



Senior Lifestyles

CELEBRATED FOLK ARTIST Warren Kimball, 90, works with his wife, Lorraine, in a painting class at the East View retirement community in Middlebury this past week.
Independent photo/Steve James

Program helps seniors age at home in Addison County

By IAN CURRY

WEYBRIDGE — With 18 bird feeders hanging outside his window, Joe Roberts, 87, has a front row seat to what he calls nature's television.

Having driven nearly two and a half million miles across the country, the former long-distance trucker and business owner has retired to a quiet home overlooking one of the more pleasant parts of Addison County.

Living on a large, rural property doesn't get any easier as you get older, Roberts said. Realizing he needed companionship and help with keeping the house in good shape, Roberts applied to HomeShare Vermont to find a housemate.

The nonprofit matched Roberts, who needed someone to just be around the house, with Wayne Roy, who was looking for a new place to live that fit his lifestyle.

Roy, 71, came to Vermont over 15 years ago and has no plans to ever leave, saying he loves the peace and quiet of the forest surrounding Roberts's property.

Roberts and Roy have been living together for seven years and say that

things couldn't be better.

Founded in 1982, HomeShare Vermont is a non-profit organization that enables Vermonters to offer a private bedroom and shared common space in exchange for rent or help around the house ranging from chores to transportation and meal support.

"If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that social connection is not a luxury as much as a necessity for health, happiness and vitality."

— Ric Cengeri,
HomeShare Vermont

Ric Cengeri, a spokesperson for HomeShare Vermont, said that the organization has an extensive matching process that aims to make compatible matches based on interests, lifestyles and needs of different individuals. Cengeri said that many elderly hosts would prefer to live with older guests whom they have an easier time relating to while others love to connect with younger individuals just starting out in their careers.

HomeShare Vermont also conducts extensive background checks on all applicants to ensure the safety and compatibility of potential housemate matches.

Roberts and Roy said that being honest and understanding are essential to being a good housemate. Both said that neither of them had any anxiety going into the matching process, noting that HomeShare



JOE ROBERTS, LEFT, and Wayne Roy spend much of their time together sitting on their verandah overlooking Addison County. They participate in the HomeShare Vermont program, which matched Roy, who was looking for better housing, with Roberts, who was looking for a tenant who could help the aging homeowner stay in his home.

Independent photo/Ian Curry

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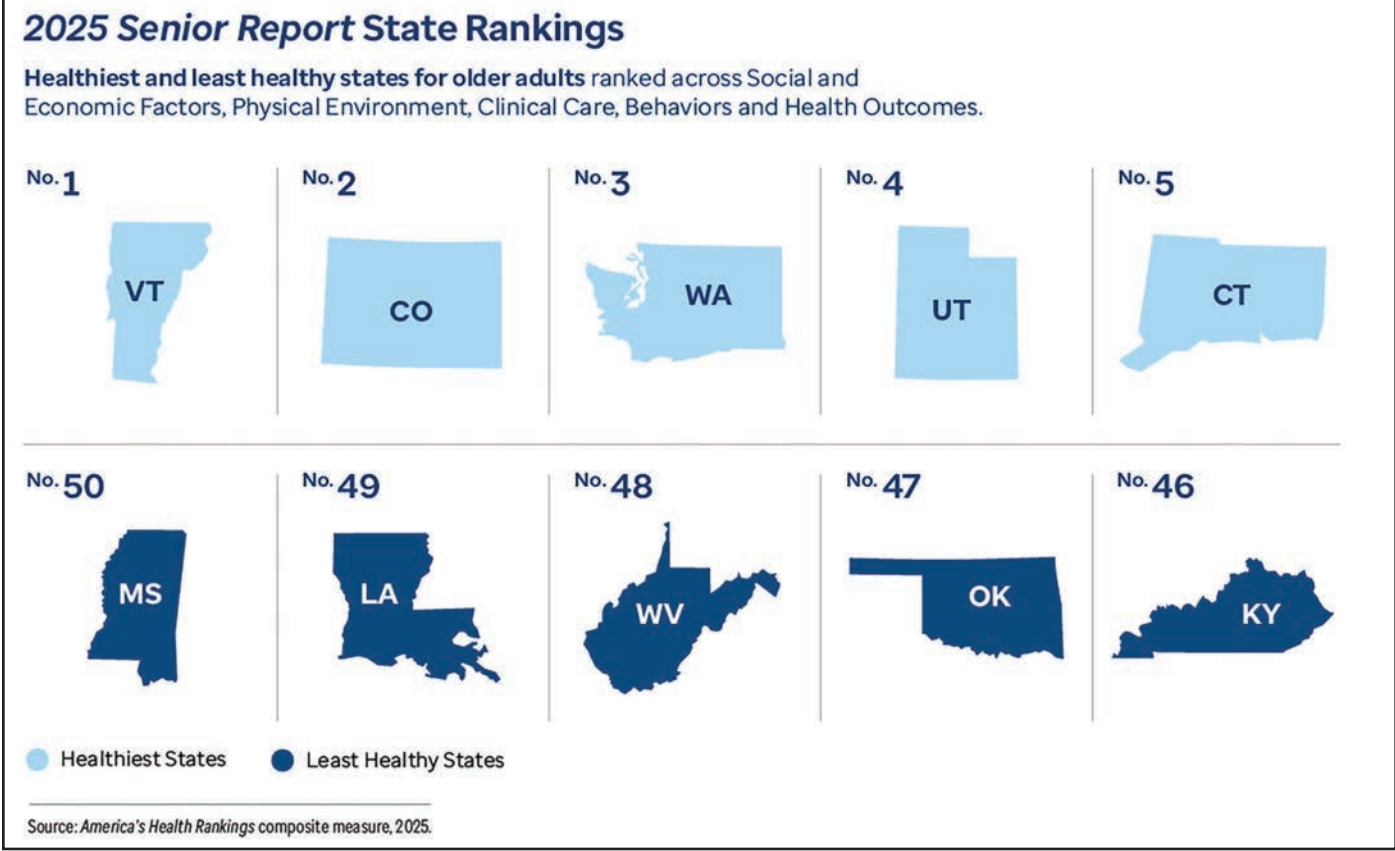


Recent report:

Vt ranked #1 in the nation for healthy older adults

VERMONT — Each year the United Health Foundation releases its America’s Health Rankings Senior Report as a portrait of the health and wellbeing of older adults nationwide. In the newly released 2025 Senior Report, Vermont ranks first in the nation, up from third in 2024.

What makes Vermont the healthiest state for older adults? Vermont receives high marks for social and economic factors impacting health as well as for healthy behaviors. For example, Vermont has a high rate of volunteerism among older adults and a high prevalence of older adults who exercise regularly. These are helped by Vermont’s focus on supporting local communities and encouraging outdoor recreation. The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) works closely with partners, including the Area Agencies on Aging, health care providers, individuals who receive services, families and communities to support healthy living for older Vermonters.



These successes align with the state’s new multisector plan on aging called Age Strong VT. Age Strong VT is a 10-year vision for making Vermont a great place for all ages and stages of life. Co-led by DAIL and the Department of Health, Age Strong VT includes goals, objectives and strategies that directly contribute to Vermont’s high

ranking in the Senior Report, including a focus on affordability, housing, healthy aging, and social connection.

“The work here in Vermont on our multi-sector plan, Age Strong VT, has now entered into year two of implementation of the 10-year plan.” notes DAIL Commissioner Jill Bowen. “This plan

is significant in its coordination and collaboration across many sectors that influence the experiences, the health and the wellness of older Vermonters.

“We hear a lot about our aging demographic here in Vermont, and for older Americans across the nation. The (See Ranking, Page 4)



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Ranking

(Continued from Page 3)

values and supportive communities of Vermont, our emphasis on nature and the great outdoors, the generosity of seniors who share their time helping others as volunteers, are just a few of the reasons why our state has ranked number one in the nation in this year’s Health Rankings Senior Report.”

The report notes that Vermont, and the country as a whole, still has work to do to address challenges, including the high cost of housing, risk of suicide and a high rate of falls.

“It’s because of the hard work, dedication, vision and creativity of so many state and community partners that we have the Age Strong VT plan and have achieved such a high ranking in the Senior Report,” said Angela Smith-Dieng, deputy commissioner of DAIL. “This could not have been accomplished by any one state agency or organization. Through strong partnerships and collaborations across the state, we are seeing these positive outcomes now and hopefully more to come as we continue this collective work.”

The report notes that Vermont, and the country as a whole, still has work to do to

A quick look at the numbers

In this year’s report Vermont was ranked No. 1 in overall health, and key findings include:

- Poverty increased 57% from 6.1% to 9.6% of adults age 65 and older between 2019 and 2023.
- High-speed internet access increased 26% from 68.4% to 86.4% of households with adults age 65 and older between 2015 and 2023.
- Preventable hospitalizations decreased 5% from 1,271 to 1,210 discharges per 100,000 Medicare beneficiaries ages 65-74 between 2021 and 2023.

address challenges, including the high cost of housing, risk of suicide and a high rate of falls. These areas are part of Age Strong VT’s goals.

Learn more: America’s Health Rankings 2025 Senior Report provides a portrait of the health and wellbeing of older adults nationwide. It examines 55 measures of health from 24 distinct data sources to present a comprehensive overview of the health and well-being of the nation’s older adults.

HomeShare

(Continued from Page 2)

Vermont did a great job catering to their needs and values as seniors.

While HomeShare Vermont is open to Vermonters of all ages, backgrounds and incomes, Cengeri said the organization’s primary focus is on helping Vermont seniors age in place safely and sustainably. A report released by HomeShare found that the average age of those sharing their homes is 72, with 86% of those individuals saying they felt safer in their home while having someone living with them.

“The health outcomes for seniors are clearly more positive for those who can stay safely at home and stay socially connected. If the pandemic taught us anything, it’s that social connection is not a luxury as much as a necessity for health, happiness and vitality,” Cengeri said.

HomeShare Vermont is also keenly aware of the state’s struggle with affordability. Not only are high housing costs making it harder for the state to attract younger workers to bolster the workforce, but more and more elderly Vermonters are having a harder time making ends meet, especially when living on a fixed income. Around 30% of Vermont seniors are cost burdened, meaning they spend more than a third of their income on housing costs.

“This is not a sustainable way to live and is paired with a hardworking but overtaxed assisted and supportive living infrastructure. Investments in those options need to happen but, in the meantime, we need to focus on giving older Vermonters more options,” Cengeri said.

Roy, who is now retired, said that when he arrived in Vermont, he would struggle to afford rent and Vermont’s higher-than-average cost of living despite waking up at 4 a.m. every morning and working full-time. It was not until he applied to HomeShare Vermont and started living with Roberts that he was finally able to achieve financial stability.

Living under the same roof, Roy checks up on Roberts throughout the day and helps run errands. They often work outside together, cutting and stacking wood in preparation for Vermont’s long winters, or sit outside and chat for hours. The two of them said that each other’s companionship was the most significant thing they’ve gained since entering HomeShare Vermont’s program.

“I know where my bread is buttered. I wake up every morning and do something to help Joe,” Roy said.

“I can’t give him enough credit. I would have a hard time surviving out here without Wayne,” Roberts said.

Living under the same roof, Wayne Roy checks up on Joe Roberts throughout the day and helps run errands.



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Back and forth

WHEN IT WAS too hot for outside games like croquet and bocce last week, seniors at the East View retirement community in Middlebury gathered in the rec room for some table tennis. Improving their eye-hand coordination and getting their competitive juices flowing are, clockwise from top left, Linda Chapman; Dick Hodgson taking a shot with doubles partner Cari Burkard; and Dee Hodges making a difficult shot look easy.
Independent photos/Steve James


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Depression in seniors is real and it's treatable

By TRACY RICHARDS, LCMHC
Community Health Rutland

Seniors often face an increased risk of depression, a fact that is commonly dismissed as a natural part of aging. It's important to recognize that depression is a legitimate medical condition that can be successfully addressed.

As we age, it's important to prioritize mental health alongside physical health. Seniors face an increased risk of depression, which is often overlooked as a normal part of aging. However, depression is a legitimate illness that can be treated.

When negative feelings begin to

interfere with daily life, it's time to talk with your healthcare provider about potential depression symptoms. Major life changes, such as losing a loved one, transitioning into retirement, or losing social connections can trigger depression. Other factors, like changes in family relations, loss of mobility, or side effects from medications, may also contribute.

Depression can lead to feelings that distort perceptions of minor issues. The World Health Organization recognizes depression as a leading cause of disability worldwide, while mental health issues can impact physical

health, including heart conditions.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Depression in seniors is often overlooked, particularly in those who are isolated. Factors such as inadequate nutrition, medications, and feelings of shame can make a person reluctant to talk about their feelings. Signs of depression include:

- Feelings of hopelessness or guilt
- Anxiety and irritability
- Loss of interest in once-pleasurable activities
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Changes in sleep patterns and appetite
- Thought of suicide or self-harm
- Persistent physical aches that do not improve
- Talking with a primary care provider is important

to rule out other medical conditions that could mimic depression, such as dementia or Parkinson's disease. Health screenings can lead to effective treatments, including medications, therapy, or sometimes both.

DEPRESSION & DEMENTIA

Depression can also appear differently across cultures, gender, and age. Memory loss and frustration can lead

to anxiety and difficult behaviors in dementia patients. They may struggle with basic tasks and experience increased aggression due to their inability to process information as they used to. Simplifying communications, maintaining routines, and offering clear explanations can help reduce their frustration.

CAREGIVER DEPRESSION

The stress of caregiving can take a toll on family members caring for seniors, particularly those with dementia. Recognizing and addressing caregiver depression is crucial. Support groups and self-care strategies are essential for managing caregiver stress. The Alzheimer's support group meets at Community Health North Main Street, 231 North Main Street, Rutland, VT on the second

Tuesday of each month.

Addressing mental health in seniors and their caregivers is essential for maintaining overall well-being.

Editor's note: This story was provided by Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region. Author Tracy Richards is a licensed clinical mental health counselor at Community Health Rutland.



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Healthy aging in the county

Vermont's population is growing older, and the Vermont Department of Health pulled together some statistics to shed some light on the aging populations in each of the state's 14 counties. Here is the data on Addison County as of 2023.

Older adults who live alone are at higher risk for loneliness, injury from falls, and cognitive decline.

One in three Addison County residents are over the age of 60 (30% or 11,100 adults), making it the 10th oldest population in the state. Since 2001, Addison County has experienced a decreasing youth and an increasing older adult population. An increasing older adult population creates new challenges and emerging health risks.

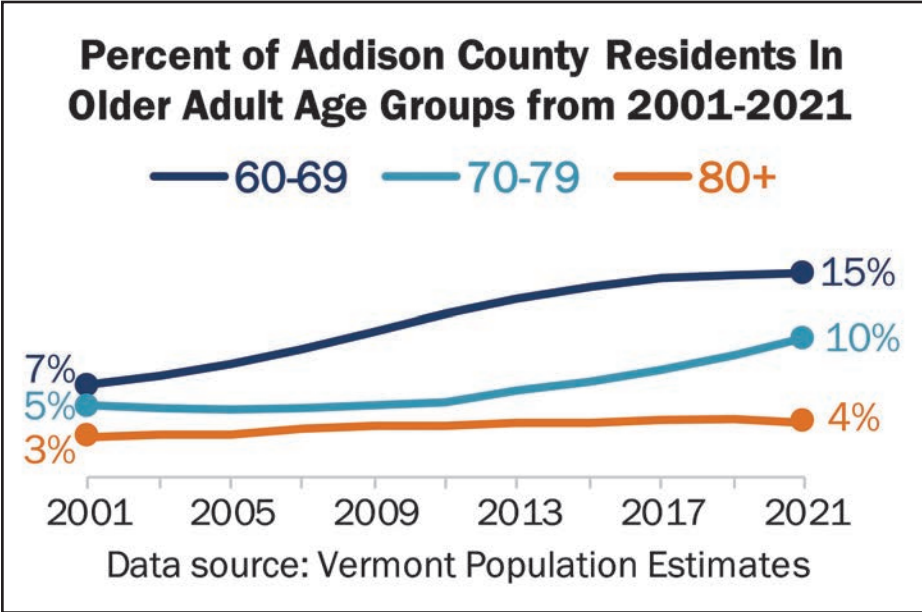
The 60-69 age group is the largest-by-decade age group in the county.

Approximately 1 in 3 adults 80+ years old live alone and 1 in 4 experience cognitive decline.

Age Strong VT is working to make sure all Vermonters can age well. There are health differences between age decades in Addison County, which should be considered when planning

institutional support for all older adults. Approximately one-third of adults 70 years and older live alone. Older adults who live alone are at higher risk for loneliness, injury from falls, and cognitive decline. Nine percent of 60-69-year-olds do not receive the social and emotional support they need. One-third of all older adults fell in the past year. Experiencing cognitive decline increases with age while not seeing a healthcare provider or drinking alcohol at a risk level decreases with age.

Here is the data by age group in Addison County.



Healthy Aging Indicators in Addison County by Age Group

| Age | 60-69 | 70-79 | 80+ |
|---|-------|---------|---------|
| Live alone | 19% | 33% | 34% |
| Rarely or never gets the social and emotional support they need | 9% | no data | no data |
| Fell during the past year | 37% | 27% | 35% |
| Had worsening memory and confusion in the past year | 9% | 11% | 28% |
| Did not see a healthcare provider in the past year | 18% | 11% | 13% |
| Consumes alcohol at a risk level | 29% | 23% | 10% |

Source: healthvermont.gov/agestrongvt



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Vermont Aging Network Consortium awarded grant to modernize helpline

MONTPELIER — The Vermont Aging Network Consortium (VANC) recently announce that its proposal “Modernizing Vermont’s No Wrong Door Older Vermonters Helpline and Information Systems Network Infrastructure” has been selected as one of 12 national grant recipients by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Community Living.

Through this two-year, \$450,000 project, VANC — working in affiliation with all five of Vermont’s Area Agencies on Aging — will serve as the hub for an enhanced and modernized Information, Assistance, and Referral system. This includes a reimagined “Older Vermonters Helpline” and the development of updated technology infrastructure that enhances accessibility, consistency, and service quality statewide.

“We are so grateful for this tremendous opportunity,” said Cheryl Gilbert, VANC’s chief operating & financial officer. “This investment enables us to build a more connected, efficient, and accessible support system for older Vermonters.”

The project will modernize Vermont’s current “Senior Helpline,” which relies on landline technology expected to become obsolete by 2030. By investing in these upgrades now, VANC will improve access to services for older Vermonters, their families, and caregivers across the state.

The Senior Helpline — 1-800-642-5119 — connects callers statewide to a wide array of vital support services delivered

by friendly, knowledgeable professionals. These services include:

- Meals on Wheels and nutrition support
- Transportation assistance
- Medicare counseling and long-term care planning
- Caregiver support services
- Translation services
- Case management
- Options counseling
- Volunteer services

Key project components include:

- Upgrading call and referral technology
- Establishing consistent service delivery protocols across all Area Agencies on Aging.
- Standardizing staff training
- Launching unified marketing and communications materials
- Implementing an updated referral database with coordinated protocols

This streamlined approach will improve service quality, increase client satisfaction, and reduce variation in practice. The enhanced system will also generate cost savings at each of the five Area Agencies on Aging, allowing those funds to be reinvested in direct services that benefit older Vermonters.

This project is supported by the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$450,000 with 100% funding by ACL/HHS.

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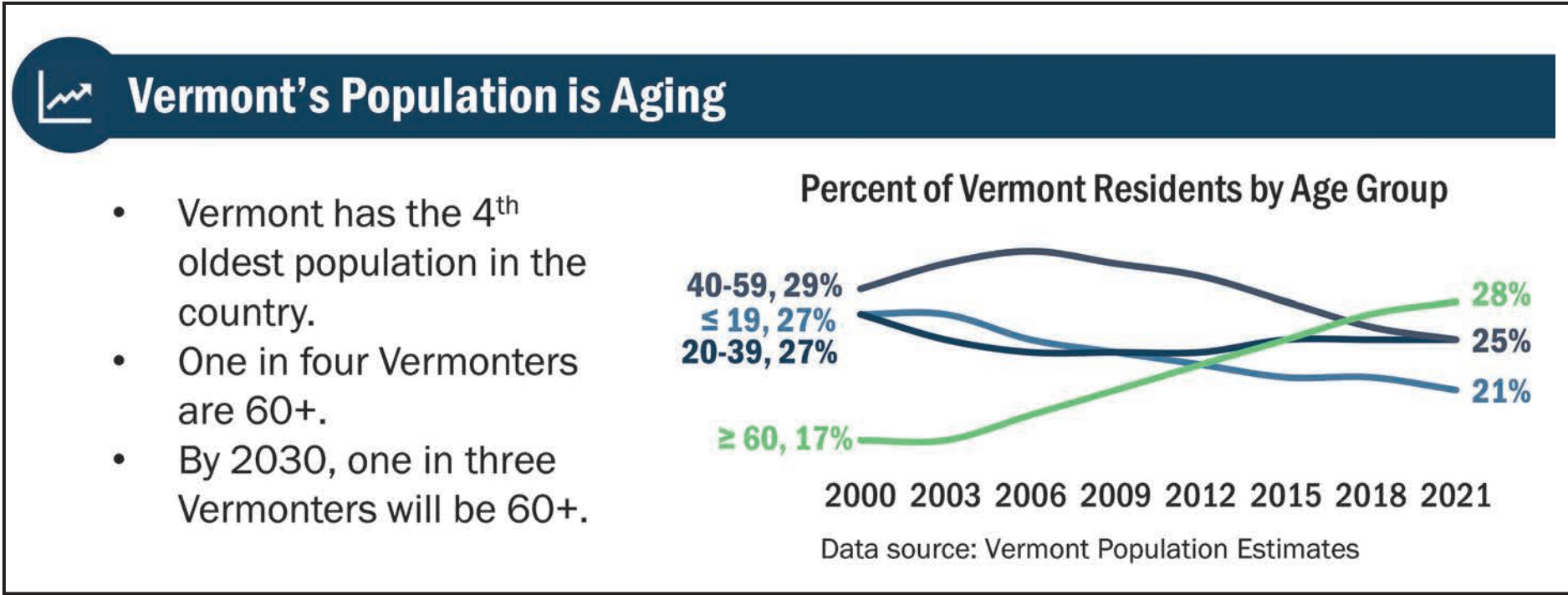


Keepin' creatin'

SENIORS IN THE Autumn Song unit (memory care) at East View in Middlebury this past week beautified their world by applying colorful paint to wooden flowers under the direction of celebrated Brandon artist Warren Kimble, who is 90 years old. Shown working on their projects are, counterclockwise from right, John Fuller sizing up the next color, Nancy Hinsdale applying plenty of red, Nina Bacon admiring the blues and yellows she swathed on an orange number, and East View Director of Engagement and Communications Cari Burkard joining Kimble to peer through a forest of flowers.

Independent photos/Steve James





Activities for seniors with limited mobility

Physical activity is a valuable tool in the fight against chronic disease and other conditions. In fact, the Cleveland Clinic highlights physical activity among its nine ways to prevent disease in an effort to live a long and rewarding life.

Children, adolescents, young adults, and even men and women in middle age may not face too many physical hurdles when they try to exercise, but seniors are not

always so lucky. Aging men and women with mobility issues may wonder if they can reap the rewards of physical activity, and thankfully there are many ways to exercise even if getting up and going isn't as easy as it might have been in years past. Sometimes referred to as "aerobic exercise" or simply "cardio," cardiovascular exercise is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of physical activities that raise the

heart rate and improve endurance. Seniors with mobility issues can look to various forms of cardio for inspiration as they seek to be more physically active without compromising their overall health.

- Walk your way to a healthier you. Walking is a form of cardiovascular exercise that is ideal for older adults with mobility issues because it need not be physically demanding and it's safe to walk just about

anywhere. Walking in a place such as a local park can be particularly good for older adults because they can take periodic breaks on benches if aches, pains or stiffness is affecting their ability to keep moving.

- Take up swimming. Swimming might be tailor-made for seniors with mobility issues because it's a great workout and exercising in water tends to be less taxing

(See Mobility, Page 11)

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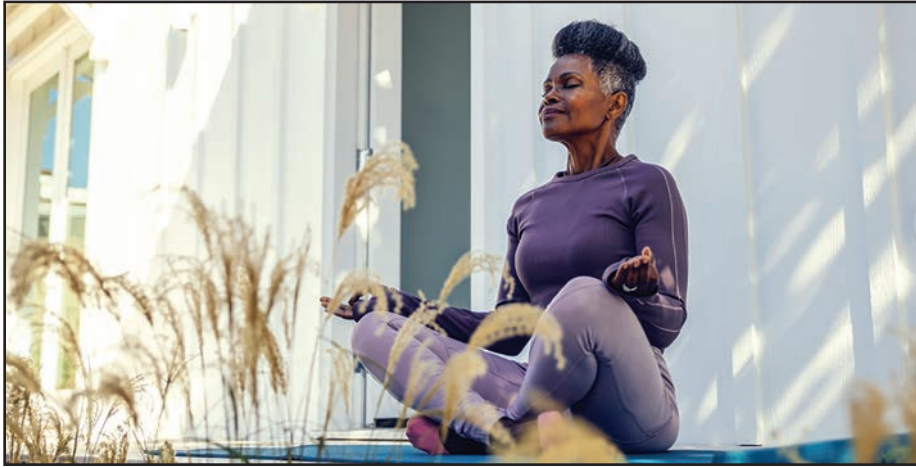
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Metro Creative photo

Mobility

(Continued from Page 10)

on muscles and joints. The Cleveland Clinic notes that swimming promotes heart health, strengthens the lungs, helps to burn calories, and builds muscle, among other benefits. And many seniors find swimming is just as fun in their golden years as it was in their youth, which means aging adults might not face problems with motivation when the time comes to get in the pool.

• Use an exercise bike or portable pedal exerciser. Cycling is a wonderful exercise but one that seniors with mobility issues may feel is no longer possible. If doctors advise against riding a traditional bike, an exercise bike or portable pedal exerciser can provide many of the benefits of cycling without as great a risk for accident or injury. A portable pedal exerciser can be carried to

a park, where seniors can still spend time in the great outdoors, which is one of the most appealing reasons to get on a bike and go.

• Take beginner yoga or tai chi. HelpGuide.org notes that gentle yoga or tai chi can help to improve flexibility and reduce stress and anxiety. Though yoga and tai chi can provide as much demanding physical activity as individuals allow, beginner classes in each discipline don't require much movement but do provide enough for seniors hoping to be less sedentary.

Even seniors with mobility issues can find safe and effective ways to be more physically active. Prior to beginning a new exercise regimen, seniors with mobility issues are urged to discuss activities with their physicians.

— Metro Services

Retired and bored - Make an active retirement a reality

Scores of people view retirement as a time in their lives when they aren't beholden to schedules and can finally indulge in hobbies and interests they'd been dreaming about while sitting in meetings or commuting to the office. Although retirement often is billed as a time to enjoy life, research suggests a different scenario plays out all too often. According to a recent study commissioned by The Oddfellows, one of the oldest friendly societies in the United Kingdom, 39 percent of retirees have experienced feelings such as loneliness, boredom and a reduced sense of identity and purpose shortly after the retirement glow wears off.

Staying active and engaged during retirement may take some creative effort, especially for those who were used to the regimented schedule of work. But the following are some ways to maintain your active engagement with the world after calling it a career.

• **Take that trip.** According to AARP, travel is one of the most popular things to do during retirement. Odds are there are places retirees have always wanted to visit, and the world is just waiting. Taking a tour or being part of a travel group can simplify travel planning by leaving the organizing to someone else. Travelers just enjoy the ride.

• **Get moving physically.** The National

Council on Aging says regularly engaging in physical activity a person enjoys can help prevent bone loss, boost immunity, improve mood, and even prevent chronic illnesses. Team sport participation is a top choice for seniors looking to stay active because sports provide physical exercise and also an opportunity to socialize with friends or teammates.

• **Maintain a consistent schedule.** Some people thrive when they know what is coming next. If you need a routine in order to be happy, establish a consistent schedule that works. For example, people can wake up at the same time each morning and eat lunch during at the same time they did while working. Upon retiring, incorporate a daily plan for exercise if physical activity is not part of your traditional routine.

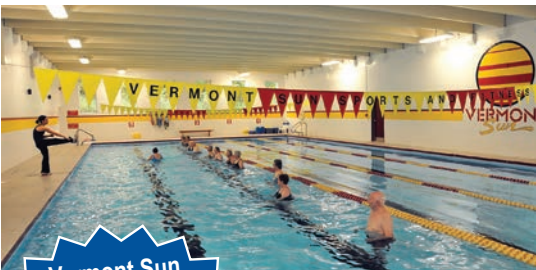
• **Try something new.** It is never too late to try a new activity, class, sport, or hobby. Challenging yourself can stimulate the mind and provide a pathway to new relationships. Individuals can even consider going back to college. According to Kiplinger, New Jersey residents age 65 and older can take regularly scheduled courses tuition-free at the state's public colleges and universities, provided classroom space permits. There are similar programs in other states across the country.

— Metro Services

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Make a plan to maintain a healthy weight as a senior

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is a lifelong process. Children tend to be so physically active and grow at such a consistent pace that it's easier for them to consume a high-calorie diet without becoming overweight. That's generally not the case after adolescence, and it might be particularly difficult for seniors to avoid gaining weight.

In a 2020 interview, Jillian Reece, a bariatric dietitian at Tufts Medical Center, noted that a person's basal metabolic rate slows down with aging. The basal metabolic rate indicates the rate at which the body uses energy while at rest. As that rate slows down, body weight can increase. But seniors should know they aren't helpless against nature and Father Time. In fact, there is much aging adults can do to maintain a healthy weight throughout their golden years.

- Limit portion sizes when eating. Controlling portion sizes is easier said than done, particularly for seniors who dine out with frequency. When dining out, seniors can order off the appetizer menu instead of ordering an entrée, especially when visiting an establishment known for its hefty portions. At home, pay attention to serving size data on product labeling. If necessary, measure portions when eating foods such as cereal so the

portion you eat reflects the serving size noted on the box.

- Eat breakfast each morning. Seniors who skip breakfast, which may be more likely upon retiring, could be doing their waistlines a notable disservice. A 2017 statement from the American Heart Association noted that several large, long-term, prospective, observational studies have found an association between breakfast consumption and lower risk of obesity. The less structured pattern of retirement living may compel some seniors to skip breakfast, but committing to a morning meal can help keep off extra pounds.

- Commit to routine exercise. Diet can go a long way toward helping seniors maintain a healthy weight. However, diet is not the only area where seniors can help their waistlines. Routine physical activity can help seniors maintain muscle mass and make it easier to be more mobile. Staying mobile can help keep pounds off, as a sedentary lifestyle is one of the more notable risk factors for overweight and obesity. The National Institute on Aging recommends seniors aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. Moderate-intensity aerobic activities are those that raise the heart rate and help seniors break a sweat, such as walking,



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jogging, swimming and cycling.

- Make a concerted effort to remain hydrated throughout the day. The Cleveland Clinic notes that age-related body composition changes make seniors particularly vulnerable to dehydration. An aging body does not demand water like it once did, so it's easy for seniors to forget to hydrate because they don't feel thirsty. But remaining hydrated is important for

seniors looking to maintain a healthy weight because dehydration can mimic symptoms of hunger. Seniors may reach for snacks feeling they're hungry when all they might need is a glass of water to hydrate.

A healthy weight can allow seniors to live life to the fullest. Various strategies can help seniors achieve a healthy weight.

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