English, working in partnership with the Nationalities Service Center and other organizations and churches, Hallstrom said.

"It's going to get extremely busy," she said.

Volunteers needed

Burke said VEC "can always use more volunteers, particularly with skills in strategic and business planning, fundraising and marketing and communica-

tions."

A former national director of volunteer management for the American Lung Association and currently a consultant in volunteer engagement, Burke said that "because so much of the VEC role is coaching and advising, the best VECs are those who are good listeners, team builders and problem solvers."

She added that "many of our clients are very small organizations. Most have budgets under \$300,000. So being able to take the skills learned in larger business settings and modifying them for smaller organizations with limited resources is important. We provide some of that learning during our onboarding process. Volunteers with backgrounds in nonprofit management can be especially helpful."

At the Literacy Council of Norristown, "We need more volunteers," Hallstrom said. "We seek adults who are willing to work with other adults, are relatively culturally aware, usually have a college education, are kind and want to help someone in their educational goals. RSVP has sent us some of our best volunteers. They're usually very well trained."

For information about RSVP's VEC, literacy and many other programs, email volunteer123@rsvpmc.org or call 610-834-1040, ext.123. Nonprofits requesting VEC management assistance can visit rsvpmc.org/vec-management-assistance-form. Startup nonprofits can visit: rsvpmc.org/vec-management-assistance-form-star

To explore volunteer opportunities with the Literacy Council, contact Kathy Stocker at volunteer123@rsvpmc.org.



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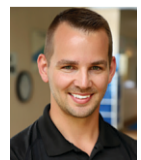
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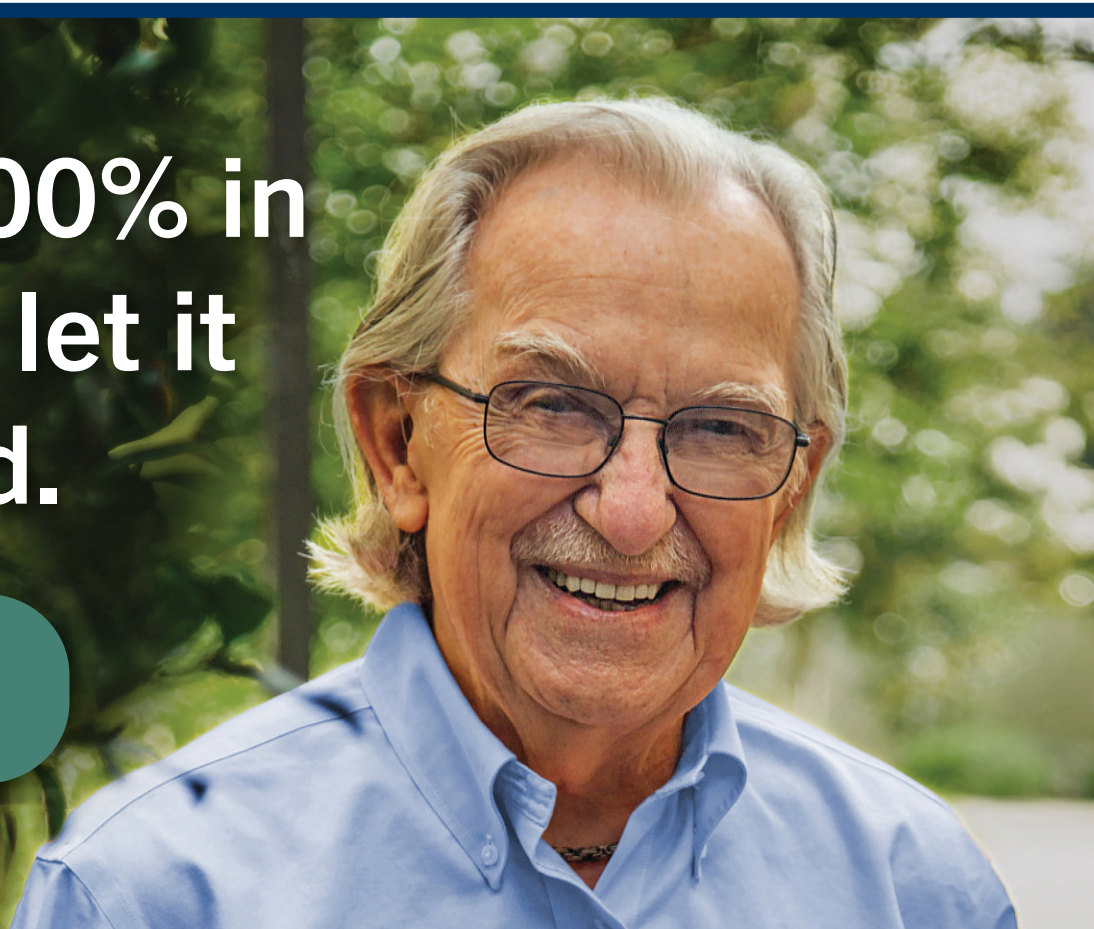


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