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**NEXT MONTH:**  
**Arts & Aging**



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## Colonoscopies: Weighing the benefits, risks and alternatives for older adults

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

Thanks to the colonoscopy – a procedure that can catch cancer in its earliest stages and remove pre-cancerous polyps – doctors say the outlook for avoiding and curing colon cancer is hopeful. “Colon cancer is the most preventable and treatable of all cancers,” said Richard Greenberg, M.D., chair of colorectal surgery at Einstein Medical Center. The flip side, however, is the risks of the procedure and the fact that those risks increase as we age. It’s worth looking at the pros and cons of this diagnostic and therapeutic tool, as well as the alternatives for colon cancer screening.

### A stark reality

Jokes about colonoscopies abound; preparing for the screening requires taking lots of laxatives and making repeated trips to the bathroom. However, the facts on colon cancer don’t make for laughter. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) estimates that more than 135,000 new cases of colorectal cancer – the combined number of cancer of the colon and

of the rectum – were diagnosed in 2017, and about 50,000 people died of the illness.

A joint guideline developed by the American Cancer Society, the U.S. Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer and the American College of Radiology advises a colonoscopy at 50 and every 10 years after that for people with average risk. Having a family history of colon cancer or inflammatory bowel diseases, including ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease, may warrant more frequent colonoscopies, noted Jesse Green, M.D., director of the Division of Gastroenterology and Endoscopy at Penn Presbyterian Medical Center. Also, African-Americans may benefit from starting colonoscopies at 45, Green said.

“If you have pain, bleeding or unexplained weight loss, don’t wait,” Greenberg said. “See your doctor sooner.”

### The colonoscopy

During a colonoscopy, for which patients are sedated to prevent discomfort, the doctor

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## Volunteerism

## Volunteer effort uses plastic bags to make mats for homeless

By Barbara Sherf

New York Opera and Broadway singer Leigh Munro, who teaches “Singing for Seniors” at her Chestnut Hill Voice Studio, is amazed at the volunteer ideas one can find on the internet.

Six months ago, Munro, 76, who also teaches singing at Center on the Hill in Chestnut Hill, was checking off items on her “bucket list.” She already knew how to knit, but she didn’t know how to crochet, so she looked it up on YouTube and discovered a video on making sleeping mats for the homeless by crocheting plastic grocery bags together. Yes, those same bags that litter our streets and attach themselves to tree limbs can have a useful second life.

“There was a panoply of videos, but the one about the mats really struck me,” she says. “What a motivator to learn to do something that is beneficial to those sleeping on the streets of our city – to give them a dry surface that is lightweight and portable.” Munro says.

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Paul Anderson

Leigh Munro, right, hands out a sleeping mat, which she made using plastic bags, at Trinity Church in Rittenhouse Square.

# PCA

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## Health Brief

### Too much TV increases blood clot risk

New research shows that spending hours in front of the TV may be damaging your blood vessels. A study conducted by researchers at University of Minnesota found that people who spend too much time in front of the TV have an increased risk for blood clots in their veins, a serious medical condition called venous thromboembolism (VTE).

VTE clots, which often occur in the legs, can dislodge and travel to the lungs, causing a potentially deadly condition called pulmonary embolism. Blood clots have also been known to occur during long airplane flights.

The long-range study, which began in 1987 and included 15,000 middle-aged Americans, determined that sitting for long periods of time can cause blood clots to form because normal circulation through the legs and feet is impaired. More than 700 cases of VTE occurred among the study's participants. Those who watched a lot of television had a 70 percent higher risk of developing one of the clots than people who never or seldom watched TV. This risk remained high even after factors such as the person's weight or exercise levels were taken into account. The research was published online in *The Journal of Thrombosis and Thrombolysis*.

The study couldn't prove that it was the TV watching, specifically, that caused the uptick in clots, but it did note an association between lengthy periods of sitting and clot formation.

"Even individuals who regularly engage in physical activity should not ignore the potential harms of prolonged sedentary behaviors such as TV viewing," said the study's lead author, Yasuhiko Kubota.

Doctors often agree that "couch potato" lifestyles can adversely impact your health.

"There's undoubtedly a connection between time spent watching TV and a person's odds for blood clots," said Maja Zaric, an interventional cardiologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

More research may be needed to determine specific recommendations for one's amount of TV time. Participants in the study



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were asked to categorize their TV viewing time as never or seldom, sometimes, often, or very often – assessments that could be very subjective.

"There may be a different view on the amount of TV watching between an obese subject with advanced arthritis and chronic back pain and a fit subject at healthy weight," Zaric said.

The study contributes to mounting research that watching TV adds to a sedentary lifestyle – and works against your health. "This is another study indicating the need for people to be more physically active and fit, move more ... and probably watch less TV," said David Friedman, chief of heart failure services at Northwell Health's Long Island Jewish Valley Stream Hospital in Valley Stream, New York.

Friedman suggested that people who watch television on their mobile devices could "improve aerobic physical fitness and watch their favorite TV programs on the go" as a way to mitigate the effects of sitting still. This does not mean watching TV while driving or walking down the street, however. Consider taking your tablet or smartphone with you to the gym so you can watch your favorite program while you're on the elliptical machine. If you have exercise equipment at home, consider making adjustments so that you are set up to work out or move while watching TV. Of course, the simplest option is to just stand up and move around every few minutes so you aren't sitting for hours on end. The commercials or program's end would be a perfect opportunity or reminder to get moving.

Source: *HealthDay News*

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**Editor:** Alicia M. Colombo  
215-765-9000, ext. 5081  
PCA, 642 N. Broad St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19130  
Email: [milestonesnews@pcaCares.org](mailto:milestonesnews@pcaCares.org)

**Advertising:** Joan Zaremba  
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## Volunteerism

### School library volunteer shares time, knowledge and gets a lot in return



Paola Noguerras

**Elayne Blender reads to children at Henry Houston Elementary School in Mount Airy.**

**By Constance Garcia-Barrio**

It's said that every life is a work of art. If that's true, then serving children of different creeds and colors has helped to make Elayne Blender's days a brilliant creation. Blender, 70, volunteers three half-days a week at Mount Airy's Henry Houston Elementary School, tutoring mostly African-American students in literacy and math and coordinating the school's 12 other volunteers in the school library.

The tutoring takes place in the library, thanks to Chestnut Hill resident Barbara Bloom, who began the volunteer program 15 years ago. Tutors, most of them retirees, assist a total of 30 students a year, working one-on-one. The tutors receive training from professionals during the year to improve their skills. "We also meet together weekly to critique and support each other, sometimes over snacks or coffee," said Blender, a native Philadelphian who has a Bachelor of Science in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh and a Master of Education in rehabilitation counseling from New York University.

Four years ago, along with a cadre of other volunteers and the Home and School Association, Blender cleaned out the school's

moldy old books and then planned a library program. Individuals and other schools generously donated new books and computers. Now classes come to the library regularly, have stories read to them by the "library ladies" and borrow books. Blender and the other volunteers help to bridge the gaps in school services. Lots of research, including a study published in 2013 in *School Library Journal*, shows that students who attend schools with libraries fare better academically, but the cash-strapped School District of Philadelphia has cut more than 80 percent of its librarians in the past two decades.

"We see a lot of kids with significant needs," said Blender, who was a program supervisor at Philadelphia Intellectual disAbility Services for 20 years before retiring eight years ago. According to Blender, large classes often hamper teachers' ability to attend to such students or even to enjoy moments when children grasp a concept. "I worked with a boy who suddenly understood multiplication. He said, 'Multiplication is like addition, only faster,' and his face lit up," she said.

Blender, who has two daughters and a son, all in their 30s, and a 5-year-old grandchild, finds that the students keep her on her toes.

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# Numbers for the aging: Up, then down

By Frank Burd

When I was young, numbers meant mathematics. You were either good at it or not. The first numerical challenge I had was in the fourth grade, when I had to learn multiplication – or as we called it back then, the “times tables.”

I soon learned that numbers themselves meant much more than math. We were always trying to get higher numbers.

We wanted to be older. We wanted to be in a higher grade. We wanted to be taller. And of course, we were measured regularly on tests, on which we sought higher scores. While we strove for a perfect 100 on a test, we were happy if we made it to the 90s. But we were always seeking to avoid the low scores, the failure.

Our intelligence was measured with an IQ – intelligence quotient – test, which predicted how well we would do in the “real world.” Mine was just a tiny bit above the average, but almost all my friends scored high. They skipped a grade and disconnected from me, eventually, leaving me sad and alone. If only I’d scored higher on that test, maybe we would have kept in touch.

The college boards, officially known as the SATs, were another measure of how smart we were. The higher your score, the better, and the scores usually determined what school we would get into and how much money the schools would grant us.

The Olympics used the number 10 as a sign of perfection. With all athletics, bigger scores, higher jumps and more points were what we wanted to see.

But now, I have a new spin on numbers. Yes, I do want the highest return on my investments. But in general, bigger numbers are bad, especially when they come from your doctor.

I started thinking about it when my doctor told me that my score on my Corus CAD blood test was 32. (That’s a test to diagnose obstructive coronary artery disease.) She told me that since my score was more than 25, I needed to see a cardiologist.

We all dread high numbers when our cholesterol is measured. And sometimes it’s confusing when the doctor tells us that there is also good cholesterol, which shouldn’t worry us.

A visit to the doctor always begins with taking my blood pressure. All my life, it’s been



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steady. But I get so anxious about my blood pressure that it actually gets elevated just by my worrying about it. The first reading is always high, which seems bad. So I ask them to check it again before I leave. It is always in the normal range by then.

I was a skinny kid growing up and wanted to put on some weight – in the form of muscle, of course. Now, I surely don’t want my weight to go up any more. As for height, I no longer need to be taller. I’m just hoping I don’t get smaller.

The numbers related to the sports we play are getting smaller as we age. All my life, I played on teams on which we tried to score more runs or more points. Well, I don’t play basketball, baseball or football anymore. Now, when I can, I drag myself to a golf course. And what am I trying for? The lowest score I can achieve.

Every year, as I add another candle to the cake that has no more room, I take a deep breath. Many of my female friends are lying about their age. That’s one thing I don’t do. No, I don’t like being 70, and I won’t like being 80. But I’m still chugging along, happy that I am but sad that some of my old friends did not have the opportunity to add another candle to their cakes. My goal is to live longer than my father, who died three years ago. He was almost 102. I gotta beat him. Yeah, I guess I’m still competitive.

*Frank Burd is a writer of fiction, plays, history and poetry, when he’s not photographing.*

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# Heart transplant recipient becomes hospital chaplain

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

Waiting for a donor organ can leave patients caught between hope and desperation, says heart transplant recipient Janet Dennis. "I lived in the University of Pennsylvania hospital for six and a half weeks, waiting for a donor heart," says Dennis, 63, a social worker retired from the city of Philadelphia. "I was blessed. Twenty-two people die every single day in the U.S. while waiting for a donor organ."

The need for a new heart came as a shock to Dennis. "At 49, I'd never been sick," she says. "I live near Wayne Junction, so I often take the Regional Rail line. One day, after I climbed the steps to the platform, I was panting." At first, Dennis brushed it off as a fluke. However, when the same thing happened after she climbed the steps at her home, one of her sisters urged her to call 911.

In October 2003, cardiologists performed surgery to implant a pacemaker whose electrical impulses regulated Dennis' heartbeat. A year later, she needed a defibrillator, which delivers a shock to restore the heart to a healthy rhythm after its beat has become ir-

regular. "Every time the defibrillator goes off, you have to return to the hospital so doctors can make sure you're OK," Dennis says. After one such episode in 2005, while Dennis sat in the hospital, the defibrillator went off again. "I was in total heart failure," she recalls. Cardiologists told Dennis that she had to stay in the hospital because she needed a new heart.

Different factors must line up to give the transplant — be it a heart, lungs, liver, kidney, or other organ — the best chance of avoiding rejection by the recipient's body. For instance, the donor's and the recipient's blood types must match. In the case of a heart, the new one must fit comfortably into the recipient's chest.

And an organ can survive only a limited time outside of the body. While it travels from the donor to the recipient, the clock is ticking.

Against all odds, doctors at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (HUP) located a heart for Dennis within hours. Hers was a rare case, since many organ recipients have to wait months.

## A new life

On July 6, 2005, Dennis received her new heart. Her adoptive daughter, Halaina, now 36, stayed at the hospital during much of the eight-day period Dennis spent in post-surgical care. When Dennis returned home, her family's love continued to weave a safety net around her. Her brother and sister-in-law, who live next door, checked on her often. In addition, her sister in Alabama and her two sisters in Florida took turns staying with her for weeks at a time. "I felt loved, safe, blessed," Dennis says.

The transplant gave Dennis a new life, but it also brought challenges. "I had thick hair before, but it's become thin," she says, "and I have Type II diabetes now due to the immunosuppressant drugs I take so that my body doesn't reject my new heart. There's no getting around it. I'll need them for the rest of my life."

The immunosuppressants leave her vulnerable. "If someone coughs on me, I'm in trouble because the drugs weaken my defenses," Dennis says. "The first time I caught a cold, it lasted eight weeks."

Despite the changes, Dennis has expanded her life. She threw herself into sports, and in 2009 she competed in the World Transplant Games. Established in 1978, the games, in which athletes from some 60 countries take part, raise public awareness about transplantation and also show the fitness that transplant recipients can achieve.

"I started swimming at 50," Dennis says. "I've traveled to Australia, Sweden, South Africa, Spain and Argentina to take part in the games." She competes in the backstroke, the long jump, javelin, discus and shot put. "I've won 45 medals so far," says Dennis, who sends the trophies to the family of her heart donor and others to express her gratitude. "That family made the decision to give their loved one's heart at a tough time," she says. "Their loved one was dying. If they hadn't made that choice, I wouldn't be alive."

Dennis also returned to work. "I had taken off 20 months," she says. "I went back to work for another seven years because I wanted my pension. Altogether, I put in 34 years of service." Dennis retired in 2013 at 58.

Dennis soon began giving presentations about organ donation at churches and



Janet Dennis

**Janet Dennis became a volunteer chaplain at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where she received a heart transplant.**

schools. "It's a way of showing I'm grateful for my new heart," she says.

## Lending an ear

She also became a volunteer chaplain at HUP in 2013. "You can have the best medical team in the world, but when you're waiting for a transplant, you're afraid of the unknown," she says. "You need to talk with someone who's been through the experience." Dennis visits HUP one day a week for six to eight hours. "Sometimes, I'm just a listening presence," she says. "I just let [patients] vent."

After patients undergo transplant surgery, Dennis helps them accept the changes imposed by the immunosuppressants: "I tell them, 'You won't go back to your old life. This is your new normal.'"

Sometimes, patients die while waiting for a new organ or succumb after the surgery. "In one case, a child died after receiving a new heart," she says. "In another case, a man has spent months in the hospital because of complications after his heart transplant. Those times are hard."

Dennis draws on her experience as she moves forward in her life. "I'm not afraid of anything," she says. "This was just a season of my life."

*Native Philadelphian Constance Garcia-Barrio writes about many topics, including black history.*

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## Volunteerism

### Giving back, getting joy in return

By Barbara Sherf

I have taken a new, freer approach to volunteering. I've come to realize that you don't have to belong to an organized group to give back. You can do it when and where a need arises. I focus my efforts on a simple volunteer activity in which I give and receive pleasure. I've termed it "pleasure-teering." In essence, pleasure-teering involves identifying a need and doing something simple to connect with one person — or the planet — that gives you pleasure.

While at home in the Philly area, I keep two seemingly quirky items on hand in my car: a big sign that reads "Free Hugs" and a weathered red hat with three oversized, artificial yellow sunflowers on it. Placing the hat on my head and wearing my hand-drawn sign, I give hugs to and receive hugs from those in need. In particular, as I pass one of two nursing homes where friends are now residing, I look at the clock and figure I can do some hugging for 45 minutes or so while on my way to or from an appointment or errand.

Witnessing the residents get poked and prodded daily in the course of their care, I realized that what many of them needed were hugs and a good listener. I've got two strong arms and a pair of ears.

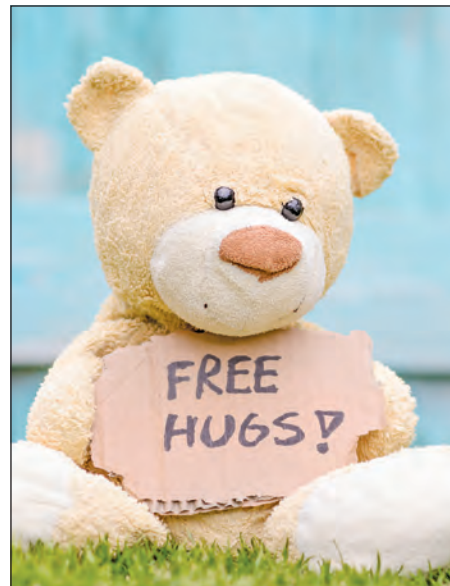
With my husband and I traveling more in our RV, I take the concept of pleasure-teering, and a mini "Free Hugs" sign, along with us on the road. When I see an elderly man with a VFW baseball cap on, I thank him for his service and offer him a free hug. "You made my day," said the World War II veteran on a recent walk around a campground.

At home and on the road, I like to walk with our elderly golden retriever, Tucker. Upon leaving the house or RV, I generally grab three plastic grocery bags — one for Tucker's "business" and one each for trash and recycling. I don't need a big volunteer badge or hat and long metal "grabber" to help me pick up litter that I see along the way. I prefer just to keep it simple.

While on the road, I heard of the 17 deaths that occurred at the Florida high school in February. I realized we were too far away to help in person. But I was able to find an

American Red Cross blood donation site and gave what I could. While they prefer you schedule an appointment in advance, there is always time for a walk-in.

I also carry postcards and stamps in the RV and was able to write (again) to our senator and congressmen, the governor, and the president about the need for better gun control. While on the road, I continue my advocacy efforts. When we go into town and I have a decent cell signal, I use my speed dial to call their offices to lobby on an array of issues.



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My pleasure-teering journey is an outgrowth of more structured volunteering efforts. Five years ago, I got involved with the local Quaker Meeting and joined the Hospitality Committee, which plans weekly and monthly events. While I was working in the kitchen, I would often pack up the homemade leftovers to take to two elderly gentlemen, who each reside on opposite ends of our street. Now, I take this practice on the road, delivering homemade soup or salads to campground hosts. It gives me pleasure to share food with others, plus I also get useful trip tips, such as on places to eat and nearby dog parks.

These are just some examples of my pleasure-teering efforts. Try it for yourself. I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

*Author, speaker and writer Barbara Sherf tells the stories of businesses and individuals.*

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## Volunteerism

# Want to start volunteering? Here are some tips from a veteran volunteer

By Barbara Sherf

Longtime volunteer Bob Rossman, who retired as a computer programmer more than 15 years ago, has some tips for those looking to take on volunteer responsibilities. Rossman, 75, who has lived in Northwest Philadelphia for 40 years, enjoys a mix of volunteer activities that includes serving on several boards, as well as working with his hands.

"For me it's important to exercise the mind and body, and that's what I'm doing in terms of my volunteer activities," says Rossman, who currently lives in Chestnut Hill with his wife, Barbara Bloom. Rossman has served on the board of the Chestnut Hill Community Association (CHCA) for 20 years and the Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network for 25 years.

His name was often brought up when considering a CHCA board president, but Rossman likes to remain behind the scenes and is more of a "hands-on" kind of guy who has taken on varied community responsibilities.

His experience has led him to offer the following suggestions to would-be volunteers.

### Do what you enjoy

While volunteering for the annual Mount Airy Day celebration, Rossman was tapped to

help set up a stage for the musical acts, and he enjoyed seeing his efforts produce an end product.

"It was fun because it was like a big erector set, and I got to help figure out how to put it together," Rossman says. "I got to wear a tool belt and street clothes, and that felt right."

When CHCA started its popular summer concerts in Pastorius Park, Rossman agreed to supervise setting up the stage for the concerts.

"I actually enjoy crawling under there to help set it up," he says. "While you are using your mind to figure things out, you are also doing physical labor and getting your hands dirty and for me, that's something I enjoy doing, so it's a good fit for me in terms of volunteering."

### Get out of your 'comfort zone'

Rossman's advice: "In addition to doing something that gives you joy, find something that you have been interested in as a spectator and always wanted to try."

Rossman, like many volunteers, likes the variety of working with several organizations. He thought it would be interesting to serve as the CHCA liaison of the Chestnut Hill Business Association (CHBA), even though he doesn't own a business. He found out firsthand what business owners were up against



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and thinking about and helped the group to develop new ideas for helping businesses attract more foot traffic.

"It was fun to brainstorm with all of these business owners and get a sneak peek at what was happening in the business community, while passing along that information to the CHCA Board of Directors," he says. "I learned a lot about running a small business and enjoyed the entire process. It was new and different, and that is something volunteers need to look at in order to keep things fresh."

### Know your limits

Rossman has not turned into an uber-volunteer. He feels more comfortable with a slow and steady approach to the projects he works on and knows when to say 'No' to certain requests.

"I don't like stretching myself too thin and so I like to keep my volunteer activities to 10

hours per week, give or take," he says. "I've seen where over-committing can be a common problem with volunteers who burn out from the pace. I don't want my volunteer activities to seem like a chore or a job. I want it to be something I get up in the morning and look forward to doing."

"You have to be aware of what is happening in the community and be willing to jump in when you can and step back when you can't."

Rossman adds: "These are all good organizations, and I like what they do, so I try to do what I can to help them out. People get to know you, and when I walk down the street, people smile and I smile back. I like that I can walk to most of my volunteer activities and am part of a wonderful community."

*Author, speaker and writer Barbara Sherf tells the stories of businesses and individuals.*

## New Medicare cards coming: What you need to know

Starting this month, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will begin a year-long process of sending all Medicare beneficiaries a new Medicare card. Beneficiaries in Pennsylvania will be among the first groups of seniors to receive new cards, and will get theirs between April and June.

The new cards will have a unique Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) that will allow for removal of the Social Security number. Medicare will automatically mail a new card at no cost to beneficiaries at the address on file with Social Security.

Here's what you need to know:

- **Mailing takes time.** Your card may arrive at a different time than your friend's or neighbor's.

- **Destroy your old card.** Once you get your new Medicare card, destroy your old one and start using your new one right away.
- **Guard your information.** Only give your new Medicare number to doctors, pharmacists, other health care providers, your insurers, or other people you trust to work with Medicare on your behalf.
- **Your Medicare number is unique to you.** Your card has a new number instead of your Social Security number.
- **Your new card is paper.** Paper cards are easier for many providers to use and copy, and they save taxpayers a lot of money. Plus, you can print a replacement if needed.
- **Keep your new card with you.** Carry your

new card and show it to your health care providers when you need care.

- **Your doctor knows it's coming.** Doctors and other health care providers and facilities will ask for your new Medicare card when you need care.
- **You can find your number.** If you forget your new card, you, your doctor or other health care provider will be able to look up your Medicare number online.
- **Keep your Medicare Advantage Card.** If you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan (like an HMO or PPO), your Medicare Advantage Plan ID card is your main card for Medicare. You should still keep and use it whenever you need care. However, you



also may be asked to show your new Medicare card, so you should carry this card, too.

- **Help is available:** If you don't get your new Medicare card by April 2019, or if you have other questions about Medicare, call 1-800-MEDICARE (633-4227) or 1-877-486-2048 for TTY users.



## Ask the Expert

# Beware of tax-time scams: It's probably not the IRS calling

### QUESTION:

*I received a phone call from the IRS telling me that I owe back taxes, but I don't think I do. What should I do?* (Anonymous)

### ANSWER:

If you receive a call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, get the caller's name and call-back number, then hang up and call 1-800-366-4484 to find out whether the person is an IRS employee. If he or she is not with the IRS, report the call to the same number.

In addition to calls, beware of email scams. The IRS does not contact taxpayers via email, text or social media. A practice known as "phishing" is the attempt to obtain sensitive, personal information (such as usernames,

passwords or Social Security numbers) for fraudulent reasons. The sender often purports to be from a trusted organization. If you receive a suspicious email, do not reply or open any links or attachments. Forward the email to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov). Never give out personal information, such as bank account or Medicare numbers, if you are unsure of a caller or emailer's validity. For more information on IRS scams, go to [irs.gov/privacy-disclosure/report-phishing](http://irs.gov/privacy-disclosure/report-phishing) or call 1-800-366-4484.

The Older Adults Protective Services department of Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) works to combat financial and other abuse of older Philadelphians and meet the needs of victims. To report suspected abuse, call the PCA Helpline 24/7 at 215-765-9040. For information about preventing financial exploitation of seniors, go to the website [stopelderexploitation.org](http://stopelderexploitation.org).

*Jennifer Spoeri, director, Older Adult Protective Services, PCA*



PCA's Jennifer Spoeri

### It's your turn!

Send Milestones your questions about aging-related issues. We will print select questions – along with answers from experts at Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) – in upcoming issues. Submit your name, address, phone number and question to [milestonesnews@pcaCares.org](mailto:milestonesnews@pcaCares.org) or:

Milestones Editor, PCA  
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# April 2018

## SUNDAY

**APRIL FOOL'S DAY  
EASTER SUNDAY**



**1**

## MONDAY

**2**

**Bodies in Motion.** Line Dancing Class. 10:40-11:40 a.m. KleinLife: Northeast Phila. 215-698-7300.

**Short Stories with Jack.** Join Jack Belitsky for short stories & discussions. 12:45 p.m. KleinLife: Northeast Phila. 215-698-7300.

## TUESDAY

**3**

**Afternoon Delight: 'The Crown.'** View TV drama about political rivalries & romance of Queen Elizabeth II. 12:45 p.m. KleinLife: NE Phila. 215-698-7300. (Continues April 10 & 19)

**Line Dancing.** Fun & fitness. 10 a.m. Journey's Way. 215-487-1750. (Tuesdays) \$

## WEDNESDAY

**4**

**Rubber Stamping Club & Card Making Class.** 2:30-4:30 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. \$

**The Criminal Justice System: Myths & Realities.** Attorney Regina Coyne discusses inner workings of the criminal justice system. 11 a.m. Parkway Central Library. 215-686-5331.

## THURSDAY

**5**

**Enhance Fitness Exercise Classes.** 9 a.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. (Tuesdays & Thursdays)

**Pennsylvania Ballet Presents 'Grace & Grandeur.'** 7 p.m. Merriam Theater 215-893-1999. \$

## FRIDAY

**6**

**Chair Yoga.** 10:30 a.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969. \$

**Wellness Symposium.** Community vendors; ideas for healthy living, exercise & senior vibrancy. 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Phila. Protestant Home. 215-697-8007.

## SATURDAY

**7**

**Family Caregiver Workshop: Promoting Activity Engagement.** Knowledge & strategies to manage behaviors, promote engagement in activities to stimulate people with dementia. 9:30-11:30 a.m. Mercy Neighborhood Ministries Adult Day Program. 215-227-4393.

**Ostomate & Continent Diversion Support Group.** 2-4 p.m. Pa. Hospital, Cheston Conference Room, 2nd floor. 267-231-4517.

**Yoga in the Greenhouse.** All-levels classes led by local teachers. Bring your own mat. 1-2:30 p.m. Fairmount Park Horticulture Center. 215-988-9334. \$

**8**

**Mosaic Art Class.** Taught by expert Sandi Young. Includes supplies to complete one project 12:45-2:45 p.m. KleinLife: Northeast Phila. 215-698-7300. (Continues April 16, 13 & 30) \$

**Silver Sneakers Exercise Class.** 8 a.m. & 9 a.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. (Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays) Free with eligible health insurance/\$

**10**

**Understanding the Rent Rebate Program.** Housing counseling staff present information about program qualifications for Pennsylvanians 65-plus; widows & widowers 50-plus. 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722.

**HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**11**

**Meet the Author: Anastasia Goodman.** Readings from the Sasha Perlov mystery series. 12:45 p.m. KleinLife: Northeast Phila. 215-698-7300.

**Sewing Made Easy: Replacing a Zipper.** 12:30 p.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969. \$

**Dancing with a Yiddish Accent: The Art of Dancing to Klezmer Music.** No experience required. 7-9 p.m. The Gershman Y. 215-545-4400. (May 17) \$

**Pinochle.** Open card playing sessions. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. (Weekdays)

**Art Class: Cherry Blossom Painting.** 1 p.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969. \$

**Book Club: 'One Perfect Lie' by Lisa Scottoline.** 10:30 a.m. Coleman Library. 215-848-7722.

**Philadanco! Presents 'Success Stories.'** Ballets choreographed by former members. 2:30 & 7:30 p.m. (April 15) \$

**14**

**Music for the Heart of Jazz Concert.** Celebrate the center's 50th anniversary. Light refreshments. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. \$

**15**

**Amici Opera Company Presents Massenet's 'Thais.'** 4 p.m. Stage One. 215-224-0257. \$

**16**

**Billiards.** Open play. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722. (Weekdays)

**TAX DAY**

**17**

**Ageless Grace with Juan.** 10 a.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722.

**18**

**Living Alone Successfully.** Discussion of loneliness coping strategies led by geriatric mental health clinician. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969.

**Diabetes Self-Management Program.** Maintain health, manage symptoms & improve quality of life. 9 a.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722 (Thursdays to May 24)

**Trip: Sands Casino in Bethlehem, Pa.** Includes food coupon. 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Departs/returns: Phila. Senior Center. 215-546-5879. \$.

**20**

**Chair Yoga.** 10:30 a.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969. \$

**Wellness & Resource Fair.** Consultations, screenings, fitness demos, health information, community resources, giveaways, & craft display & sale. 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Journey's Way. 215-487-1750.

**21**

**Amici Opera Company Presents Puccini's 'Madame Butterfly.'** 4 p.m. Redeemer U.M. Church. 215-224-0257. \$

**April Showers Bring Opera's Flowers.** Arias, duets & ensembles. Works by Mozart, Puccini, Strauss, Verdi & more. Wine & refreshments. Benefits Delaware Valley Opera Co. 7 p.m. 215-725-4171. \$

**22**

**EARTH DAY**

**Amici Opera Company Presents Massenet's 'Thais.'** 3 p.m. Redeemer United Methodist Church. 215-224-0257. \$

**23**

**Spinning Yarns.** Knitters, crocheters & all fiber artists are welcome to bring latest project for a relaxing, low-key evening of crafting. 6:30 p.m. Fumo Family Library. 215-685-1758.

**24**

**African American Journeys.** 1 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722.

**25**

**Pinochle Tournament.** Friendly competition & pinochle fun. 10 a.m. Center in the Park. Register: 215-848-7722.

**Movie: 'Florence Jenkins' (2016).** Starring Meryl Streep & Hugh Grant. 12:45 p.m. KleinLife: Northeast Phila. 215-698-7300.

**Afternoon of Jazz at the Clef Club.** Live music & comedy. Includes boxed lunch. 12-3 p.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1971. \$

**27**

**Chair Yoga.** 10:30 a.m. Marconi Older Adult Program. 215-717-1969. \$

**National Tell a Story Day.** Participants share stories from books, childhood memories or imagination. 1 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722.

**28**

**Broadway Philadelphia Presents: 'The Sound of Music.'** 8 p.m. Merriam Theater 215-893-1999. \$

**Olympia Game Day.** Play board games on the Cruiser Olympia. BYO or borrow games. 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Independence Seaport Museum. 215-413-8679.

**29**

**Amici Opera Company Presents Puccini's 'Madame Butterfly.'** 2:30 p.m. Dock Woods, inside chapel. 215-224-0257. \$

**The Fit Expo.** Fitness celebrities, classes & competitions; health & wellness products; cooking demos. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pa. Convention Center. 888-348-3976. \$

**30**

**Chopped! Team cooking competition using surprise ingredients. Supplies provided.** 1 p.m. Center in the Park. 215-848-7722.

## Milestones

Events that end with a "\$" require an entrance fee or advance ticket purchase. Free events may request donations or sell items. Please call the number listed for pricing or other details.

Send your calendar items to:

ATTN: Milestones Editor  
PCA, 642 N. Broad St.,  
Philadelphia, PA 19130  
Phone: 215-765-9000, ext. 5081  
Fax: 215-765-9066

Email:  
milestonesnews@pcaCares.org

Event submission deadline: 25th of the month for publication in month after next.

## Financial Literacy Month

## National Volunteer Month



## Volunteerism

# Long-term care resident ombudsmen advocate, care for each other

By Marcia Z. Siegal

Darlene Sauer frequently walks the halls on her floor at the Immaculate Mary Center for Rehabilitation and Healthcare in Northeast Philadelphia to check on fellow residents. Recently, she heard a female resident calling for help. The woman wanted to take a shower and needed aides to help her into the Hoyer lift, a specialized mechanical sling for people with limited mobility that allows them to be lifted and transferred. Sauer went to a nursing supervisor to report that the



resident needed assistance. "Then I went back to her room and waited with her until the aides arrived," she said.

"I try to solve problems and, if I can't, I report them to people who can," said Sauer, who is a Pennsylvania Empowered Expert Resident (PEER) ombudsman at the skilled nursing facility. "When I first came to the center, I was at death's door with lung and bowel cancer. I had been given two months to live. That was five and a half years ago. I'm now a cancer survivor. I feel God put me here at the center for a reason – to help who I can help."

## Residents' rights

Federal and state regulations spell out long-term care residents' rights to both quality of care and quality of life. Among these rights for residents in nursing facilities are the following:

- \* Be informed in writing of your rights, as well as the policies and procedures of the facility
- \* Be treated with dignity and respect and have privacy
- \* Know about services and changes to your care plan
- \* Know about your medical condition(s)
- \* Participate in your plan of care, including the right to refuse treatment
- \* Choose your own physician and pharmacy
- \* Have your personal and medical records treated as confidential
- \* Manage your own personal finances
- \* Use your own clothing and possessions
- \* Be free from mental, physical and sexual abuse; exploitation; neglect; and involuntary seclusion
- \* Be free from restraints
- \* Voice a grievance without retaliation

There are also specific rights for personal care home residents, domiciliary care residents and adult day care center participants. Information is available on Philadelphia Corporation for Aging's (PCA's) website at [pcaCares.org/services-for-seniors/ombudsman/know-your-rights](http://pcaCares.org/services-for-seniors/ombudsman/know-your-rights).

## Resident advocates

The word "ombudsman" is derived from a Swedish word meaning advocate or people's representative. Long-term care ombudsmen, including PEERS, address issues that range from residents' finances, such as access to personal funds, to quality of life, such as concerns about food or social activities; professional care, such as medication and nursing care; and residents' rights, such as residents' dignity and facilities' transfer and discharge policies.

Sauer is among four PEERS at the center, located at 2990 Holme Ave. She and fellow residents Johanna Blodgett, Elizabeth Tyre and Carol Whatley advocate for residents and work with staff in their long-term care facility to maintain and enhance the quality of care and quality of life of all who live there. They help to resolve residents' complaints and ensure that residents are treated with dignity and respect. (See information at left about the rights of residents in nursing facilities).

The PEER initiative is part of Pennsylvania's Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Program, an effort of Pennsylvania's Department of Aging (PDA) that comprises professional and volunteer ombudsmen. The ombudsman program covers LTC residents in nursing facilities, domiciliary care and personal care homes, and assisted living facilities, as well as those receiving adult day services in a facility and LTC services at home. "All [ombudsmen, whether paid or volunteer] are united through an impassioned commitment to listen, educate, investigate, mediate and em-



Paola Nogueras

**Resident ombudsmen, clockwise from bottom left, Carol Whatley, Johanna Blodgett, Elizabeth Tyre and Darlene Sauer discuss residents' issues at Immaculate Mary Center for Rehabilitation and Healthcare in Northeast Philadelphia.**

power through a visible presence," notes the PDA on its website. Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) oversees the LTC Ombudsman Program in Philadelphia.

The state expanded its community-based volunteer ombudsman program in 2002 when it implemented the PEER program for LTC facility residents. PEERS complete a six-week training program to learn how to work with facility staff to mediate and resolve problems and to empower themselves and fellow residents to maximize their health, comfort and happiness. After certification, volunteers receive ongoing training and support, such as by participating in monthly conference calls in which they can share issues and problem-solving strategies with fellow PEERS statewide. Professional LTC ombudsman make regular visits to the facilities where PEERS live and are available to support PEERS with their advocacy efforts and address concerns.

## Proactive efforts

PEERS at Immaculate Mary are especially alert to issues that affect the quality of life and care of the people they live with and are often proactive in addressing matters of concern.

Like her fellow resident ombudsmen at the center, Elizabeth Tyre has a sign outside her room identifying as a PEER who is available to help with residents' concerns. In addition, she is proactive about reaching out to those who might need information and assistance.

Recently, when conversing with a new resident, Tyre discovered that the woman was unaware of the scope of social and recreational happenings in her new home. "I let her know

that there are a lot of activities available," Tyre said. "She could put herself on a list for going out to dinner. She could come to bingo, play Trivial Pursuit games and come to musical programs ... I encouraged her to get involved and do things she enjoys."

Before moving into the facility, PEER Johanna Blodgett had volunteered for many years at its former gift shop. Now, as a resident, she has a much different perspective. "I see what it's like when you can't do for yourself," Blodgett said. "You've got to fight to keep yourself going. I think the PEER program is a wonderful thing. You learn a lot of things that can allow you to help yourself and others."

Carol Whatley became trained as a PEER soon after she moved to the center a year ago. "I felt it was important to be able to get involved on behalf of the people right around me and to have an impact on the system here," Whatley said. The center serves as a voting station in its neighborhood, and she is well known for encouraging others to vote as a way for them to make a difference.

When Tyre was in isolation due to a medical issue, she was confined to a private room and unable to have visitors. "Carol would poke her head in the door to say 'Hello' and ask how I was and if I needed anything," said Tyre, who resides on the same floor as Whatley.

Loneliness can be a major issue for people in long-term care, these PEERS said. Many residents may not have family nearby or rarely receive outside visitors. "Sometimes I hear that someone is very ill and not going to make it. I'll go and sit with them. I'll hold their

• continued on page 14



## Recipe Box

# Kale chickpea stew: Tasty result of communal soup-making venture

Replete with protein, vitamins and minerals, kale chickpea stew is a popular recipe that's often made by volunteers in a communal soup-making venture sponsored by Food & Company, a project of Ralston Center's Age-Friendly West Philadelphia initiative. The center partners with host sites, including houses of worship and senior community centers, for the soup-making project. Food & Company volunteers often cook up large vats of soup that yield up to 120 servings, then take the food to homebound West Philadelphia friends and neighbors. The center partners with community organizations to distribute any remaining soup to other seniors in need. The amounts in the recipe below have been adjusted for home use. You can multiply the ingredients, if you're cooking for a crowd.

## Kale chickpea stew

(Servings: 4-6)

### Ingredients:

8 cups kale, finely chopped  
4 tomatoes, diced  
6 carrots, chopped  
1 medium onion, diced  
32 oz. vegetable, beef or chicken broth  
5 cloves garlic, minced  
1 15 oz. can chickpeas, drained  
½ tbsp. chili powder  
¼ tsp. cumin  
2 tbsp. olive oil  
Salt & pepper to taste

### Preparation:

The preparation of this recipe works best if all the ingredients are chopped ahead of time with onions, garlic and carrots first. Heat oil in a pot over medium heat. Add diced onions to the pot. Stir onions in oil until translucent and tender. Once onions are translucent, add carrots and garlic and cook vegetables until tender.



Courtesy of Ralston Center

Add tomatoes and stock and simmer cook until blended.

Slowly add kale, cumin and chili powder.

Cook soup partially covered, until kale is tender (about 25 minutes). Reduce heat to low.

Add chickpeas. Gently simmer uncovered for approximately 5-10 minutes.

Season with salt and pepper to taste and enjoy!

\* \* \*

Ralston Center is a nonprofit organization providing health and social services to older West Philadelphians. For more information about its Food & Company soup-making project, call the center at 215-386-2984, email [jrussell@ralstoncenter.org](mailto:jrussell@ralstoncenter.org) or visit [ralstoncenter.org](http://ralstoncenter.org).

## Crossword puzzle solution

(See page 19 for clues.)



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# Time to do taxes: Information, free help available to prepare your returns

The deadline to file your 2017 federal and Pennsylvania state income tax returns is Tuesday, April 17. This is the date when most taxpayers must either file an extension or submit their returns and pay any back-owed taxes to avoid penalty and interest charges. (If you file for an extension, your return is due Oct. 15.) There's a two-day extension from the traditional deadline this year because April 15 falls on a Sunday. The federal filing deadline would normally be moved to the following Monday, but that day is Emancipation Day – a legal holiday in the District of Columbia, which by tax law affects the filing deadline nationwide. State tax filing deadlines vary.

## What happens if I don't file by the deadline?

Taxpayers may request a six-month extension by efileing the IRS Form 4868 at [irs.gov](http://irs.gov) or [efile.com](http://efile.com). If you file for an extension, you can prepare and electronically file (efile) a 2017 tax return until Oct. 15. After that date, the IRS will no longer accept 2017 returns electronically, and you will need to paper file your return.

An extension gives you more time only to file your return; it is not an extension of time

to pay your tax bill. You will only be granted an extension if you don't have all the information or documentation you need to prepare a return.

Federal and state returns filed after the deadline will be subject to interest and penalties. The IRS does not have a deadline for the filing of overdue returns from previous years. But in order to claim a tax refund for a certain year, you must file a return for that year within three years of the original due date. If you wait longer, any refund is forfeited.

Past due taxes, however, do not expire. If you owe taxes from a previous year, the IRS may charge you additional penalties and interest for filing past the deadline and also for paying late. The amount of the penalties is generally based on the amount of taxes owed. Late filing penalties are generally more severe than those for late payment, so you should try to file your taxes on time, even if you owe money and can't pay right away. Many of your tax preparation questions can be answered on the IRS's website, which provides a wealth of tax information. Tips and information specific to the needs of retirees and other seniors can be found at [irs.gov/individuals/seniors-&-retirees](http://irs.gov/individuals/seniors-&-retirees).

## What if I need help to prepare my taxes?

If you need help to prepare and file your tax returns, the following resources are available. Contact the provider directly to inquire about eligibility and locations for free tax preparation services, to make an appointment, or to find out what documents you need to provide.

- **AARP Foundation Tax-Aide** offers services including free tax preparation for low- to moderate-income taxpayers at 13 locations in Philadelphia. The program is targeted to people 50-plus who can't afford a tax preparation service. For more information, including locations and answers to frequently asked questions, go to [aarp.org/taxaide](http://aarp.org/taxaide) or call 1-888-OUR-AARP (687-2277).
- **The IRS** offers services including free tax preparation through two programs that serve income-eligible taxpayers, older adults, and people with disabilities or limited English. These programs are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other convenient locations.
- **The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)** program offers free tax help to people who generally make \$54,000 or less, people with



iStock

disabilities, and limited-English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their returns. IRS-certified volunteers provide free basic tax return preparation with electronic filing to qualified individuals.

- **The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE)** program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 and older, and specializes in questions about pensions and retirement-related issues specific to seniors. The IRS-certified volunteers who provide tax counseling are often retired individuals associated with nonprofit organizations that receive grants from the IRS.

To locate a VITA or TCE site near you or for more information, call 800-906-9887 or visit [irs.gov](http://irs.gov) and click on "Get free tax preparation help."

Sources: [IRS.gov](http://IRS.gov) and [efile.com](http://efile.com)

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**The deadline to file your 2017 federal and Pennsylvania state income tax returns is Tuesday, April 17.**

## Care advocates

- continued from page 12

hand and pray with them while they are dying or after they pass, and I'll stay until the family comes," Sauer said.

"We all care for one another," Tyre said.

"We look out for each other," said Sauer.

"There is love here," Tyre added.

In Philadelphia, there are currently four long-term care facilities involved with the PEER ombudsman program and a total of 23 PEER volunteers, according to Lynda Pickett, PCA assistant director of in-home support, ombudsman and volunteer services.

PDA allocates funds to PCA for the LTC Ombudsman Program in Philadelphia. PCA

subcontracts with two organizations to provide ombudsman services in Philadelphia. For more information on the PEER and other LTC ombudsman programs or to request ombudsman services for your or a loved one's facility, contact the program appropriate to your geographic area:

- **South, West or North Philadelphia:** Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE): 100 S. Broad St., Suite 1500; 215-545-5728 or toll-free: 1-800-356-3606; [carie.org](http://carie.org)
- **Northeast or Northwest Philadelphia:** Center in the Park: 5818 Germantown Ave.; 215-844-1829; [centerinthepark.org](http://centerinthepark.org)

Marcia Z. Siegal is public relations manager for Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA).



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## Colonoscopies

• continued from page 1

inserts a thin, flexible tube called a colonoscope into the colon, or large bowel. The tube has a tiny camera that lets the doctor check the colon for cancer as well as for polyps, which are abnormal growths that could become cancerous. "Polyps that are encountered can be removed during the procedure," Green said. "It's an advantage of colonoscopies: You not only check for polyps, but you can remove any that you find."

Doctors help ensure a good colonoscopy with pre-planning. "I see the patient in the office beforehand and give the person a thorough checkup," Greenberg said. "I make sure that all medications are appropriately adjusted. For example, if patients have diabetes and take insulin, we discuss the necessary changes in dosage because they won't be eating prior to the colonoscopy."

Much of the quality of the colonoscopy depends on the thoroughness of the prep. "If the colon is well prepared, then I can see the polyps and remove them," Green said. "That's why it's important to follow the instructions for the prep."

Most colonoscopies are quick and safe, according to the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE), but difficulties may arise. About a third of patients have minor side effects, such as bloating or discomfort, after an outpatient colonoscopy. These symptoms generally subside fairly quickly.

### The risks

Colonoscopy patients may experience other, more serious problems. Nutritionist Kaayla T. Daniel, Ph.D., warned that "intestinal flora are disrupted by a colonoscopy because the procedure requires a thorough washing out of the large intestine ... and that can contribute to irregularity, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's and other diseases."

A colonoscopy may also result in an irregular heartbeat or insufficient oxygen in the body. At times, bleeding may occur from the removal of polyps, according to a 2013 article by Karen Rowan, health editor of Livescience. For that reason, it's critical to let doctors know ahead of time if you're taking blood thinners.

The greatest risk of a colonoscopy is a perforation, or tear, of the bowel, which often requires surgical repair. Estimates of the in-

cidence of perforations vary, but ASGE puts it at 2.8 per 1,000 procedures. The likelihood of suffering a perforation increases with age, some doctors note. In addition, older patients tend to have other illnesses that may leave them more vulnerable to complications.

### An individual choice

The U.S. Multi-Society Task Force of Colorectal Cancer does not specify an age at which older patients should no longer receive colonoscopies, but the organization has stated that the incidence of colorectal cancer "continues to rise with increasing age."

"It's not a one-size-fits-all scenario," Green said of the question of when and whether to stop receiving colonoscopies. "The decision should be individualized and arrived at after a discussion between the doctor and the patient."

Rowan points out that screening tools other than colonoscopies may be adequate in some cases. One such tool, fecal occult blood testing (FOBT), involves using a chemical that detects blood in the stool. Your health care provider gives you a test kit to be used at home. The kit includes a stick or brush

you use to obtain a small amount of stool. You then return the test to the doctor or a lab to be tested for blood. This procedure is not invasive and doesn't involve the preparation required by the colonoscopy, nor the risks. On the other hand, it doesn't let the doctor see where any blood might be coming from. Also, the doctor can't remove any polyps.

With another option, the flexible sigmoidoscopy, the doctor uses a short, thin, flexible tube lighted at the end to check the rectum and the lower third of the colon for polyps and cancer. This test, sometimes used with the FOBT, doesn't require that the entire colon be prepared. Instead, patients use enemas and limit eating prior to the procedure. Patients often undergo this screening without sedation. However, the doctor doesn't see the whole colon.

Medicare and many other insurance plans cover a range of colorectal screenings. Check on your coverage beforehand, and consult your doctor to see which test best meets your needs.

*Native Philadelphian Constance Garcia-Barrio writes about many topics, including black history.*

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## Critics' Corner

# 'The Last Word' handles a 'grave situation'

By M.L. Polak

For a moment or two while meditating recently, my mind skipped back to a movie I had just seen about the meaning of life. On the surface, you would not assume its interest is in such weighty matters as care of the soul. However, in "The Last Word," the clever 2017 comedic drama directed by the great Mark Pellington, Shirley MacLaine plays Harriet, a brashly unpleasant retired businesswoman and control freak who suddenly realizes she has wasted her entire life and accomplished zilch, nothing, nada. She's certain no one will ever say anything nice about her when she dies. Harriet believes she will have an embarrassingly crappy obituary to show for an empty, meaningless life badly lived because she has been so shallow and selfish in her pursuit of things that don't matter in the end.

Basically, the movie consists of Harriet performing an intervention on herself, preemptively writing her own obituary to give herself the last word. She decides it's never too late to accomplish something helpful to others and useful to society for which she may indeed

be remembered fondly after her death. Toward that end, she cultivates a young reporter named Anne Sherman (played by Amanda Seyfried) as her sidekick and attempts to reinvent herself by taking on this smart and sassy young urban intern as part of her team. Harriet forces Anne to listen to her life lessons as she attempts to remedy her own – shall we say – grave situation.

I confess: I have a fondness for churlish protagonists. And Harriet represents one of those really obnoxious, off-putting anti-heroine-type characters that are vaguely popular from time to time as a plot device. The meaner they are, the more pleasure viewers get as their character arc changes and their personality improves, and even their very essence transforms. As with Kevin Kline in "Life As a House" and Jack Nicholson in "As Good as It Gets," you'll hate them in the morning, but I guarantee that you'll grow to love them before bedtime. You might even shed a tear at the thought of Harriet's final departure.

*M.L. Polak is an award-winning writer, editor, cartoonist, editor, seniors coach and filmmaker.*

## Library volunteer

• continued from page 4

"One little boy, a charmer with beautiful eyes, asked if he could have an extra reward one day," she said. "It was hard to say 'No,' but I had to be fair. The kids don't automatically respect you because you're an adult. You have to earn it by your commitment to the child." Blender, who with her husband fostered two teens through Jewish Family and Children's Services, doesn't shrink from challenges. "They can keep us seniors sharp," she said of her young charges.

The companionship of volunteering goes beyond the school. "We go out to lunch, we talk, we get into each other's business," she laughed. Tutors also help one another in other ways. When Blender had knee surgery in 2016, she received cards, visits and treats

from fellow volunteers to lift her spirits.

Besides tutoring, Blender is busy on an education committee of POWER, an interfaith social justice group; as a member of Northwest Village Network, a group focused on helping seniors age in place; and as the coordinator of Wissahickon Village Cohousing, a group working to create an intentional residential community.

Blender's volunteer work keeps her eager to go out and help in her community. She wants to keep learning so she can give more to the students. "We retired people can use our skills to volunteer in our neighborhoods," she said. "We give our time and knowledge and get a lot in return."

*Native Philadelphian Constance Garcia-Barrio writes about many topics, including black history.*



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# The candy lady at the Cross Keys Theater

By Dorothy Stanaitis

The news was so exciting, so stunning, that we could hardly absorb it.

Nannie, our beloved grandmother, had a job. She would be going out of the house to work. And the job that she had taken was wonderful beyond our wildest dreams.

Nannie would be the candy lady behind the counter at the Cross Keys Movie Theater on Market Street near 59th.

Along with the general World War II shortages of chocolate, sugar, coconut and butter, my sister and I suffered from a chronic shortage of funds, which made for a fairly sweet-starved existence.

When we had enough money for the Saturday matinee at our local Frolic Movie Theater, we seldom had enough left over for a treat unless we pooled our funds and split a 5-cent candy bar.

Those wonderful 1940s candy bars were big enough to provide us each with a large chunk of candy. They were never large enough, however, to satisfy our insatiable appetite for

sweets. But now, our own grandmother, who loved to spoil and indulge us, would be the keeper of the Cross Keys candy counter; and we couldn't wait to visit her there.

The problem was that the Cross Keys Theater was farther from home than we were allowed to go. Our mother's argument was that since we were allowed to walk to the many other movie theaters along 52nd Street, we shouldn't whine about going to the Cross Keys. And if we were so eager to visit our grandmother, we could wait until the weekend when we would all go to her house as a family. The Pennsylvania blue laws that closed most stores and other establishments on Sunday would ensure that Nannie would be home then.

Well, we were always glad to visit our grandmother, and we really were surrounded by many good movie theaters within walking distance – the Apollo, Adelphi, the Frolic, Belmont, the Nixon and the State. But, of course, our real interest wasn't the movies, or even a family visit. We wanted to see the candy lady at the Cross Keys.

And we did. After some lengthy and skillful negotiations that involved our promises to be very careful crossing streets and just a little whining, we were given permission to walk to Nannie's house and go with her to the Cross Keys for a Saturday matinee. After the show, we would go home with Nannie for supper. After it got dark, Uncle Charlie could walk us back to our house when Nannie returned to the Cross Keys for the evening show. We were wild with excitement at the thought of our adventure and the prospect of visiting the candy counter. And we weren't disappointed, either.

We were thrilled when Nannie took us into the theater without even having to purchase tickets. In the employees' cloak room, she slipped into a natty maroon smock, then introduced us to the manager and to the three uniformed ushers. We were impressed to meet such important people. Finally, she took



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us behind the candy counter. It was almost overwhelming. We were each allowed to choose a whole candy bar for ourselves. For once, we wouldn't have to share. But to choose from that wonderful array of treats was agonizing, and took so much time that MovieTone News had started before one of the ushers could lead us to our seats.

Skilled in the art of slowly nibbling half a candy bar, we were able to make our whole bars last well into the feature film. We were so happy watching the show and savoring our treat.

I don't remember the name of the movie we watched or even which candy bar I ultimately chose, but I'll always remember the sweetness of that special Saturday matinee courtesy of the Cross Keys candy lady.

*Dorothy Stanaitis presents programs based on her work as a Philadelphia Tour Guide.*

## Plastic bag mats

• continued from page 1

She notes that 500 to 700 bags are needed to create one mat. "I started going to the Acme," she says, "and they were like, 'Here comes the bag lady,' and they would give me bags that customers had recycled, as well as boxes of store bags that had some minor defects."

A resident of the Chestnut Hill Towers apartment complex for 18 years, Munro laughs that she opens her front door to find bags full of bags.

Munro asked her students to bring bags to Center on the Hill, where executive director Leslie Lefer ended up seeing a finished mat and thought it would make a great volunteer project.

Eighteen seniors signed up for the first meeting at Center on the Hill to organize volunteers to help make the mats, and Lefer had to change the location when more than twice that number showed up. At the second meeting, 50 volunteers came out to help. Now the volunteers meet twice a month to work on the mats. Munro, who had been busy making eight mats over the previous six months, enjoys sharing the process for making the mats



Courtesy of Center on the Hill

**A plastic bag mat provides a moisture barrier for the homeless.**

with seniors.

"First we straighten [the bags] out and use a rotary cutter to cut the handles off the top and the seams at the bottom," says Munro, a longtime crafter. "Then we use oversized needles to crochet the bags, which we call 'plarn' for plastic yarn. At first, I was getting creative with patterns, but then I realized that they don't need to be pretty and perfect if it gets the job done in terms of giving the homeless a lightweight mat that is clean and keeps them off of the wet ground."

On a recent outing with a friend, Munro saw a line of homeless people waiting for food outside of Trinity Church on Rittenhouse Square, and the pair pulled over and

handed out the eight mats she had made.

"There is something special in being able to hand a mat directly to someone and give them a hug of hope," Munro says. "They were beyond grateful. I just wish I had had five times the number of mats. In fact, I rushed home and

started another mat, which I've almost completed. I can see they're making a difference. The men and women loved them, especially the carrying straps that make them easy to tote around."

Munro notes that the mats are durable, waterproof and bugproof. They can also be hosed down when necessary.

"The crochet stitches reinforce the strength of the plastic," she says. "I try to make each one a little different with different-colored bags. The women want the pretty ones with yellow and blue stripes."

At the next meeting, Munro planned to urge the volunteers to get as many mats finished as quickly as possible.

"Hopefully, I'll be able to motivate them," Munro says. "If I can adequately describe the faces of gratitude I saw, I'm sure we will be on our way toward getting more mats out there on the streets."

Munro is a firm believer in finding something to do in terms of volunteering that speaks to you while giving joy to someone less fortunate.

"I feel blessed, being able to volunteer and give back," Munro says. "Life is so great; you never know what you are going to get into. There are so many volunteer opportunities out there. If you have a computer, just Google 'projects for seniors' and find something that interests you. Some people like to volunteer with children; others like crafts. Whatever it is, just jump in and do it. Life is not a dress rehearsal. We are in a performance, and we need to step up onto the stage."

\* \* \*

For more information on making mats at Center on the Hill, email Leslie Lefer at [llefer@chestnuthillpres.org](mailto:llefer@chestnuthillpres.org) or call 215-247-4654.

*Author, speaker and writer Barbara Sherf tells the stories of businesses and individuals.*



## Don's Column

# Flying high on Eagles Super Bowl win



By Don Harrison

It's been less than two months since our underdog Philadelphia Eagles (or "Iggles," as some Philadelphians call them) won their first Super Bowl – but the unparalleled excitement lingers.

And understandably so.

Being a Philadelphia sports fan has been a sequence of disappointments over at least two generations. It's no wonder the Super Bowl victory parade attracted so many – and such jubilant – people.

Our city's beloved sports teams have won multiple World Series and basketball and Stanley Cup titles, but they have been few and far between. Not to mention that those wins were vastly outnumbered by near-misses in the playoffs or finals.

Pro football was something we were indifferent to years ago. The college game drew much more attention. Penn was a powerhouse at one time; in fact, temporary stands had to be erected at Franklin Field to handle the overflow.

But pro football, enabled by TV, gained popularity until it became America's most-watched sport, monopolizing the nation's Sundays – and now our Mondays and Thursdays, too. All the while, Eagles fans were on the outside looking in, watching other teams win the honors, watching other populaces celebrate.

After the Eagles franchise was established in 1933, the team went on to win three NFL

championships in less than 30 years – in 1948, 1949 and 1960. But those wins all occurred before the first Super Bowl was played, in 1967. Thus, the current-era gold standard eluded us.

That is, until this year. It took 52 years, but this year's Super Bowl parade was in Philadelphia, and our fans jammed the city's streets. Underdogs no longer, the Iggles show promise of such parades becoming what Coach Pederson called "the norm" – not a fluke.

Maybe there will be more Super Bowls and more victory parades in our near future. But there will never be quite such joy in the city; this one, because it was the first – and the most unlikely – will be the most memorable.

## A wall that was

The Berlin Wall didn't come down all at once. During a Cold War thaw, as Germany reunited, it came down bit by bit. Entrepreneurs rented screwdrivers to souvenir hunters who were looking for a literal piece of history. In fact, I brought home a chunk of it myself from an Eastern European tour undertaken by U.S. journalists. Some of us were passing a chicken-wire-covered section of what had been the wall when we saw a VoPo (from the once-feared Volkspolizei East German police force) on the other side.

"What is your job?" someone asked.

"I am a tourist attraction," he replied.

*Milestones Editor Emeritus Don Harrison was deputy editor of the Daily News opinion pages and assistant managing editor and city editor of the Philadelphia Bulletin.*

## Crossword

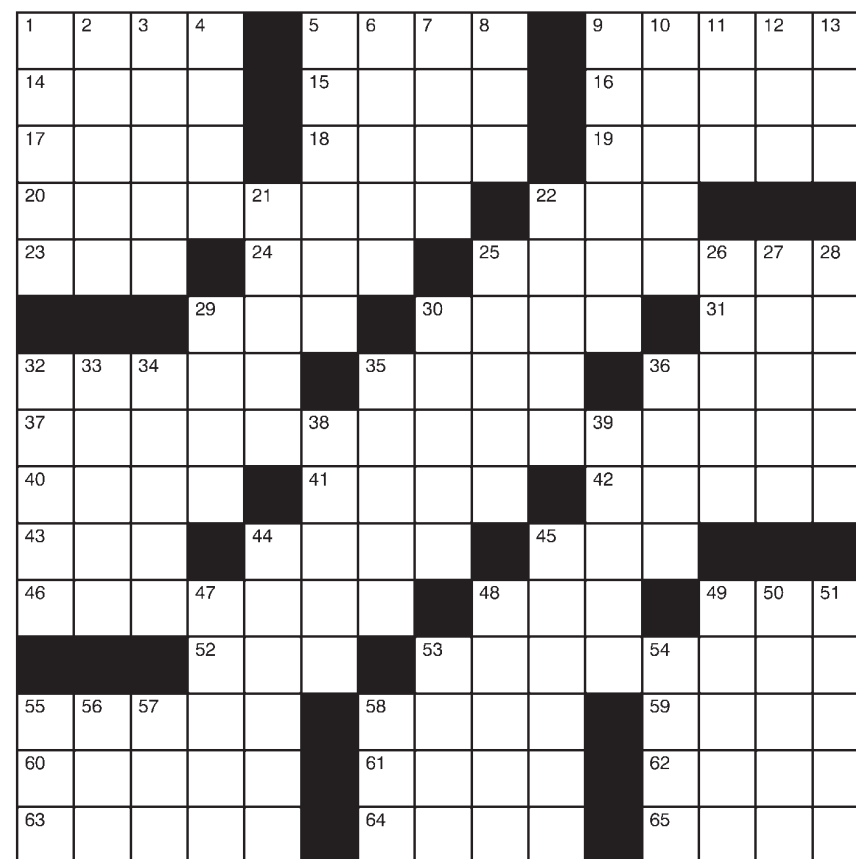
# Marine Life

## Across

- |  |                              |                             |                                 |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Jason's ship                             | 22 Malt beverage             | 40 Aspirations              | submarine                       |
| 5 Feel pain                                | 23 Understanding             | 41 Feedbag contents         | 55 Woodland deity               |
| 9 Idaho's capital                          | 24 Mine output               | 42 Extreme                  | 58 Clark Kent's fellow employee |
| 14 Aviary resident                         | 25 First cup-winning yacht   | 43 Diminutive noun ending   | 59 SA tree                      |
| 15 Lure                                    | 29 Possessive pronoun        | 44 Night prowlers           | 60 Redolence                    |
| 16 Activist actor                          | 30 Room or pen               | 45 Free from                | 61 Green Gables girl            |
| 17 Away from the wind                      | 31 Avuncular nickname        | 46 Heyerdahl's craft        | 62 Ugandan dictator             |
| 18 Hawaiian city                           | 32 Heidi's creator           | 48 One of the Three Stooges | 63 Instrument of 55 Across      |
| 19 Stair part                              | 35 The south of France       | 49 Greek letter             | 64 Tare                         |
| 20 First commercially successful steamboat | 36 Seaweed                   | 52 Owns                     | 65 1492 vessel                  |
|  | 37 Bogart-Hepburn conveyance | 53 Captain Nemo's           |                                 |

## Down

- |                                 |                                 |                                      |                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Startle, with take            | 11 Power people                 | 32 Host of <i>Unsolved Mysteries</i> | 47 Aromatic herb            |
| 2 Lunar depression              | 12 Notice                       | 33 S.S. Van Dyne's detective Vance   | 48 1898 American battleship |
| 3 Envy's color                  | 13 Stray                        | 34 Arab republic                     | 49 Oily resin               |
| 4 River of central Europe       | 21 Theme                        | 35 Home of the Dolphins              | 50 Shroud of ____           |
| 5 Detests                       | 22 Speedily: arch.              | 36 ____ Lang Syne                    | 51 Yoga position            |
| 6 Captain Queeg's mutinous ship | 25 Acting father & son          | 38 Chess pieces                      | 53 Not a soul               |
| 7 Weapon handle                 | 26 Cay                          | 39 Hushed                            | 54 Russian czar             |
| 8 DDE's command                 | 27 Basketball player            | 44 Royal adornments                  | 55 Enervate                 |
| 9 Whiskey ingredient            | 28 Iowa community               | 45 Alerted                           | 56 Greek shipping magnate   |
| 10 Willow                       | 29 Security packets?            |                                      | 57 Acme                     |
|                                 | 30 Early inhabitants of Britain |                                      | 58 Order's sidekick         |



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