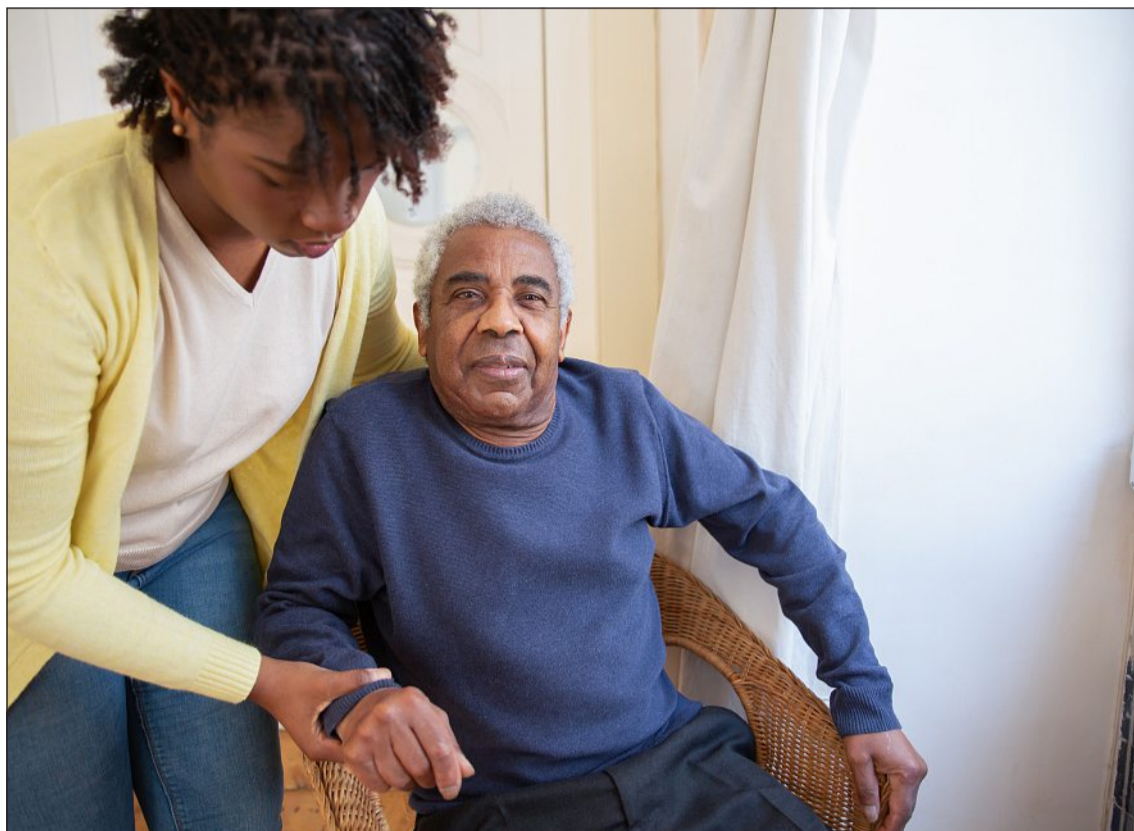


AGING IN PLACE



COURTESY OF KAMPUS PRODUCTION

Caregivers can make it possible to age in place by offering support in the home from meal prep and medicine alerts to daily hygiene practices.



COURTESY OF ANNA SHVETS

Aging in the comforts of home has been increasing in popularity over the last 10 years.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO SAFELY AGE IN PLACE

By Courtney Diener-Stokes
For MediaNews Group

The University of Michigan Poll on National Aging asked a national sample of adults ages 50 to 80 their perspective on aging at home, and 88% felt it is important to age in their own homes.

Jessica Jones, director of the Berks County Area Agency on Aging, has witnessed a shift in the 20 years she's worked with the aging population that is reflective of this preference.

"There has been a big shift on aging in place at least in the last 10 years," Jones said.

She attributes that to the various benefits of staying at home.

"They get to remain in their home and still maintain a higher level of dignity," Jones said. "There is also a cost aspect around that. It's a lot more cost effective for families and the state system to support people in that type of setting."

The BCAA offers many programs that help older adults age in place.

"These programs allow older adults to remain in the community with support and services for as long as they can be safe," Jones said. "We also have programs to support family members who are caregivers, to help the older adult stay in the community."

They provide guides to home care, home care registry agencies and home health agencies, along with other services.

According to the University of Michigan poll, people ages 64 to 80 are giving the most consideration to modifications that will enable them to remain at home.

When planning ahead, there are many factors to take into account as your needs evolve, from personal care and household chores to meals, money management and health care. The end result is an individual who receives personalized care in the home that meets their needs.

"They might need someone to come in a few days a week to do meal prep, bathing, give cues to take their medication," Jones said. "Maybe their only need is home-delivered meals — that is one of our funded programs that people utilize a lot. That is a big piece of what we offer to keep people independent in the community."

In addition to health benefits, there are affordable options that



COURTESY OF YAN KRUKOV

Local senior centers offer a social outlet that includes fitness classes and other activities.

make living at home possible. According to the National Institute on Aging, an important part of the planning process is to consider how you're going to pay for the help you will eventually need in your home.

"Some things you want may cost a lot — others may be free — some might be covered by Medicare or other health insurance," the NIA states on its website. "Check with your insurance providers; it's possible that paying for a few services out of pocket could cost less than moving into an independent living, assisted living or long-term care facility."

Of course, a senior independent living community, assisted living or long-term care facility could be a good option for some older folks. Seniors need to assess what's best for their own situation.

Cost-saving measures can also be reaped by caregivers.

"We have a caregiver support program," Jones said of the BCAA. "It allows them to receive

reimbursement on different types of services and supplies."

The reimbursement is based on a caregiver's income to determine a percentage to be reimbursed, such as on the purchase of incontinent supplies.

"We serve caregivers over 55, and the care receiver has to have some diagnosis of dementia, like Alzheimer's," she said.

One of the BCAA's goals is to help individuals figure out the least restrictive way they can have their needs met safely in the community. Regardless of income, they can offer advice on the best route to go.

"I always encourage people to call us and have a discussion about an individual's income and assets so we can give them direction on what would best suit their needs," Jones said. "We can help stretch assets more to age in place for as long as possible."

As for maintaining a life rich in social outlets while living at

home, there are outlets that are easily accessible to help maintain contact with others. Many offerings can be found at places such as the Tri County Active Adult Center in Pottstown and the West Chester Area Senior Center in West Chester.

"We have fitness classes, foreign languages, current events, Bible study, knitting and crochet, card playing and bingo," said Jessica Tipton, fitness instructor at the West Chester Area Senior Center for the past seven years.

Tipton instructs individuals ages 60 to 105 at the Center, which also offers functional fitness testing.

"Most of them live independently in their own home," she said.

The Center serves as more than a place to keep busy with activities.

"It's primarily for socialization," she said. "It's like a family away from their family."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Berks County Area Office on Aging

The Berks County Area Agency on Aging serves county residents with comprehensive services for the over-60 population. It provides a variety of services and programs to assist families and individuals over 60 achieve independence to be self-sufficient. Whether you require senior center services, in-home services, a comprehensive assessment, information and referral services, care management, caregiver support services, protective services, adult day care centers, they are available to help you acquire those services.

Website: www.co.berks.pa.us/dept/aging

TriCounty Active Adult Center

Website: www.tricountyacc.org

West Chester Area Senior Center

Website: www.wcseniors.org

Aging in place at home

Growing older brings many positive experiences. However, it can also bring new challenges and a need for specialized services to enable older adults to remain independent in their own homes through in-home services and other supports. Some areas of support:

- Personal care to aid in basic daily needs such as bathing and dressing
- Help with preparing meals, laundry, shopping or other household chores
- Home health services, personal emergency response systems, medical equipment and supplies
- Home-delivered meals
- Home modifications to make your home more accessible to your needs
- Adult daily living centers to provide a safe environment for older adults who are unable to be left alone

Source: Berks County Area Agency on Aging

SPOT OF T

Enjoy some time in the world of whimsy

By Terry Alburger

This past weekend, I had a debate with my eldest granddaughter, who is 11 years old. No, we were not concerned with election fraud or global warming or some of the more serious topics of the day. But we were each intent on proving our stance.

The question at hand — was the inflatable raft which was bobbing in the pool in front of us a unicorn or was it a Pegasus? Ah yes, the tough questions indeed. She insisted it was a unicorn, and I claimed it was a winged horse. With all the passion of a future litigator, she sought to win the case.

“It has a horn,” she said. “Pegasus doesn’t have a horn. How can it be Pegasus? Remember when Perseus rode him to save Andromeda? That was Pegasus. No horn. Just wings. But this has a horn. It must be a unicorn.”

While I was tickled pink that she actually knew mythology based on watching the film “Clash of the Titans” with me last year, I could not let on that I was pleased. I continued the debate the issue as her opponent.

“But this beast has wings. How many unicorns do you know that have wings? Maybe this Pegasus just has a deformity in the shape of a horn?” I said, with all the authority of someone who has never seen a unicorn. Probably with good reason.

“The magical ones do, like on ‘My Little Pony,’” she said. “Haven’t you ever seen those?”

I could not argue with her fictional logic. I conceded that perhaps it

could be both, unicorn and Pegasus. Perhaps it was in the family of the narwhal? Anything’s possible. And we both walked away happy in our whimsical collaboration, smiling with fictional pride. I consider that to be time well spent.

What I enjoyed the most of our little tete-a-tete is that we were up to our eyeballs in our whimsical world, both engaged in a fictional and fun creation of our own making. Sometimes I think a little whimsy is a wonderful thing.

Whimsy can remove us from the harsh and painful reality that surrounds us in social media offerings and the news sources. It can remove us, albeit temporarily, from the sadness and the tragedy that sometimes surround and overwhelm us.

It’s interesting how some of these whimsical wonders have transcended their fictional walls and have become part of our lives. If you are a Harry Potter fan, you will no doubt agree that Buckbeak plays a key role in Harry’s narrow escapes, or that the Cloak of Invisibility and the Marauder’s Map are important tools to his victory over ... He Who Will Not Be Named. Any true Harry Potter fan will follow that logic without hesitation.

I suppose this is part of the reason I love Disney World so much. When you set foot in those magical gates, you are transformed into a world of magic, princesses and wonder. There is nothing wrong with an escape from reality every now and again. Each time I go there, I am once again a 12-year-old kid, with no problems of adulthood other than avoiding long wait times for the attrac-



PIXABAY

tions.

But you needn’t travel anywhere to be transported and you do not need the power of the entertainment industry, either. Recently, I have begun re-reading Sherlock Holmes books. I love a good mystery, and these books certainly fit that bill.

This fictional crime fighter, quirky as he may be, is certainly a clever fellow! I love to try to solve the mysteries as I read, but there are so

many clever and sometimes insidious twists and turns, I am seldom right.

Books definitely help escape the harsh reality of our day and take us to so many exotic, far-away and even whimsical places. I have rediscovered some of the hundreds of books I have stowed away in my house. Most, I kept for a reason.

Now is a great time to remember the wonder that each book held for me. Books are the perfect

escape in a time where COVID is still very much a danger. Though I’m not ready to travel yet, I can be transported anywhere I choose through the literary talents of some of the masters.

Whimsy. We all need a little bit of it in our lives. It’s like an escape hatch from reality, a temporary shelter to let your brain rest, reset and recover. Let a little whimsy into your life when the barrage of tragic or horrific

news unfolds in our everyday lives.

Take that temporary journey into the whimsical, a journey that will allow you to smile at the imaginary and will allow relief from a tired and painful reality.

For a short time, follow that White Rabbit down Alice’s hole in Wonderland. Close your eyes and take a break. Ponder the existence of the unicorn. I did, and it was well worth the trip.

Planning for tomorrow starts today.



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SENIOR LIVING

Berks retirement communities on list of Best Senior Living by national magazine

For MediaNews Group

U.S. News & World Report recently released its inaugural list of Best Senior Living for independent living, assisted living, memory care and continuing care retirement communities across the country.

Chestnut Knoll, managed by Heritage Senior Living LLC, is a personal care and memory care community in Boyertown and earned best status by attaining the highest possible rating in each of its senior living levels.

Manor at Market Square, also managed by Heritage Senior Living LLC, is an independent living, personal care and memory care community in Reading and earned Best Independent Living by attaining the highest possible rating in that category.

Three Keystone Villa properties, also managed by Heritage Senior Living LLC and located in Amity Township, Berks County; Maiden Creek Township, Berks County; and Ephrata, Lancaster County, were designated as best. While each Keystone Villa community varies in care levels, all were recognized as Best of Independent Living, with Ephrata additionally awarded Best Memory Care.

The status reflects senior living communities that were able to satisfy *U.S. News & World Report's* objective statistical assessment of performance from consumer-satisfaction surveys given between March 2021 and February 2022, reflecting the viewpoints of more than 200,000 current residents and family members

of residents living in thousands of senior living communities nationwide.

In consumer-satisfaction surveys, residents and their families evaluated factors such as community and activities, caregiving, food and dining, and management and staff.

Residents and their families of Chestnut Knoll, Manor at Market Square and the Keystone Villa locations noted excellence in value and variety of life enrichment activities, caregiving, skilled and knowledgeable licensed nursing staff, quality of food and dining; responsive management and staff; and promptness of maintenance and housekeeping.

U.S. News & World Report is known for its annual lists and is also the global authority in health care ratings.

"The Chestnut Knoll team is grateful to our residents and their families for reviewing us with such high esteem," said Shawn Barndt, executive director at Chestnut Knoll. "We strive every day to be the best for our residents, and this recognition is a testament to our quality standards."

"It's an honor to be nationally recognized as the best!" said Mary Kusnierz, executive director at Manor at Market Square. "The staff is grateful for the positive responses from the residents and their families who have entrusted us with caring for their loved ones."

"We are honored to receive this distinction from *US News & World Report*," said Keystone Villa Vice President of Sales and Mar-



Shawn Barndt, executive director of Chestnut Knoll

keting Gretchen Vakiener. "The recognition is especially significant because the results from residents and family members validate the energy, care and dedication of our employees."

Chestnut Knoll provides affordable care services and housing through a month-to-month lease with no buy-in fees. Rent includes apartment-style, 24-hour personal care; three meals served daily, weekly housekeeping and linen services, a stimulating activities program, the FOX Optimal Living program and more. To learn more about care services or to schedule a tour, call 610-473-8066.

Manor at Market Square provides affordable care services and housing through a month-to-month lease with no buy-in fees. Rent includes apartment-style, meals; recreational and social activities; weekly housekeeping and linen services; a parking space; use of all community amenities; and more. To learn more about care services or to schedule a tour, please call 610-790-1707.

Keystone Villa communities offer affordable senior housing options while providing an environment for aging adults to thrive through proper nutrition, socialization and fitness. For more information about the Keystone Villa properties or Heritage Senior Living, call 215-793-4445 or visit www.heritagegs.com.

COLUMN

Ask Rusty: Must I pay income tax on Social Security benefits?

By Russell Gloor

DEAR RUSTY» I do not recall the rules on my income tax obligation for Social Security benefits. Can you please explain these rules to me? — *Senior Taxpayer*

DEAR SENIOR TAXPAYER» I'll be happy to review the rules about income tax on Social Security benefits for you. If your combined income from all sources is low enough, your Social Security benefits aren't subject to being taxed by the IRS. But some of your Social Security benefits will become taxable if your combined income from all sources exceeds certain thresholds, and the thresholds are dependent on your tax filing status (single or married).

If you file your income tax as "married-filing jointly" and your combined income from all sources (both taxable and non-taxable income) is less than \$32,000, then your Social Security benefits aren't taxable. But if your combined income as a married couple is between \$32,001 and \$44,000, then half of the SS benefits you received during the tax year becomes part of your taxable income. And if your combined income as a married couple exceeds \$44,000, then up to 85% of the SS benefits you received during the tax year be-



Russell Gloor

comes part of your taxable income. Those SS benefits will simply be included as part of your taxable income and taxed at whatever your normal IRS tax rate is.

If you file your income tax as a "single" the thresholds at which Social Security benefits become taxable are different. Single filers with a combined income of \$25,000 or less pay no income tax on their benefits. But single filers with combined income between \$25,001 and \$34,000 will have half of their SS benefits received during the tax year become taxable, and single filers whose combined income exceeds \$34,000 will see up to 85% of their Social Security benefits become taxable.

These single filer thresholds apply also

to those filing as Single Head of Household or Qualifying Widow(er), and to those filing as "married-filing separately" if they lived apart for the entire tax year. But the threshold is zero dollars for married couples who file separately but lived together at any time during the tax year.

To clarify what "combined income" is, the IRS uses something called your Modified Adjusted Gross Income, or "MAGI," to determine if your Social Security benefits should be taxed. Your MAGI is your normal Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) from your tax return, plus any non-taxable income you may have had, plus 50% of the Social Security benefits you received during the tax year. If your MAGI is over the thresholds described above, a portion of the SS benefits you received during the tax year will be included in your taxable income. If it is not, you pay no income tax on your benefits.

To be sure you're aware, when you file as "married/jointly" income from both partners counts when determining your MAGI for income tax purposes.

Russell Gloor is a certified Social Security adviser by the Association of Mature American Citizens: <https://amac.us/social-security-advisor>.



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HEALTH

Chronic isolation correlates with serious health issues

By Kelly Andress
SageLife

When you consider all the public health risks that are associated with older adults, there are two important ones that are often overlooked — loneliness and social isolation.

While some may think this is a simple frame of mind or mood issue, chronic isolation is actually correlated with many serious health issues that can negatively affect an older adult's health and well-being.

The elderly are simply more at risk for finding

themselves alone. Spouses and friends may have passed, or family members may live too far away to stay in close contact. Perhaps the person is no longer driving or is physically unable to get out and about.

No matter the reason, the natural progression of life contributes to an older person becoming isolated, and this can put the elderly at risk for a variety of medical conditions.

A study conducted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) concluded that loneliness and social isolation are linked to higher risks for a long list of physical

and mental ailments. Some of these include high blood pressure, heart disease, and a weakened immune system.

Those living alone also suffer more often from stroke, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation, as well as Alzheimer's and other cognitive declines. The CDC report found 50% of older adults in socially isolated living situations had an increased incidence of dementia.

Older adults deserve to spend the last years of their lives to the fullest. Suffering in an isolated situation that causes extreme loneliness isn't good for the body,

mind or soul.

Families and caregivers are often stretched too thin, which means even when their loved one exhibits signs of isolation or loneliness, there is only so much that can be done.

Paying close attention to and monitoring for signs of loneliness or isolation is key to maintaining an older adult's health and happiness. Helping your senior connect with community groups, encouraging them to join a club, or making a concerted effort to avoid chronic isolation is a start.

Often, the best solution is to find senior residential

housing where the older adult becomes part of a vibrant community and is able to explore interests with others going through a similar stage of life.

For more information on the connection between isolation, loneliness and mental health and to learn more about local SageLife communities, visit www.sagelife.com/daylesford-crossing; www.sagelife.com/echo-lake; www.sagelife.com/plush-mills; or call 484-472-8151.

Kelly Andress is the founder and president of SageLife.



Kelly Andress, founder and president of SageLife

PROMOTING SENIOR WELLNESS

Many caregivers struggle from burnout, but support is available

By Jennifer Singley
The Hickman

According to a 2020 report, 53 million Americans are providing unpaid caregiving support to adult family members and loved ones. Of those who are caregivers, many are experiencing caregiver burnout, a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Fortunately, support exist to help caregivers — both those currently experiencing burnout and those seeking to prevent burnout from occurring.

Signs of caregiver burnout

- Isolation and withdrawal from others
- Loss of interest in activities
- Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless
- Changes in mood
- Abnormal eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in health

Feeling the stress of caring for a loved one is common, but an abundance of in-person and virtual sup-

port that addresses the physical, emotional and financial needs of caregivers is available.

National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)

Since its founding in 2000, NFCSP has been helping families care for loved ones in their homes for as long as possible. A range of services and information can be accessed through their website, including caregiver training, information on community services and how to access them, caregiver support groups and individual counseling.

Eldercare Locator

Eldercare Locator is a service provided by the United States Administration on Aging that acts as a hub of information for both older adults and caregivers.

While its premise is to help seniors live as independently as possible, caregivers will find plenty of useful information to aid in navigating their caregiving role in the Caregiver Corner section of the website, in-

cluding links to frequently asked caregiver questions such as "I am a caregiver. How do I work with my employer?" and "How do I know I am making the right decisions?"

Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)

The financial burden of caregiving is profound. Caring for a loved one can significantly affect a caregiver financially, both in expected ways — such as with medical and health-care expenses — and in less expected ways, such as in the form of lost income from taking time off work to support a family member needing care.

WISER recognizes the impact of caregiving on income security and outlines an array of resources on their website for caregivers who are feeling the financial strain of caring, including how to create a budget as a caregiver and how to navigate your own career while providing care at home.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Alzheimer's, and understanding feelings of grief and loss as their loved one's disease progresses.

Caregiving can be an overwhelming sacrifice, and while many of us would willingly commit to caring for a loved one without hesitation, it is an endeavor that requires a strong net of support.

The above resources are but a piece of the roadmap to navigating the caregiving journey. Should you decide to entrust your loved one's care into the hands of professionals, The Hickman offers a warm and inviting community for the older adult in your life to thrive.

From our Independent Plus+ living and short-term respite stay programs, to our personal care communities and memory care neighborhood, we invite you to visit our beautiful campus and see why "when you're here, you're home."

The Hickman is a Quaker-affiliated licensed personal care home in West Chester. Contact Jennifer Singley at jsingley@thehickman.org or www.thehickman.org.

Alzheimer's Association

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's is an experience wrought with unique challenges and a particularly strong need for support. In addition to a 24/7 caregiver helpline (800-272-3900), the Alzheimer's Association presents re-

sources for those navigating the complex task of caregiving for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

At alz.org, caregivers will find information on the nature of the disease, how it changes the individual who has been diagnosed and his or her relationships, how to manage the stress involved in caring for someone with

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What is PA MEDI?

Pennsylvania Medicare Education and Decision Insight, PA MEDI, is a free health insurance counseling program designed to help all Pennsylvanians with Medicare. PA MEDI counselors are specially trained staff and volunteers who can answer your questions and provide

You may qualify for financial assistance programs!

PA MEDI wants to make sure you and your friends who have Medicare know about the Extra Help and Medicare Savings Programs.

Extra Help

Can help lower your prescription drug co-payments and premiums, and cover the cost of the [coverage gap!]

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*There are certain deductions taken for Extra Help. You may qualify even if you are above these limits.

Medicare Savings Program

Can help you with the payment of your Part B premium!

You may qualify if:

- If you are single and have a total monthly income of less than \$1,549/month; and less than \$8,400 in resources
- If you are married and have a total monthly income of less than \$2,080/month; and less than \$12,600 in resources

*Medicare Savings Programs can possibly help with the payment of your Medicare Part A and Part B cost-sharing. There are certain deductions taken for Medicare Savings Programs. You may qualify even if you are above these limits.

How can the PA MEDI Program help you?

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- Medicare
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- Medicare Advantage Plans
- Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap)
- Plan Comparison
- Medicaid
- Screening and applying for financial assistance programs
- Medicare Appeals
- Long-Term Care Insurance

Call today to get connected to the Chester County PA MEDI Program.


610-344-5004

Option 2

www.chesco.org/477/PA-MEDI

PA MEDI in other counties call 1-800-783-7067

This project was supported, in part by grant number 2101PAMIDR-00, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201.



WORKPLACE

White Horse Village recognized by Great Place to Work

For MediaNews Group

White Horse Village in Edgmont Township, Delaware County, has been certified as a Great Place to Work for the fourth year in a row.

A global authority on workplace culture, employee experience and effective leadership, Great Place to Work provides independent company assessments based entirely on employees' feedback about their workplace experience.

Activated Insights aging services certification program helps Great Place to Work recognize outstanding workplace cultures in the aging services industry.

The certification process surveyed 100% of employees who work at White Horse Village, an active, nonprofit senior living community.

"This year, we had the highest number of participants," said President and CEO Len Weiser. "Nearly 200 team members completed the survey."

More than 60 elements of job experience were evaluated, including employee pride in the organization's community impact, belief that their work makes a difference and feeling their work has special meaning. Rankings are based solely on employees' experiences.

"This recognition is an incredible testament to our employees and their dedication to our mission," Weiser said. "The results from the survey affirm that and demonstrate what makes our community a great workplace!"



SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- 90% say White Horse Village is a physically safe place to work.
- 86% feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments.
- 85% feel good about the ways White Horse Village contributes to the community.
- 83% believe their work has special meaning: this is not "just a job."

"We applaud White Horse Village for seeking certification and publicly sharing its employees' feedback," said Dr. Jacquelyn Kung of Great Place to Work's senior care partner Activated Insights. "These ratings measure its capacity to earn its own employees' trust and create a great workplace for high performance."



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COMMUNITY SERVICE

Mifflin Court staff member receives community service award

For MediaNews Group

Mifflin Court in Cumru Township, Berks County, a Senior Living and Secured Memory Support Community affiliated with Genesis HealthCare, announced that Melissa Eberhart, the community's director of marketing and admissions, received the 2022 Circle of Life Coalition Community Service Award.

Each year the Circle of Life Coalition (CoLC) chooses one member of the community who has promoted the Coalition's mission to educate the community and professionals on all aspects of end of life. Eberhart was voted as this year's CoLC honoree.

Eberhart previously served on the Coalition's board president, hospitality committee chair, and community relations committee chair and remains an active part of the Advisory Board, co-coordinating volunteer recruitment activities and fundraisers.

"In addition to her leadership, organizational skills and ideas, Melissa brings true understanding, compassion and insight to end of life care," said Deborah L. Nicholson, CoLC board president.

Eberhart started working in healthcare at eye doctor and dental health practices. She then worked in the critical care unit at a local hospital and a non-medical homecare company in Berks County before taking her current role at Mifflin Court.

"I take pride in being able to help prospective residents and their loved ones feel comfortable with their transition to senior living/personal care in their time of need," Eberhart said. "Al-



Melissa Eberhart

though I do not take an active role in their day-to-day care, I enjoy being able to see them flourish in our community as part of the Mifflin Court family.

"In the marketing capacity, I enjoy building relationships with external healthcare professionals as we assist our mutual patients to regain their independence and receive the top-notch care they deserve."

In addition to being on the Advisory Board for The Circle of Life Coalition, Eberhart also serves on the Healthnet of Berks County committee and the Berks Encore Senior Expo committee.

To learn more about The Circle of Life Coalition,

visit www.circleoflifecoalition.org.

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AGING

It's your choice: You can change your views of aging and improve your life

By Judith Graham
Keiser Health News

People's beliefs about aging have a profound impact on their health, influencing everything from their memory and sensory perceptions to how well they walk, how fully they recover from disabling illness and how long they live.

When aging is seen as a negative experience (characterized by terms such as decrepit, incompetent, dependent and senile), individuals tend to experience more stress in later life and engage less often in healthy behaviors such as exercise.

When views are positive (signaled by words such as wise, alert, accomplished and creative), people are more likely to be active and resilient and to have a stronger will to live.

These internalized beliefs about aging are mostly unconscious, formed from early childhood on as we absorb messages about growing old from TV, movies, books, advertisements and other forms of popular culture. They vary by individual, and they're distinct from prejudice and discrimination against older adults in the social sphere.

More than 400 scientific studies have demonstrated the impact of individuals' beliefs about aging. Now, the question is whether people can alter these largely unrecognized assumptions about growing older and assume more control over them.

In her new book, "Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and Well You Live," Becca Levy of Yale University, a leading expert on this topic, argues we can.

"With the right mindset and tools, we can change



DREAMSTIME

A study found that people with positive age beliefs lived longer — a median of 7.5 additional years — compared with those with negative beliefs.

our age beliefs," she asserts in the book's introduction.

Levy, a professor of psychology and epidemiology, has demonstrated in multiple studies that exposing people to positive descriptions of aging can improve their memory, gait, balance and will to live. All of us have an "extraordinary opportunity to rethink what it means to grow old," she writes. Recently, I asked Levy to describe what people can do to modify beliefs about aging. Our conversa-

tion, below, has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How important are age beliefs, compared with other factors that affect aging?

A: In an early study, we found that people with positive age beliefs lived longer — a median of 7.5 additional years — compared with those with negative beliefs. Compared with other factors that contribute to longevity, age be-

liefs had a greater impact than high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.

Q: You suggest that age beliefs can be changed. How?

A: That's one of the hopeful messages of my research. Even in a culture like ours, where age beliefs tend to be predominantly negative, there is a whole range of responses to aging. What we've

shown is it's possible to activate and strengthen positive age beliefs that people have assimilated in different types of ways.

Q: What strategies do you suggest?

A: The first thing we can do is promote awareness of what our own age beliefs are.

A simple way is to ask yourself, "When you think of an older person, what are the first five words or

phrases that come to mind?" Noticing which beliefs are generated quickly can be an important first step in awareness.

Q: What else can people do to increase awareness?

A: Another powerful technique is something I call "age belief journaling." That involves writing down any portrayal of aging that comes up over

YOUR CHOICE » PAGE 8



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Your choice

FROM PAGE 7

a week. It could be a conversation you overhear in a coffee shop or something on social media or on your favorite show on Netflix. If there is an absence of older people, write that down, too.

At the end of the week, tally up the number of positive and negative portrayals and the number of times that old people are absent from conversations.

With the negative descriptions, take a moment and think, "Could there be a different way of portraying that person?"

Q: What comes next?

A: Becoming aware of how ageism and age beliefs are operating in society. Shift the blame to where it is due.

In the book, I suggest thinking about something that's happened to an older person that's blamed on aging — and then taking a step back and asking whether something else could be going on.

For example, when an older adult is forgetful, it's often blamed on aging. But there are many reasons people might not remember something. They might have been stressed when they heard the information. Or they might have been distracted. Not remembering something can happen at any age.

Unfortunately, there's a tendency to blame older people rather than looking at other potential causes for their behaviors or circumstances.

Q: You encourage people to challenge negative age beliefs in public.

A: Yes. In the book, I present 14 negative age beliefs and the science that dispels them. And I recommend becoming knowledgeable about that research.

For example, a common



COURTESY OF YALE UNIVERSITY

Becca Levy, a professor at Yale University, studies the way our beliefs about aging affect physical and mental health.

belief is that older people don't contribute to society. But we know from research that older adults are most likely to recycle and make philanthropic gifts. Altruistic motivations become stronger with age. Older adults often work or volunteer in positions that make meaningful contributions. And they tend to engage in what's called legacy thinking, wanting to create a better world for future generations.

In my own case, if I hear something concerning, I often need to take time to think about a good response. And that's fine.

You can go back to somebody and say: "I was thinking about what you said the other day. And I don't know if you know this, but research shows that's not actually the case."

Q: Another thing you talk about is creating a portfolio of positive role models. What do you mean by that?

A: Focus on positive images of aging. These can be people you know, a character in a book, someone you've learned about in a documentary, a historical figure — they can come from many different

sources.

I recommend starting out with, say, five positive images. With each one, think about qualities you admire and you might want to strengthen in yourself. One person might have a great sense of humor. Another might have a great perspective on how to solve conflicts and bring people together. Another might have a great work ethic or a great approach to social justice. There can be different strengths in different people that can inspire us.

Q: You also recommend cultivating intergenerational contacts.

A: We know from research that meaningful intergenerational contact can be a way to improve age beliefs. A starting point is to think about your five closest friends and what age they are. In my case, I realized that most of my friends were within a couple of years of my age. If that's the case with you, think about ways to get to know people of other ages through a dance class, a book club, or a political group. Seeing older people in action often allows us to dispel negative age beliefs.

EDUCATION



COURTESY OF KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY TO HOST LIFELONG LEARNING FOR SENIOR COMMUNITY

For MediaNews Group

Kutztown University has announced a new initiative geared toward the local senior community.

Senior Scholars will offer low-cost, noncredit lifelong learning experiences for those ages 50 and older.

The first event, Printing an Etching, will be held on June 24 from 3 to 4:30 p.m. at Studio 108, located at 108 S. Whiteoak St.

Hosted by Evan Sumner, professor emeritus, the processes involved in creating an etching on a copper plate will be ex-

plained, and then the plate will be printed using intaglio inking and a Takach press.

The cost to attend is \$5 per person. Email Lori Lentz, director of Extended Learning, at lentz@kutztown.edu if you would like to attend.



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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



EVAN BRANDT — MEDIANEWS GROUP

From left, Brian Parkes, executive director of the Tri-County Active Adult Center, Martha Pish, State Rep. Tim Hennessey, Chester Pish, Pottstown Mayor Stephanie Henrick and state Rep. Joe Ciresi.



EVAN BRANDT — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Martha and Chester Pish cut a cake from Beverly's Pastry Shop during a celebration of their 80th wedding anniversary, making them the oldest married couple in Pennsylvania.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

Couple celebrates 80 years of marriage, the longest-married couple in Pennsylvania

By Evan Brandt
ebrandt@pottsmmerc.com

POTTSTOWN » When Martha Pish was born, she was the youngest of 13 children and weighed only two pounds.

Martha's older sister was a nurse who helped to deliver her and did not expect Martha to live through the night, according to the family lore. "But they wrapped her in a blanket and put her in a shoe box on top of the stove," according to Martha's daughter, Anita Scherer.

In 2022, it seems that

prediction of a short life was a bit premature. Not only is Pish 99, but so is her husband Chester. Both will reach the century mark next February, just nine days apart.

As if that were not accomplishment enough in its own right, the two were celebrated recently just a few days after their 80th wedding anniversary. According to state Rep. Joe Ciresi, D-146th Dist., that makes them "the oldest married couple in Pennsylvania, maybe in the country."

Gathered in their driveway Friday morning, af-

ter a rainy weather forecast put the kibosh on a planned car parade, the couple was all smiles and jokes, welcoming family, friends, public officials (and press). "This is fabulous," exclaimed Chester.

"I never give her anything," he joked with a wry smile when asked about his 80th anniversary gift to his wife. "I don't want to set any precedents. That way, she's never disappointed."

She patted his hand, smiled confidently and riposted "he lies a lot."

The Pishes were married on May 23, 1942, at St.

Philomena's Roman Catholic Church in East Lansdowne, Delaware County. They were married shortly after he was deployed in the Navy during World War II.

Together they have three children — Albert Frank, Christina Elizabeth and Anita Alyce — seven grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, "and two more in the oven," Martha added with obvious delight.

While the rain held off, the official proclamations

congratulating the couple seemed to be falling out of the sky. Firstly, Ciresi and state Rep. Tim Hennessey, R-26th Dist., congratulated the couple from the floor of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives on May 25.

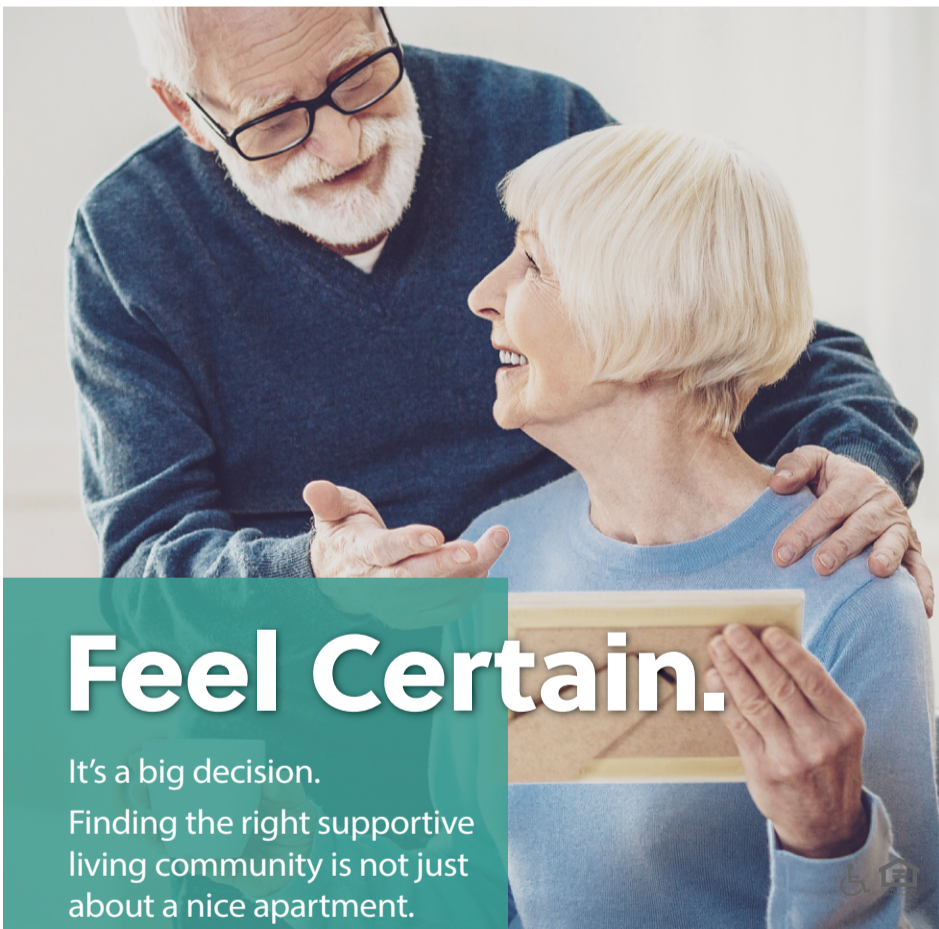
"If you could see them when I visited them on Thursday, he was out mowing the lawn and she was inside cleaning," Ciresi said. "These two people are an incredible asset to the Pottstown community. Their son is 79, to put

it in perspective." Ciresi said he also had a proclamation from Gov. Wolf, "but I had to send it back because they only had you married for 70 years."

Hennessey provided the couple with a proclamation from U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey and they received another from the office of U.S. Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-4th Dist.

"You know, in our society today, people don't stay

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD »
PAGE 10



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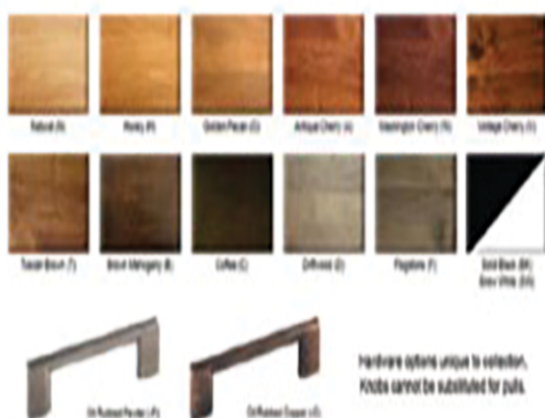
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EVAN BRANDT — MEDIANEWS GROUP

State Rep. Tim Hennessey, R-23rd District, presents a proclamation from U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey congratulating the couple on 80 years of marriage.

To have and to hold

FROM PAGE 3

married for 80 years," Hennessey said. "They don't stay married for 10 years or eight years. It's a tribute to your commitment you've made to each other. Strong families make for a strong Pennsylvania."

Also on hand with a proclamation was Pottstown Mayor Stephanie Henrick. The proclamation noted that Chester Pish worked in a colliery before moving to Pottstown for a job at the former Firestone Tire and Rubber plant. Of Polish descent herself, she even sang the couple a song in Polish as they cut their cake from Beverly's Pastry Shop on High Street.

"Everyone at the center sends their congratulations and we miss seeing you," Brian Parkes, executive director of the Tri-County Active Adult Center, told the couple.

Pottstown Borough Council President Dan Weand and his wife Polly, who were out of town, sent a vase of roses.

The couple attends St. Aloysius Catholic Church and ran the parish's BINGO game for 23 years. While Martha volunteered at Pottstown Hospital and



EVAN BRANDT — MEDIANEWS GROUP

This plant and specially-made pot, were among the gifts presented to the Pishes.

the YMCA, Chester held several positions with the IMC organization. He still enjoys gardening and she continues to cook and bake.

"She's still an excellent cook," said Scherer, rattling off the unfamiliar names of her mother's Polish specialties.

"We grew up on Maple Street," Scherer recalled. "They were good parents,

very supportive, and when I had my kids, even better grandparents and so, so helpful."

The family, Scherer said, "has always had fun. We like to play cards until 11 or 12 at night, mostly 'hand and foot,' Mom really likes that one. And just last summer, we were dancing on my back deck" — mostly Polish polkas of course.

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