

A man wearing a light-colored hat and a blue long-sleeved shirt stands on a grassy bank, looking out over a calm lake. The trees on the opposite shore and the sky are reflected in the water. The scene is set in autumn, with some trees showing yellow and orange leaves. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

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Libraries offer classes and community for seniors

By MARIN HOWELL

ADDISON COUNTY — Libraries around Addison County have a lot more than books to offer. For local seniors, those offerings include opportunities to socialize, be active and learn new skills. From TED Talks to Tai Chi classes, local libraries host a variety of programs each week that older residents in the county enjoy ... for free.

One of the newest programs is in Middlebury at the Ilsley Public Library,

“Seniors need to move to stay healthy as well as have a place to socialize with other seniors.”

— Beverly Blakeney

which has started a weekly program that invites local seniors to gather for conversation, community and a variety of activities. The new offering is called “Still & Hip Happening” and meets in

the Jessica Swift Community Room on Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon.

Renee Ursitti, the adult services librarian at the Ilsley, runs the Still Hip & Happening program. She said the offering is intended to put a fun spin on a senior social hour.

“The program was born out of a request from a few active seniors in the community who were trying to find things or people — just activities that were a little bit more

(See Libraries, Page 6)



BEVERLY BLAKENEY OF Waltham, right, uses the stepwise method to teach seniors tai chi at Bixby Library in Vergennes last week. Some of the class participants are, from left, Mary Gordon, Bob McGrath and Grace McGrath. Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that combines slow, gentle movements and physical postures with meditation and deep breathing.

Independent photo/Steve James

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Addison County has a large and vibrant aging populaton

By KRISTIN BOLTON, executive director of Elderly Services Inc.

I remember as a child, when I would imagine my future, all I wanted was an apartment of my own, a VW Bug, and a German shepherd, its head hanging out the window as we cruised down the highway. Sure enough, by my mid-20s, I had all three, although the Bug was on its last legs, the dog was a mutt that looked a lot like a German shepherd, and the apartment little more than a glorified room with kitchen and bathroom over a garage.

Our dreams for our lives can be powerful this way, fed, of course, by a car-based culture that prizes independence and youth. I never imagined for myself what it would be like to grow older beyond that, and now that I am solidly seeing the end of the runway of middle age, I find myself at a loss when I try to envision that hoped-for future. Growing old is not something we want to imagine, nor has it ever been something we hoped for. Yet it comes for



AGING IN ADDISON COUNTY
By KRISTIN BOLTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ELDERLY SERVICES INC.

us anyway: white hair, wrinkles, creaking joints. The names “Geezer, Granny, Old-Timer” are evidence of our distaste for the last chapters of our life.

But as we denigrate the very natural process of aging, we deny the possibilities of one of the most dynamic and meaningful times of our lives, and create the dismal process we fear. Ageism is one of the last accepted forms of prejudice, and is something we will all experience. As with other -isms, ageism extracts its pound of flesh from our bodies and minds. Ageism costs the health care system billions of dollars each year, according to thorough research done by Yale professor Becca Levy. It also costs us our relationships, our sense of self, and our vitality.

Addison County is no different than the rest of Vermont; the demographics show more and more people over 65. This Silver Tsunami, far from detracting from our community, is a powerful part of our workforce, our



WHAT EVERY 96-YEAR-OLD wants to still be doing in the fall ... picking apples. Victor Quesnel of Whiting last month visited a local orchard to continue an autumn ritual he has probably done for decades.

Photo courtesy of Madeleine Quesnel

volunteerism, and our collective wisdom. With awareness comes opportunity. Individually and together, we can rewrite the narrative of life over 65. There is much to celebrate as we grow old, and things we can work on together to improve the lives of everyone here.

Oct. 7 was Ageism Awareness Day. Let's take this moment to look ahead to

the last chapters of our lives, not with fear but curiosity and hope. Let's imagine a community that supports interdependence as well as independence and celebrates the lives and contributions of people of all ages. And let's imagine our own lives intertwined in that future that supports all the facets of growing old. I'm already dreaming about it.

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EARLIER THIS FALL, Ed Walker is literally dwarfed by this colossal sunflower that was put in the ground at the Brandon Senior Center in Forestdale in May. The plant was nourished all summer by plentiful amounts of rain.

Photo by Marianne Buswell

VERMONT Sun

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Libraries

(Continued from Page 3)

stimulating,” Ursitti explained. Those who stop by for the Tuesday morning gatherings will find coffee, tea and treats as well as an assortment of puzzles, games and art supplies. Ursitti said she’s also hoping to offer different activities each week.

“Those could be TED Talks (presentations by experts on myriad topics), chair yoga, maybe a walk-and-talk book group or a book versus film discussion,” she said. “I’m hopefully going to arrange an animal visit from Homeward Bound, which could become a regular offering. I’ve got a whole host

of ideas to throw out and see what the congregant wants.”

Eventually, Ursitti hopes that future Still Hip & Happening gatherings will evolve into what the group’s participants are most interested in.

“I’m hoping once I get a following and start getting feedback from folks that attend, they will sort of take ownership and let me know what sorts of things they’d like to see,” she said.

Ultimately, Still Hip & Happening is intended to offer local seniors a space to gather with one another and enjoy free activities.

“It’s an alternative to some of the opportunities in town that cost money.

Folks that maybe don’t have the budget for that, there’s that hope of reaching those people,” Ursitti said. “(Also) building community, gathering folks, letting people know that that library is a place where you can meet people and find fun activities.”

TAI CHI CLASSES

In addition to community building opportunities, local libraries also host programs that help seniors stay active.

Those offerings include tai chi classes sponsored by Age Well, which libraries like the Bixby Memorial Free Library in Vergennes host each week. Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that combines slow, gentle movements and physical postures with meditation and deep breathing.

Beverly Blakeney has been teaching tai chi courses for seven years. She’s one of three Age Well volunteer instructors that lead classes at the Bixby each week.

The library hosts three styles of tai chi courses: tai chi for fall prevention, Sun 73 and Yang 24. Each style looks a bit different, with yang tai chi incorporating big, exaggerated movements and sun style using circular hand movements and unique footwork.

Blakeney co-leads an experienced class on tai chi for fall prevention, as well as Sun 73 and Yang 24 courses. She said the classes boast many health benefits for participants.

“We often focus on fall prevention (tai chi helps with balance), but it also helps with arthritis, low back pain and bone



BOB MCGRATH OF Middlebury is one of several seniors learning tai chi at Bixby Library in Vergennes last week. The practice not only helps participants preserve balance and can help with arthritis and low back pain, it also provides a place for seniors to socialize.

Independent photo/Steve James

density,” she explained. “Seniors need to move to stay healthy as well as have a (See Offerings, Page 7)



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**INSTRUCTOR
BEVERLY BLANKENEY**

Offerings

(Continued from Page 6)

place to socialize with other seniors.”

Blakeney said classes are taught using a stepwise method, where instructors break down each move into small parts and describe and practice each step before putting it all together.

“For example, we may have a move (Single Whip, for instance) and just start with how to move the feet. Once that is understood by the students we add in the hands,” she said. “It is great when we have two instructors, as one can be talking and moving while the other observes and reports back what parts need work. We encourage students to stay in their comfort zone and we modify moves to accommodate physical limitations.”

Blakeney added that Age Well instructors are trained by Tai Chi Vermont and that safety is a primary concern in classes.

“If a participant is unsteady on their feet, we may have them do seated tai chi until they are strong enough to stand, or we may take multiple breaks,” she said. “We want the participants to feel successful, it keeps them coming to class, moving and socializing. The stepwise teaching method is perfect for that as each small piece can be mastered at a time instead of expecting

the participant to master the whole all at once.”

Blakeney said classes tend to include anywhere from six to 25 participants, with attendees ranging in age from 60 to 88.

She noted that the classes appear to be popular amongst attendees.

“The beginning class always has a lot of participants,” she said. “My Yang 24 class is at capacity, so I think the participants really enjoy the classes. I think once participants learn the mechanics of the form, they really start to enjoy the movement and the synergy of the class.”

Blakeney enjoys taking part in the classes as well.

“I really enjoy meeting the seniors in my community (I’m a senior) and being a part of something that brings so much joy to people,” she said.

Age Well’s tai chi classes are free and geared toward individuals age 60 years. In addition to the Bixby, classes are offered at the Ilsley Public Library and other community spaces in the county, including the Congregational Church of Middlebury, Holley Hall in Bristol and on Zoom.

Those interested in joining a class can find more information on Age Well’s website at www.agewellvt.org.

“It’s an alternative to some of the opportunities in town that cost money. Folks that maybe don’t have the budget for that.”

— Renee Ursitti

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Ageism affects everybody

Gov. Scott reframes aging to support aging well

WATERBURY — Gov. Phil Scott proclaimed Saturday, Oct. 7, as Ageism Awareness Day in Vermont.

Most people, without even thinking about it, use language that describes aging as a negative experience. Ageism is a serious challenge in our culture and communities, and it is manifested in unconscious thoughts, actions and behavior, and institutional policies and systems.

Ageism refers to stereotypes (how one thinks), prejudice (how one feels) and discrimination (how one acts) toward others based on age, and it is the most widespread and socially accepted form of prejudice. An estimated 183,157 older adults — those over the age of 60 — live in Vermont, which makes this group our fastest growing demographic in the state and for whom this prejudice of ageism is lived daily.

Ageism negatively affects Vermonters' health and well-being. It prevents people from seeking support they may need or gaining employment they are more than qualified for. It contributes to errors in the healthcare system. It leads to higher rates of chronic illness and morbidity.

According to the research, older adults who have a negative view of aging have a life expectancy of 7.5 years less than older adults who have a positive view of aging. AARP estimated \$850 billion in lost gains to the Gross Domestic Product because of involuntary retirement, underemployment and unemployment among older workers.

Ageism in Vermont

- 60% of older adults report experiencing age discrimination in the workplace.
- 45% of all Vermont employers do not offer retirement benefits.
- 70% of older adults will need long-term care as they age, yet almost half (46%) of older Vermonters do not know how they will pay for long-term care.
- 38% of Vermonters with Alzheimer's Disease or Related Dementia have five or more chronic diseases.

Source: Vermont Department of Health

Levy and colleagues (2020) estimated that in just one year, \$63 billion in healthcare costs were due to ageism. Ageism intersects with other forms of discrimination such as racism, quietly exacerbating inequities and worsening the impacts faced by older people of color and other minorities.

The good news is that Vermonters have the power to reframe aging and prevent ageism in education, employment, housing and healthcare. We have the tools to build a Vermont that is equitable and just

(See *Ageism*, Page 9)

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FOUR TYPES OF AGEISM



In 1968, Dr. Robert Neil Butler, a gerontologist and psychiatrist, coined the term "ageism" to describe systematic discrimination against older people.



Personal or Interpersonal

Bias against a person or group based solely on age.

"You wouldn't understand because you're young," or "OK, Boomer."

Rules and practices that discriminate against people or groups because of age.
"Traditionally, we encourage people to retire when they reach 65 years."

Institutional



Intentional or Internalized

Practices carried out with knowledge of bias.

Examples include neglectful care or scams directed at older people; self depreciation, such as saying, "I'm having a senior moment."

Perpetrators are unaware of age bias, and may intend to help or compliment.

Unintentional

"You look good for your age!"



Community of Vermont Elders
vermontelders.org

Vt. Arts Council receives major funding award to support creative aging

The Vermont Arts Council recently secured \$95,000 in new funding from a national program to bolster creative aging programs for older adults — one of only nine state arts agencies to receive the award.

The award is part of \$855,000 in nationwide creative aging grant funding from the State's Leading Creative Aging program, which is a joint effort of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy. With this funding, each state will build on existing creative aging programs to gain significant ground in meeting the needs of older adults in underserved communities throughout their state. The program builds upon the transformative success of NASAA's Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging initiative, which catalyzed arts learning opportunities for older adults in Vermont and nationwide.

In Vermont, the funding will increase arts programming and access for older adults across the state through its Creative Aging Grants program, which opened for applications on Sept. 1. The Creative Aging Grants support skill-based instruction alongside opportunities for social engagement and community

building in and through the arts for older adults. Applicants must be non-profits with 501(c)(3) status, such as arts organizations, area agencies on aging, or social service organizations. Organizations may apply for up to \$6,000 to support activities designed for older adults aged 60+ led by experienced teaching artists.

Funding will also help increase the diversity of voices contributing to the state's creative aging effort through teaching artist recruitment and culturally responsive training. To meet this goal, the council has partnered with Clemmons Family Farm (CFF) to recruit and provide training to selected members of the Vermont African-American/African Diaspora Artists' Network.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Vermont Arts Council to provide this wonderful professional development opportunity for Vermont teaching artists to build skills and to support the needs and creative interests of older Vermonters. Clemmons Family Farm's role is to validate and expand the expertise of Vermont's Black teaching artists to bring the creativity and power of African diaspora cultural traditions, including

(See Vt. Arts Council, Page 10)



In synch

INSTRUCTOR BEVERLY BLANKENEY is flanked by Grace and Bob McGrath of Middlebury as they build strength and balance during a tai chi class at Bixby Library in Vergennes this past week.

Independent photo/Steve James

Ageism

(Continued from Page 8)

for older adults of all backgrounds. With words, actions, policies and initiatives that promote positive aging and actively combat ageism, Vermont can make a real difference in people's lives — leading to longer, happier, and healthier lives for all. Learn more about Vermont's work to combat ageism through

Learn more about how the state sees

aging and a program called "Age Strong, our roadmap for an age-friendly State" online at tinyurl.com/AgeStrongVt.

The Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living, also called DAIL, has a mission to make Vermont the best state in which to grow old or to live with a disability — with dignity, respect, and independence. See what they do online at dail.vermont.gov.



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Resources for staying active

The Vermont Arts Council offers resources for people who want to know more about staying active in the arts as you grow older.

This story is posted online at addisonindependent.com with hyperlinks to resources on the web:

- Ashton Applewhite's manifesto against ageism, *This Chair Rocks*, takes aim at how we view age. Her *Let's End Agism* Ted Talk reminds us that agism is "a natural, powerful, lifelong process that unites us all."
- The Creativity Matters Toolkit from the National Guild for Community Arts Education offers support to

those organizing community arts and aging programs. It gives others the tools to take the first step—and keep going.

- The Creative Aging Resource from Lifetime Arts is a hub of hundreds of resources on topics related to the field of creative aging.
- The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies provides resources for states and community members to build their capacity to facilitate creative aging programming.
- The Community of Voices choir program documented a community choir's impact on health and well-

being and provides a manual for organizing an older adult choir program.

- The Creativity and Aging Study from the National Endowment for the Arts led by Gene Cohen documents the impacts of professionally conducted community-based cultural programs on the general health, mental health, and social activities of older persons.
- A recent report from the American Alliance of Museums shows how cultural institutions can promote lifelong learning, joy and social connection for older adults.

Part-time jobs are available for retirees

Many adults nearing retirement age count down the days until they can bid adieu to the daily tasks of commuting and working so they can enjoy much more time for recreation, travel or whatever is they aspire to do.

As enticing as unending free time may seem, some retirees find it is not ideal to be entirely free from the responsibility of working.

As current seniors can attest, inflation can drive up the costs of living, meaning that seniors who were once able to afford a certain retirement lifestyle may no longer enjoy that hard-earned luxury. Others may miss the daily opportunities to socialize that working provides, or the way problem-solving on the job stimulates the brain. But even retirees who miss working may not be ready to return to the workforce full-time. That can make

(See Part-time jobs, Page 11)

As enticing as unending free time may seem, some retirees find it is not ideal to be entirely free from the responsibility of working.

Vt. Arts Council

(Continued from Page 9)

storytelling, into the practice of creative aging," said CFF President and Executive Director Lydia Clemmons.

The new funding will also support the Council's Creative Aging Idea Exchange, which will include four bimonthly virtual gatherings for teaching artists across the state to share best practices and provide mentoring; will enhance the Council's Creative Aging Teaching Artist Roster; and support video documentation of its creative aging initiatives.

More than 9% of Vermonters are at least 65-years of age, and Vermont is on track to be the oldest state in the nation

(65+) by 2032. Vermont also has one of the highest life expectancy rates, at nearly 80 years of age.

The Council's creative aging initiative began in 2021 with an inaugural grant program, which provided up to \$4,000 to support Vermont organizations in their arts programming for older adults. A total of 29 applications were received, and seven grants were awarded, supporting written storytelling, ceramics, photography, Tin-Pan Alley discovery and singing, place-based storytelling through historical archives, traditional Abenaki artmaking techniques, and dance and movement.

"The council's approach to creative

aging is built on research that demonstrates the power of the arts to promote optimum health and wellness and facilitate social connection and engagement," said Vermont Arts Council's Executive Director Susan Evans McClure. "This new funding allows us to deepen and broaden our creative aging work completed over the last two years, increasing the number of communities served and expanding access to teaching artists new to this work."

For more information about the Council's Creative Aging initiative, visit www.vermontartscouncil.org/programs/creative-aging.



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Part-time jobs

(Continued from Page 10)

part-time employment an ideal fit for mature workers.

Here's a look at some part-time positions that could be a good fit for older adults reentering the workforce.

Retail sales associate

Working in retail opens seniors up to a wide array of responsibilities and scenarios. Jobs may include greeting customers, making sales, putting out inventory, and helping customers select merchandise. Being personable and having good customer service skills are necessary traits to have when working in retail. Many stores offer part-time employees flexible hours so schedules can be customized.

Consultant

Retirees who loved their job but wanted to spend less time doing it can return as consultants. According to "The Balance: Money," individuals often find they earn more per hour working as consultants than they did as full-time staff members. Consulting is a way to share expertise and experience without making a full-time commitment.

Customer service representative

A customer service representative is tasked with helping customers solve problems and ensuring customer satisfaction. He or she may work in a traditional office or store location, or answer calls and resolve issues from home.

School positions



Group activity

BOB AND GRACE McGrath have fun while improving their balance at a tai chi class in Vergennes at the Bixby Memorial Library last week. In addition to the physical and emotional benefits of exercise programs like this, seniors also get a social boost from being with their peers for classes.

Independent photo/
Steve James

Retirees may want to consider jobs working in schools or in related capacities. Driving a school bus is an option if people are willing to undergo the proper training and licensing to operate this type of vehicle. Seniors also may consider working as lunchroom aides or lunch service providers, crossing guards, substitute teachers, and

paraprofessionals. School employees will only work a few hours during the day. They'll also enjoy many holidays off as well as summer vacations.

Receptionist

Receptionists greet patients or customers in office settings. According to AARP, they are the welcoming faces of organizations. Answering phones

and light clerical work also may be required of receptionists. Those who want to work off-peak hours can think about working nights and weekends in hospitals or skilled nursing facilities.

Seniors have many different options if they decide they want to return to the workforce in a part-time capacity.

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With the UVM Health Network Mail Order Pharmacy, you'll never miss a dose with prescription refills delivered to your home at no extra charge.



THE
University of Vermont
HEALTH NETWORK

Call (802) 424-9183 to sign up.

Copays apply based on prescription type and dosage duration.



It's now more convenient than ever for you and your provider to manage your prescriptions - and your health.

The UVM Health Network's pharmacy team is here to support you with personal service, prescription tracking, and renewal reminders.

MEDICATION REVIEWS

We review your medications list at every renewal to ensure they are appropriate and interact safely with each other.

NEVER MISS A DOSE

We'll keep track of your scheduled medications.

LOCAL MAILING

Prescriptions are filled and shipped by our pharmacists in Burlington, VT.

TRANSFER PRESCRIPTIONS

We'll work with your provider and previous pharmacy to get your prescriptions transferred.

SYNCHRONIZE MULTIPLE PRESCRIPTIONS

We make it easier to manage your medications by mailing them on the same schedule.

SIGN UP IS EASY

All you need is a list of allergies, prescription insurance information and a credit card.

Learn more at UVMHealth.org/MailOrderRx

or call (802) 424-9183

8:30 am - 5 pm | Monday - Friday

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