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JANUARY 2015



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- Recognizing and fighting **AGE DISCRIMINATION** at work



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# STRIKE!

## OLDER ADULTS TAKE TO THE LANES

BY KAREN FINUCAN CLARKSON



PHOTODISC/THINKSTOCK

**F**our frames into what could have become a perfect game, Jerome West leaves a pin standing. Fellow bowlers commiserate, shaking their heads. But after West takes down the remaining pin, earning a spare, there are high fives all around. “All the people here are so nice,” said the 52-year-old Gaithersburg resident. “You can’t find a more supportive group.”

Each Monday, West and about 20 other older adults gather at Bowl America in Gaithersburg for an afternoon of fun and camaraderie. Known as Senior Pin Busters, the weekly program is in its sixth year. “We’re not here for averages but to get some exercise and socialize,” said Pam Truxal, recreation program supervisor for the City of Gaithersburg Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture. Although administered by the city, Senior Pin Busters is open to anyone 50 or older. The \$8.60 fee covers three games and includes ball usage, shoe rental and light snacks.

On a cold Monday in November, West is hot. He bowls a 231, 200 and 219—a perfect game is 300—all better than his 190 average. But as much as he enjoys bowling well, West said he likes helping others improve their game. “It was great when my buddy Ed finally got his 200 game,” said West, calling 200 a milestone. “He’s tried different things, and they finally came together.”

Ed Forrest, 70, has been bowling for about 18 months. He bowls for fun and appreciates the support of his fellow Pin Busters. “Everyone cheers for everyone. It doesn’t matter if you have a bad game. This isn’t a competition,” said the Gaithersburg resident.

Some older adults do bowl competitively, including Jerome L. Jackson, who has won medals at the Northern Virginia Senior Olympics and Virginia Senior Games. The 66-year-old Fairfax, Va., resident began bowling in 1973, but after joining the military, games became few and far between. “There were so many things going on in my work life that I didn’t get an opportunity to do the fun stuff,” he said. “I started to bowl more regularly in 2011, after I retired ... I wanted to fill the time with something that’s happy and good for you.” While his highest score, a 269, came in the 1970s, Jackson has bowled a 236 since his return to the sport four years ago. “I carry an average of about 165.”





KAREN FINUCAN CLARKSON

**Jim Kelley (left) of Germantown and Jerome West (right) of Gaithersburg, flash their Bowl America rewards cards, which give them discounts at the Gaithersburg bowling alley.**

“If I weren’t bowling, I’d probably be watching the boob tube,” said Audrey Huthwaite, a 65-year-old resident from Springfield, Va. “It gets me off the couch and allows me to catch up with friends and meet new people.” Huthwaite, who began bowling with her parents as a child, has played in an Annandale, Va., league with co-workers from the Defense Information Systems Agency for four decades. “It amazes me when I think back and realize how many Tuesday nights that is.” A gold medalist in the 2014 Northern Virginia Senior Olympics, Huthwaite carries a 160 average. “Bowling is very humbling and somewhat challenging. You can bowl a 150 game and then, in the next game, you can’t hit 100.”

That doesn’t mean it’s difficult to learn, even later in life. Kathy Kelley had bowled just once before her husband convinced her to join Pin Busters. “There always are people willing to give you tips and advice,” said the 68-year-old Germantown resident. “I’m not very coordinated, so it took me a while to get the hang of it. Even today I’m not great. But, I like the sport and there’s such wonderful camaraderie.”

Jim Kelley, Kathy’s husband, is the only original Pin Buster still bowling. He’s someone others turn to for advice. “When I started bowling, I worried about my score. Now, I worry about everyone else’s,” said 71-year-old Jim Kelley, whose high game is a 242. “We all support each other and encourage each other to do their best.”

While there are books, websites, online videos and instructors to help novice bowlers, many older adults learn the game from their peers, said Jackson. “Having someone who knows how to bowl and give you pointers is golden,” he said. Bowling basics are

easy to pick up. “There are arrows and dots on the lane. If you are consistent and swing the ball the same way across the same spot and watch where the ball goes, you’ll begin to figure things out.”

“Bowling is not overly physically demanding or high impact,” Huthwaite said, which makes it a great game for seniors. “You can stand at the line and throw the ball if you can’t do an approach.” Balls come in a variety of weights and holes can be drilled to accommodate swollen fingers. “Most women use balls in the 12-14 pound range while most men do the max, 16 pounds. But I do have some male friends who have gone down to 15.”

Those new to the sport may rent shoes and use balls provided by the bowling alley. Those who stick with the game often buy their own. A basic pair of shoes will run about \$30, a cost easily recouped in a couple of months for those who bowl weekly, noted Huthwaite. A ball, with holes drilled to match one’s grip, can be had for less than \$100. Then there is the cost to play. “The senior leagues I know of average \$10 per night. But in leagues like the ones I’m in, fees run between \$20 and \$25.” That, said Huthwaite, is because there is prize money.

Bowling also is a great intergenerational game, said West, who has five grandchildren. “I like to bring them bowling. My oldest granddaughter, who is 14, is pretty good,” he said.

“What I love about bowling is that you don’t have to be perfect,” said Ruth Sentelle, a 76-year-old Gaithersburg resident. “Sure, it takes some practice and it can be frustrating a times. But it’s such fun and I’ve made some great friends. That’s really why I bowl.”



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# A PATH TO EMPLOYMENT

## THE CAREER GATEWAY! SERVES AS A SENIOR JOB PORTAL

BY KAREN FINUCAN  
CLARKSON

**T**he numbers kept dwindling each time The Career Gateway! class of September 2014 met for coffee. And that's a good thing because it meant people were finding jobs. The program, which has served more than 270 older adults since its inception in 2010, provides job seekers and career changers with the knowledge, tools and support needed to find employment in today's job market.

"While the basics of a job search have not changed—there's the process of gaining self-awareness, creating a resume, networking, interviewing, and receiving and negotiating an offer—the manner of doing a search has," said Gordon Silcox, a Fairfax, Va.-based job-search and career decision-making consultant who crafted The Career Gateway! curriculum, as well as an accompanying manual for the Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) in Rockville. "The program provides a better perspective on how to go about a job search in this digital age."

That, agree members of the September class, is one of the program's greatest strengths. "I didn't realize how much social media plays into the job search these days," said Virginia Jones of Washington Grove, who is now marketing herself and her job qualifications online.

The power of digital and in-person networking was a revelation to Greg Hardin of Silver Spring. "As soon as I started contacting friends and colleagues, things started happening and my confidence began to build," he said.

Offered five times a year, The Career Gateway! is a comprehensive and intensive program that provides individualized atten-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CAREER GATEWAY!

**The Career Gateway! program has served nearly 300 older adults since its inception in 2010.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CAREER GATEWAY!

**The Career Gateway! is a 30-hour class open to anyone 50 or older, regardless of faith or residency.**

tion. It covers virtually every aspect of the job search, according to Ellen Greenberg, director of the JCA's Center for Information & Education, delving into specific areas of concern to older adults.

Benefits of senior-only participation are the frank discussions. "There is more openness and conversation about age discrimination, which usually is the No. 1 concern of the people who come to the class," said Silcox. "It's probably always been there, but now we know how to better address it legally ... and help job seekers understand what their rights are." Tips are provided to help participants create resumes, cover letters and online profiles that draw attention to their qualifications rather than their age.

The 30-hour class—open to anyone 50 or older, regardless of faith or residency—is partially funded through a Montgomery County program for seniors, The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the JCA. "It's the best \$75 I have ever spent," said Jones, noting that the class provided her with direction and focus.

Members of the September class were, in many ways, a typical representation of those who turn to The Career Gateway! for assistance. They hailed from Prince George's, Montgomery and Fairfax counties. Several had lost or quit their jobs, some had left the workforce recently to care for ailing parents or decades ago to raise children, and a few were employed but looking to try their hand at something different. It was somewhat comforting to Jones and several of her classmates to discover they weren't alone. "I liked knowing that there are other individuals in the same situation as I am—unemployed," she said.

Silcox said it wasn't unusual for people to come to the class with shaken self-esteem. "But as I watch people from the





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CAREER GATEWAY!

**Frank discussions are among the benefits of senior-only participation at The Career Gateway!.**

first day of class to the fifth day, there's a significant, palpable change in their understanding and appreciation of what they have to offer an employer." Identifying those assets requires introspection, which is accomplished through personal reflection. The skills and abilities unearthed during that exercise inform the development of a resume, LinkedIn profile, two-minute networking speech and responses to potential interview questions.

The Career Gateway! draws on volunteers from the local business community to review participants' resumes and conduct a mock interview, which is videotaped and critiqued by classmates. A human relations professional and LinkedIn specialist also share their expertise with the group.

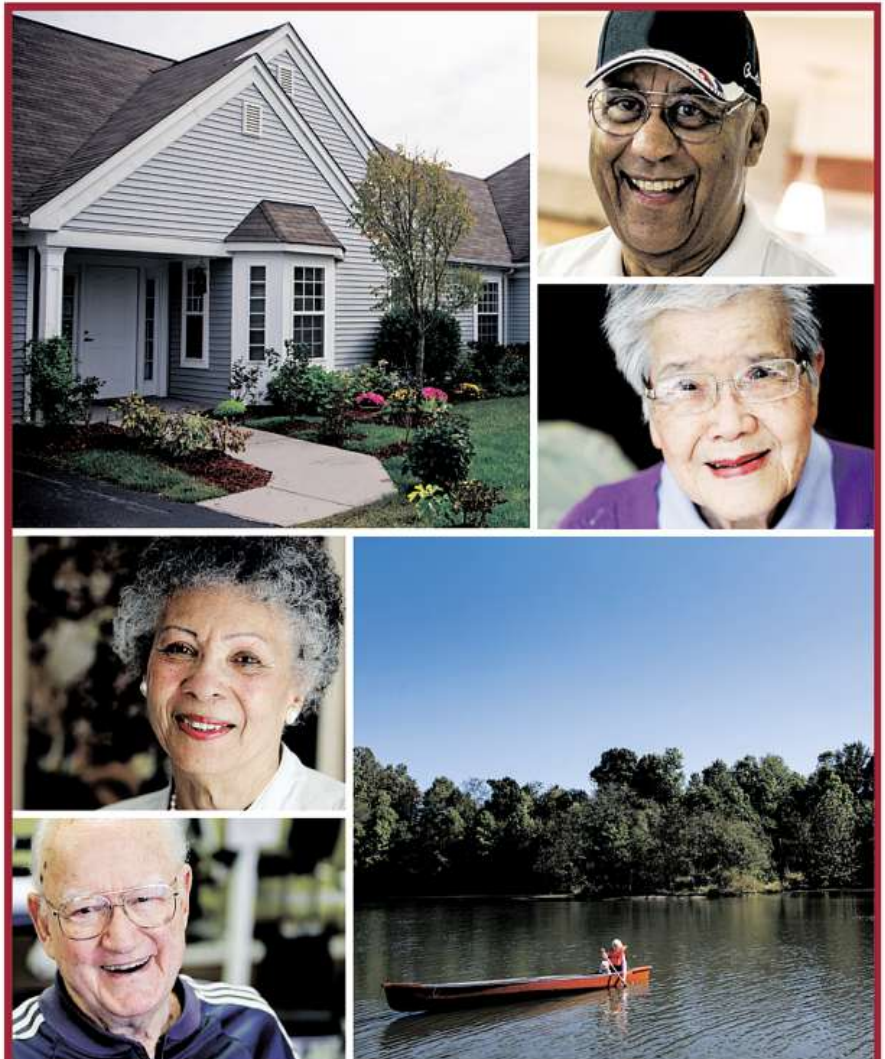
When the fifth and final day of class rolls around, participants have an enhanced understanding of what the job search requires and the basic tools to forge ahead. What they generally don't have is a job. That's where Job Club comes in. Within a month of graduating from The Career Gateway! class, participants gather twice as a group. "The end goal is to have students develop a specific, actionable game plan for their career search and to motivate them and hold them to it," said Margo L. Smith, who facilitates Job Club. "We work on tweaking job-seeking skills, perfecting an elevator speech and enhancing networking skills."

The real strength of Job Club is the support network "People begin to feel connected to each other and develop professional friendships," said Smith. "The feedback they get from each other is meaningful."

**The Career Gateway! holds classes five times a year, from September through March, in Rockville. Each session consists of five six-hour classes over two weeks. The cost is \$75. The next session runs Feb. 23–March 4. To learn more, visit [accessjca.org/programs/senior-employment](http://accessjca.org/programs/senior-employment), or call 301-255-4200 or 703-425-0999.**

So is the feedback they get from their mentors. Once Job Club concludes, each participant is matched with a volunteer mentor. "We don't just leave them hanging," said Smith. "We want everyone who goes through this program to get a job." The mentor serves as a sounding board for the job seeker, providing advice and encouragement. The relationship lasts until the mentee finds a job, though some persist beyond that.

Members of the September class of The Career Gateway! have made steady progress. By early December, three of the 11 participants had found jobs, and three others were awaiting callbacks from interviews. A few were still researching potential careers and the two that were self-employed were trying to find time to kick their search into high gear. "Some people think that just by taking the course something magical will happen and a job will fall into their lap," said Smith. "But a job search is work. It's the people who stay the course and work the system that they learned who eventually get a job."



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# AGE DISCRIMINATION



CREATAS/THINKSTOCK

## ◆ How to identify it in the workplace and contest it

BY SCOTT HARRIS

**N**ot unlike bias based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, age discrimination can foster a toxic workplace, keep its victims from advancing as quickly as their younger colleagues and, in those extreme cases, lead to being passed over for a promotion or even being unlawfully terminated.

Local jurisdictions are no more immune to the problem than any other area of the country. According to data from the federal

Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2020, workers 55 and older will comprise 25 percent of the American workforce, up from about 20 percent in 2010.

The causes for that increase are numerous, interconnected and not at all unfamiliar.

“There is increasing participation of people 55 years old and older,” said Kenneth Saunders, director of Fairfax County’s Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs. “Fifty-five is the new 40 in a lot of workplaces, and these folks have not exited the workforce. Life expectancy is longer

and people are working longer. You have service and technology-based jobs that are not as physically demanding. Labor is no longer as much of a barrier.”

The nation’s economic downturn in 2008 also lengthened many careers, as retirement accounts and earnings shrunk. With more older Americans in the workforce, discrimination incidents are also on the rise.

“Complaints have definitely been trending upward over the last five years,” said Loretta Garcia, a labor attorney and

manager of enforcement programs for the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights. “Age discrimination complaints are increasing as the population ages. More people are coming in and saying they are victims of discrimination, and weren’t hired or [were] discharged because of their age.”

Age discrimination complaints—which can also be filed by younger workers—have come into Montgomery County’s human rights office from employees as old as 80, Garcia said.

Successful employee discrimination



complaints are often based on incremental comments or actions that build a broader picture of discrimination.

"It's the stereotypes," Saunders said. "Things like saying that older employees are costly to employ, less competent and less motivated. Can you imagine saying those things about any other group? Discrimination can come from comments you hear in the workplace. 'When are you going to retire? When will you get out of here? You don't have the energy to do this.'"

One of the more prominent stories at the national level involves a worker named David Nelson who, with more than 25 years of service with the RadioShack electronics chain, had a flawless track record. Nevertheless, not six months after someone new came in to supervise him, Nelson was out of a job.

That was 2007. Nelson, then 55 years old, worked in RadioShack's Denver, Co.,

county. Case workers collect all the basic information on possible incidents. If there are solid indications that age discrimination may have occurred, the case is investigated, with employers receiving an opportunity to respond. Mediation between employee and employer or even a lawsuit can ultimately result, with financial compensation, reassignment or other options being possible.

The threshold of evidence for proving age discrimination, however, is higher than that required for racism, sexism and other forms of bias, Saunders said. That makes it critically important for employees who think they may be victims of age discrimination to collect and provide as much hard evidence as possible.

"One of the hardest things for us is when there's no evidence," Garcia said.

Even basic documents like pay stubs or a job application can be helpful. Furthermore, all comments, internal emails and

## "AGE DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS ARE INCREASING AS THE POPULATION AGES.

**More people are coming in and saying they are victims of discrimination, and weren't hired or [were] discharged because of their age."**

— Loretta Garcia,  
a labor attorney and manager of enforcement programs  
for the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights

regional office. His new manager, who was 43 at the time, placed him on two performance improvement plans within four months. But it got worse: Just days after he filed a complaint with the office's human resources department regarding his treatment, Nelson was fired.

Nelson believed he had been a victim of age discrimination. He took his case to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which filed suit against RadioShack and ultimately won \$187,000 in back pay for Nelson.

While Nelson's is an extreme case, that situation is emblematic of the growing issue of age discrimination, and local counties are no exception.

Though the EEOC requires workers to report incidents within six months of the incident date, Fairfax and Montgomery counties provide a full year. In order for an employee to file a complaint at the county level, the employer must be headquartered in that

other documents should be recorded by employees, with as much detail as possible. This is particularly the case if a promotion is denied or termination has occurred.

"Start documenting things," Saunders said. "If there are comments, chronicle them and include the date and time. Make a note of any witnesses to the comments. Save any emails that might be discriminatory. Thoroughly document promotional pass overs."

Ultimately, even things that seem innocuous can constitute discrimination and can hamper a worker's ability to get a fair shake in the workplace.

"It does not always mean being treated badly, necessarily, but treated differently compared to those who are younger than you," Saunders said. "Are you getting the same opportunities? Are they not sending you to a certain training session because they don't think you'll be here? Those are the kinds of things that can happen and that workers have to notice and chronicle."



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## Retirement community offers real estate ownership, independence

- BY ELLEN R. COHEN -

**W**hile some older adults like the concept of real estate ownership, they might not like the cost and the maintenance that comes with it. Residents at Maplewood Park Place in Bethesda may have the best of both worlds. The full-service retirement community offers real estate ownership, as well as tax advantages and equity that passes to heirs when the apartment is sold. Meanwhile, residents retain their independent lifestyles, free from home upkeep and ownership chores. All services and amenities are in one building.

"Maplewood is a true community," said Zelda Segal, 88. "People here reach out to others and Maplewood seeks opportunities to bring people together. For people who have lived on their own before moving here, it's especially wonderful." A former psychologist and writer, Segal often collaborated on writing projects with her husband, the late Dr. Julius Segal. Widowed for 22 years, Segal said she enjoyed going to museums, theater and concerts. "I

## "IT'S EXHILARATING TO LIVE HERE."

— Adele Leff,  
Maplewood Park Place resident

feel comfortable, secure and looked after at Maplewood," Segal said.

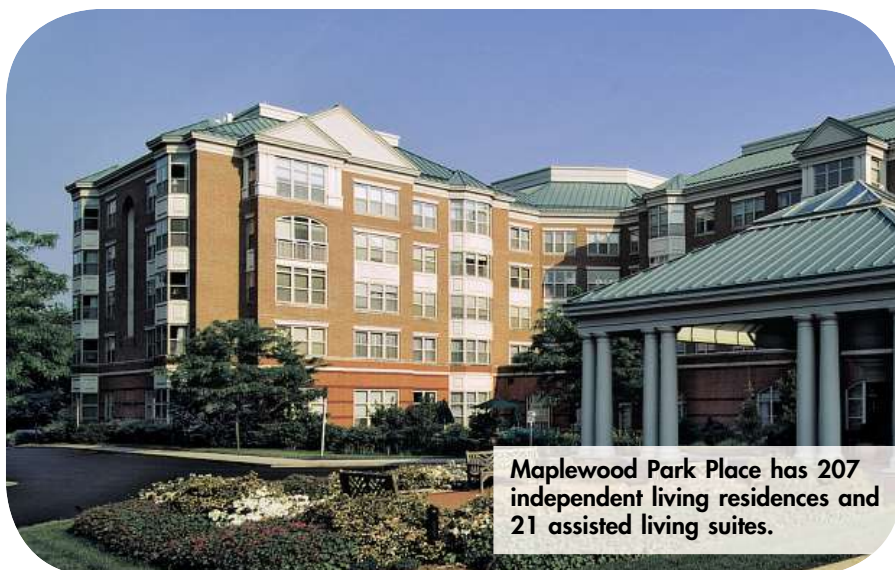
Resident owned and governed, Maplewood opened in 1996 and is managed by Sunrise Senior Living. There are 207 independent living residences and 21 assisted living suites, according to sales coordinator Sophy Neumer. The retirement community—located near Old Georgetown Road at Interstate 495—consists of one building with two towers that are connected by the lobby. The community is close to several medical centers, a walking and biking path, and two Metro stations, according to the community's website.

To live at Maplewood, residents must be 62, although a spouse may be younger. Neumer said there were a couple of residents who were older than 100. Most of the people who live at Maplewood were single—only 35 percent of the residents were couples, according to Neumer. "Most residents come from Chevy Chase, Potomac and Bethesda," said Neumer, "but many from out-of-state came to be close to family."

Bob Wallace, 82, moved to Maplewood about a year ago with his wife, Althea Wallace, 78. "My wife and I were brought up in the area," Bob Wallace said. "Maplewood was close to our two daughters."

Twice widowed, Adele Leff, 90, has lived at Maplewood just over four years. "I looked at other retirement places in Georgia and California, where my children live, but decided to live here, where I am familiar with the area," she said. Leff retired from grants management at the National Institutes of Health Nation-





Maplewood Park Place has 207 independent living residences and 21 assisted living suites.

al Cancer Institute after 22 years. She's originally from New York and moved to the area in 1949. Leff is chairwoman of Maplewood's budget committee, making use of her financial background. "The people here are people I enjoy being with," she said. "Many come from intellectual and professional backgrounds. It's exhilarating to live here."

Priscilla Tapley, 87, came to Maplewood with her husband in March 1996. Widowed in 2008, Tapley said she particularly liked the library and the evening programs. Tapley worked for Chevy Chase library for a number of years and traveled with her husband during their retirement. "We had a flat in England that I sold about three years ago," Tapley said.

Maplewood has 19 floor plans for independent living apartments. The smallest, a one-bedroom, is 730 square feet; the largest unit, at 1740 square feet, is a two-bedroom unit with a den. Other combinations include smaller one- and two-bedroom units with dens, and two- and three-bedrooms units. Apartment features include bay windows, enclosed balconies or sunrooms, in addition to fully equipped kitchens, individually controlled heating and air-conditioning, cable television, and weekly housekeeping. Apartments come with all utilities except telephone and Internet.

The meal plan for independent living apartments includes 27 meals per month. Lunch and dinner are served every day except Sunday, when brunch is offered. Meals are served in the attractive dining room, but private parties may be hosted in a smaller dining room.

Maplewood also offers concierge medical services from Dr. Gary Wilks, as well as assisted-living and skilled-nursing services.

Many residents subscribe to Maplewood's Lifecare Plan, which offers savings and tax deductions for health care services.

Roderick French, 83, is president of the Maplewood Services Board. He said the services board was responsible for health care, assisted living, skilled nursing, clinic, dining room and transportation. Another board was responsible for the co-op apartments. "I know that Maplewood's self-government is real and it works," he said.

French—former vice president of academic affairs at George Washington University—and his wife Sally French, 80, have lived at Maplewood for about four years. Their 7-year-old miniature poodle, Serkin, named for a classical pianist, gets a lot of attention from residents. They said they liked Maplewood's lecture and concert programs, and enjoyed their neighbors.

Residents praised Maplewood's community amenities. Artists enjoy the creative arts center's space for painting, ceramics and classes. The clubroom is used for cards, games and receptions. There is a piano lounge and a library with Mac and PC computers, as well as wireless Internet access. There's also a game room and a fitness center with exercise equipment, heated pool and whirlpool.

Residents also said they appreciated the convenience of Maplewood's full-service bank, barber and beauty shop, as well as the general store and café. Scheduled local transportation is available for doctors' appointments, religious services, shopping and cultural events.

Howard Monderer, NBC's former vice-president of law in Washington, D.C., said he liked the "culture and friendliness" at Maplewood. "We go to concerts, lectures,



The game room, a favorite for pool players, is one of many amenities available in the community.

current events programs, and I work out every other day at the fitness center," said Monderer, 87. Monderer and his wife Claire Monderer, 83, have lived at Maplewood just over three years.

Originally from Leonardtown, Md., Eleanor Storck, 87, lived in Bethesda since 1956 and worked for 28 years at Bethesda Community School. She moved to Maplewood in December 2012, when her husband required skilled nursing. Now a

widow, Storck said she couldn't praise the skilled nursing facility enough. She described the staff as "compassionate, patient and caring."

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# GOOD EATS

Gazette Seniors asked people to share their fondest culinary memories. Here's what they had to say:

AS TOLD TO KAREN FINUCAN CLARKSON / PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SUBJECTS



Steve Fox

**STEVE FOX, 67**  
Bethesda

I joined the Peace Corps in March 1971 and went to a middle and high school in a provincial capital in Northeast Thailand in June. I celebrated Thanksgiving that year at the home of a married couple that I had gone through training with. Somehow we managed an American-style dinner. We got the turkeys from a nearby farm run by a U.N. food and agriculture organization. One person, who worked at an agriculture school, had access to a welding machine, so he made a barbecue spit. We spit-roasted the turkeys, taking turns hand cranking them over charcoal and bricks, for five or six hours. A good bit of beer was flowing. We found vegetables and potatoes—what's Thanksgiving without mashed potatoes—and ate ourselves silly. A couple of young officers came down from a military base and brought M&M'S, which were like gold, and copies of National Lampoon. We sat and read them out loud and laughed till we cried. It was a chance for us to be Americans, and we bonded. After I came back to the U.S., I got a law degree and joined the Foreign Service, moving around a lot. Ever since Thailand, Thanksgiving has been spent with my friends of the moment, whether celebrated in a home or a mess hall in Iraq or Northeastern China.



Joyce Smythe

**JOYCE SMYTHE, 59**  
Leisure World

My first food memory is of dinner at my grandmother's house across the street from mine in Weirton, West Virginia. Every Sunday, she would cook a big family dinner. My favorite was chicken. First my grandmother would take the chicken and cook it to make a broth. Then she'd roll the chicken in flour and fry it up. She would hand-cut noodles on Saturday—I remember seeing them laying out to dry—and cook them on Sunday. She'd also mash potatoes and make a giant potato lake, then fill it with noodles and broth. It was like a version of a pierogi. Along with the fried chicken, there also would be homemade biscuits and coleslaw. My dad passed away from mesothelioma. Near the end, this was the only meal he could eat. And, as my mother aged, she would frequently ask for the meal. It was such comfort food. If I was going to have one last meal, that is what I would pick.

**LESLIE SHEDLIN, 59**  
Bethesda

I have a great recipe for chicken soup. It goes back to when my grandmother was in a nursing home and I was in law school. My aunt and I were making food for



Leslie Shedlin

Rosh Hashana. We put the chicken soup on the stove before going to visit my grandmother and then stopping at Loehmann's. By the time we got back an hour later, we discovered all the chicken soup had boiled out. So, with relatives on their way, what did we do? We opened a bottle of wine. To this day, whenever we hand out the recipe for chicken soup, the first step is always open a bottle of wine. And, whenever I'm making soup, I call my aunt and tell her I'm opening a bottle of wine and we laugh.

**JEANNE INMAN, 84**  
Bethesda

As a child growing up in Northeastern Vermont, not far from the Canadian border, I helped my family tend the garden. My father was a country preacher and didn't make much, so he fed us from the garden, which was about a half acre, and the chicken house. We always had lots of carrots. But one year, when I was about 10, we had an exceptional harvest. That year, my younger brother and I dug 15 bushels of carrots out of the ground. We had a cellar, not a basement, with wooden barrels. And that's where we stored the carrots. My parents would put sand around the carrots to help them stay moist. So, when you wanted a carrot, you'd have





Jeanne Inman

to put your hand in the barrel, dig through the sand and pull one out. My mom was a good cook and could do just about anything in the kitchen. And that was a good thing with such a large quantity of carrots. I don't remember the specific recipes, but we had carrot soup, and mashed carrots and carrots cooked with other dishes. We didn't let anything go to waste. It was a long winter, but I do believe the carrots got us through.



Judy Jonas

**JUDY JONAS, 71**  
Bethesda

Have you ever made lollipops? It's not difficult. All you need is Karo syrup, sugar and food coloring. When I was about 10 or 11, old enough to be in the house alone, my friend Gloria and I decided to make blue lollipops. We greased up some cookie sheets so the lollipops wouldn't



stick and, when we ran out of the cookie sheets, put Crisco all over my mother's counters. When my mother came home, she found blue all over her kitchen. She was tired from a day at work and

not happy, but I don't remember her being furious. She insisted we clean up immediately, which we did. In November, when I was visiting Gloria in New Jersey and telling her grandchildren about our lollipop escapade, she added that after we used all of my mother's countertops, we put Crisco on a section of the kitchen floor and made more lollipops. Needless to say I have no memory of that, but she swore in front of her grandchildren that it was true. I'm always reminded of our lollipop adventure when I look at the quilt my kids put together for my 30th wedding anniversary and the square Gloria made commemorating the two blue lollipop devils.



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# A PASSION AND A PROFESSION

For more than a quarter century, Nilimma Devi has shared her love of ancient Indian dance with local audiences

BY KATE MCDERMOTT

**A**s a young child in pre-partition India during the 1940s, Nilimma Devi discovered that the mystical world of ancient Indian dance forms could take her far away from the harsh realities of her daily life as a refugee. Living with her mother and sister at her grandmother's home in Delhi, she waited and hoped that her father, who had sent them to safety from their home in Peshawar (which was eventually given to the new nation of Pakistan when India was partitioned in 1947), would someday be able to join them. Amid the political upheaval and violence of newly independent India, dance provided a make believe world and a way to escape reality, she said. "It was therapy for me. It took me to a world that was beautiful."

Although her life's journey would eventually take her from India to Maryland, her love of the mystic Indian dances she grew up with never left her. It was what compelled her in 1988 to open the Sutradhar Institute of Dance & Related Arts (SIDRA) in Silver Spring. She especially wanted to share with American students and audiences the traditional Indian dance known as Kuchipudi.

Kuchipudi uses yoga, creative writing, music and dance to weave a story together. But what makes the ancient art form so powerful, Devi said, is its invitation to dancers and audiences to transcend their language and cultural boundaries to experience a world beyond the physical space they occupy and ultimately reach an aesthetic joy or bliss known as *rasa*. "Nobody has equated dance to the spiritual connection to the degree that India has done," she added.

Artists from the Sutradhar Institute have performed at numerous regional venues, including the Smithsonian's Discovery Theater and Sackler Gallery, Strathmore Arts Center, Artscape in Baltimore, the National Museum of



PHOTOS BY TOM FEDOR/POST COMMUNITY MEDIA STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER  
**Nilimma Devi of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance and Related Arts (SIDRA) and dancers (clockwise, from left) Maya Brennig, 12 of Springfield, Va., Josephine Lichten, 18, of Takoma Park, Mrinalini Pillai, 19, of Bethesda, Laura Smith, 24 of Aspen Hill and Lily Henry-Austin, 12, of Silver Spring, pose at SIDRA's studio in Silver Spring.**



**Nilimma Devi of the Sutradhar Institute of Dance and Related Arts (SIDRA) says her love for dance began when she was a child growing up in India.**

Women in the Arts, the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage and others.

In 2013, Devi was awarded the Montgomery County Executive's Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in the Arts & Humanities for her decades-long commitment to expanding the cultural horizons of Montgomery County citizens.

## AN UNLIKELY BEGINNING

During the years she spent at her maternal grandmother's home in Delhi, Devi's aunt shared with her young niece the worldly experiences of finishing school. "She would show us dance movements," Devi recalled. Her aunt's "performances" captivated Devi and sparked her imagination in a way nothing ever had before. Although her mother's family supported her desire to dance, she could never share her passion with her paternal grandfather. "He was so opposed to dance that he would not stay in a room in which the word was mentioned," Devi said. "It was a taboo subject, almost akin to prostitution."

And what about her father, who was eventually able to rejoin his family after narrowly escaping death in Peshawar? "He never said I shouldn't dance. He said, 'Just don't make it your profession,'" she recalled with a laugh.



But that is exactly what Devi has done. After earning her bachelor's degree in history, she worked with gurus who helped her learn as much as she could about the ancient Indian dances, studying and dancing with them five or six days a week. And soon thereafter, she discovered something besides dance she could love. She met an American who was studying in India at the time. "My father was so against it (our relationship) that he would bring me books about American divorces," she laughed. "But what did I do? I became a bride."

The newlyweds traded the sweltering heat of India for the frozen tundra of Madison, Wis., home of the University of Wisconsin. Despite the temperature—and culture—shock, Devi was determined to make the most of her new life in America. She began teaching classes in ancient Indian dance for the university's dance department. Still young and at the top of her performing career, she also danced and lectured for the school's Southeast Asian Studies program.

#### BACK IN THE U.S.A.

Eventually the couple returned to India, but nearly 20 years later, her life's journey



**Sutradhar Institute of Dance and Related Arts (SIDRA) dancers Maya Brennig, 12 of Springfield, Va., (left) and Lily Henry-Austin, 12, of Silver Spring, dance at SIDRA studio in Silver Spring.**

brought her back to the U.S., specifically to the D.C. area. Soon after, Devi's talents earned her a spot as an artist-in-residence at the University of Maryland, and before

long, as of her talents spread, she was asked to teach at George Washington University.

Although excited by the opportunity to share her knowledge, Devi hoped for more. "I knew I could do more than just talk and teach basic technique," she said. She recalled her days back in India, where while tending to her ailing father, she found herself again escaping into the therapy of dance. "When I would play nurse to my father, I used to close my eyes and see the rows of beautiful costumes I would have if I could open my own little school," she recalled.

Her dream was to introduce people to the classical dance form of Kuchipudi—and not just people of Indian descent. That dream has now become a reality. A quarter century later, Devi has shared her passion with nearly 1,000 students, many of whom, she said, are not of Indian descent. Today nearly half of her students at the Institute and in the school's annual summer camps are multicultural. Regardless of their backgrounds, the best students "don't want to just learn the movements, they want to know why, the concepts," Devi said. Many of these students have gone into the arts and "have taken these seeds with them."

Josie Lichten is one of those students. She attended her first performance at SIDRA when she was 6 or 7 and fell in love with the art form. She credits Devi with being like her grandma. "She is not a teacher as much as she is guru, and I don't think a lot of Westerners understand that relationship," Lichten said. Currently studying dance at the prestigious Barnard College in New York, she hopes someday to dance in India.

But another student of Devi's, Mrinalini Pillai, has different aspirations. She's a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh studying political science and philosophy and is in the pre-med track. Although her career path will take her away from the dancing she has done since she was a mere 5 years old, Devi, or "Auntie" as so many of her students call her, will always occupy a special place in her life. "What she has given me is the gift of dance, and I will never be able to repay her for that," Pillai said. Through SIDRA she was able to connect with other families of Indian descent, but more than that, Pillai said she was able to "share a beautiful form of dance that brings me a lot of happiness with other people. And that is what's really amazing."

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# JAPAN:

## *A fascinating blend of ancient culture and modern society*

BY ELLEN R. COHEN

**W**hen my husband Harvey Cohen and I were stationed in Italy and Germany with the U.S. Army in the 1960s, we had many opportunities to travel in Europe. However, our travel experiences in Asia have been minimal. Deciding it was time to see a new part of the world, we left our home in Rockville for Japan Oct. 7. Joining a group of American and Canadian travelers, we enjoyed a two-week view of this fascinating island nation. Our trip, called “Essence of Japan,” combined ancient, modern, traditional, historical and cultural attractions, enabling us to develop a deeper understanding of this beautiful but faraway country.

Located in the North Pacific off the coasts of Russia and the Korean peninsula, Japan is an archipelago slightly smaller than California. We were impressed by the hordes of people in Japan, especially in Tokyo. Japan’s population is dense, at 349 people per square kilometer—compared with 35 people per square kilometer in the U.S., according to World Bank data.

Our visit to Hiroshima, where the first atomic bomb was dropped Aug. 6, 1945, was especially poignant. Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is at ground zero, in the center of the city, where monuments, museums and memorials are dedicated to those who lost their lives in this catastrophic event. Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, established in August 1955, shows in words, pictures and heart-wrenching artifacts the events of that horrific day. The museum’s exhibits display victims’ clothing and personal effects, show how the bomb’s heat destroyed building materials and flesh, and discuss

the health issues suffered by those who survived. What is left of the A-Bomb Dome—a blackened, twisted structure, a building once known as the Industrial Promotion Hall—still stands in memory of those who perished and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We were impressed by the cleanliness of Japanese streets and public areas. Restrooms, too, are extremely clean, and we encountered only one homeless person on the street—in two weeks of walking around in several cities. Everyone who has been to Japan comments about the TOTO toilets found everywhere. Their bidet-like feature makes it possible to use a built-in sponge bath or shower function that augments standard toilet cleanliness. Some models have heated seats. Others have a faucet above the tank that refills water in the tank after the flushing handle is depressed, so that one can wash one’s hands while the tank is refilling.

As animal lovers, we enjoyed the cat cafés in Osaka and Kyoto. Customers are invited to select a cat to pet—chosen from photos of the cats that are “working” that day. People are encouraged to come in and relax for a while, paying for time with these soft, friendly animals. We heard that there were similar “rabbit cafés,” but we did not encounter them in our travels.

We toured many Shinto and Buddhist shrines and temples. Shintoism and Buddhism are Japan’s two major religions and Japanese people often subscribe to both denominations concurrently. We went to Nara to see the Todai-ji Temple, the largest wooden building in the world and the site of the world’s largest bronze statue of Buddha, which stands more than 50 feet tall. After being appropriately impressed



PHOTOS BY HARVEY M. COHEN

Harvey and Ellen Cohen, dressed in yukata, had dinner at a ryokan, a Japanese-style inn.



with this statue's immense size, we entered Nara Park and were impressed again, this time with the vast number of sika deer that roamed the park. Once considered sacred or divine, sika deer were reclassified as national treasures after World War II and are protected as such. Visitors may purchase special crackers to offer the deer. Though, if you had no crackers, they would try to eat whatever you might be holding in your hand.

Japanese foods enjoyed by visitors from all over the world include sushi, sashimi and tempura. We tried everything and also enjoyed a sushi-making class just before lunch. We sampled the many varieties of meat, fish and vegetables cooked on a hibachi grill, as well as udon and soba noodles available in noodle houses.

A totally different highlight of the trip was our "Japanese experience" at a ryokan, a Japanese-style inn often found in hot spring resorts. They have tatami straw floor mats (shoes are removed before standing on these mats), futon beds placed on the floor, Japanese-style baths and appropriate clothing to wear during one's stay. On the day we checked into our ryokan, we were each given a yukata, which is like a kimono but more casual and lighter. Yukata sets come with an obi (belt), a yukata jacket and socks. These are worn to the bath, to dinner and breakfast, and even to bed as sleepwear. During our time here, we wore our yukatas to dinner, dined at low Japanese tables (having first removed our shoes) and slept on futons, which were surprisingly comfortable.

The public bath, or onsen, was an unexpected concept for us. Our guide gave us the proper onsen etiquette and invited us to try it. There are separate onsens for men and women and photography is prohibited. There are also rules about how to wash before entering the onsen and how to behave. No soap or shampoo is allowed in the onsen and, as our guide explained, "The dress code is simple: One wears nothing." The women in our group agreed it was different, but had no interest in trying it. My husband and at least one of the other men in the group tried the onsen and proclaimed that it was a worthwhile experience.

Our visit to Shirakawago village in the mountains was a chance to see rural life in Japan. This old resort town is famous for



The A-Bomb Dome in Hiroshima is one many places Ellen Cohen (pictured here) visited in Japan with her husband Harvey Cohen.



**This Shinto shrine on the island of Itsukushima—popularly known as Miyajima—is best known for its "floating" torii gate. It is in the city of Hatsukaichi in Hiroshima Prefecture in Japan.**

traditional farmhouses with steep, thatched roofs. Made without nails, the roofs once provided a large attic space and sheltered large families involved in the cultivation of mulberry trees and raising silkworms. The silkworm industry has died out in recent years, but visitors still come to Shirakawago to enjoy the area's rustic ambience.

In recent years, my husband and I have enjoyed a variety of tours to places that appear on many people's "bucket lists." But there is much to see in Japan. After our trip, we came home with a renewed appreciation for this beautiful island nation and its people, their courtly manners, their food and their history.



**This is a traditional farmhouse with a thatched roof in Shirakawago Village in the mountains of Japan.**



# SPREAD THE WORD, NOT THE DISEASE

## Baby boomers are at greatest risk for infection with hepatitis C

BY KATE MCDERMOTT

**A**s a 55-year-old mother of four who will celebrate her 31st wedding anniversary this year, Linda Douglas of Silver Spring, is hardly a poster child for high-risk behavior. Coming of age in the 1980s, she never injected drugs, snorted cocaine or engaged in unprotected sex with multiple partners.

So imagine her surprise when she found out she had hepatitis C.

"I tried to give blood back in 1988 and I was told I had what they called then 'non A-non B' hepatitis," she recalled. In the years since, as additional viruses that cause hepatitis have been identified, they have earned their own labels, including hepatitis C.

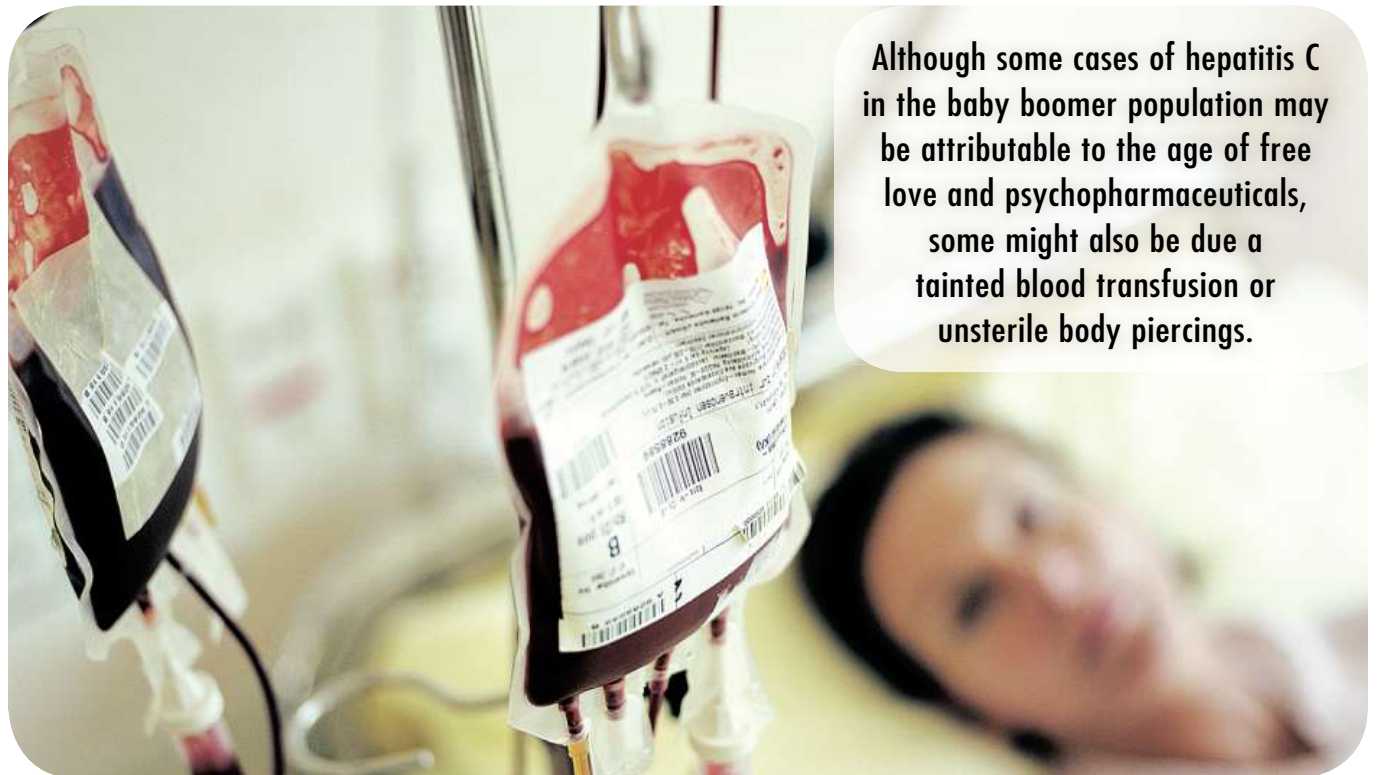
The American Liver Foundation reports that more than 30 million people in the United States have some form of liver disease, including hepatitis C. Of the estimated 3.2 million Americans diagnosed with hepatitis C, an estimated 75 percent to 80 percent are in the baby boomer population.

That is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone born in 1945 through 1965 (baby boomers) be tested for the virus. Diagnosing hepatitis C before it does irreversible damage to the liver is critical. Left untreated, the virus is a leading cause of liver cancer and the primary reason for liver transplants. The CDC reports that 15,000 people die from hepatitis C-related liver disease annually.

Yet thanks to new treatment therapies, liver specialists report that nearly 95 percent of those diagnosed and treated for hepatitis C are cured. It marks incredible progress for a disease that was not even identified until 26 years ago.

### SILENT BUT DEADLY

What makes hepatitis C so dangerous is the fact that patients usually have no symp-



DIGITAL VISION/THINKSTOCK

toms and can live for decades without feeling ill. Douglas can attest to that. "I never once remember feeling sick," she said. Sure, she was tired. "What working mother isn't?" she recalled thinking.

Kirti Shetty, M.D., associate professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine and director of hepatology at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C., said hepatitis C causes symptoms such as fatigue, joint pain and depression—things that could easily be attributed to other conditions. "Three out of four patients affected do not know they have it until their liver disease is advanced," she said. But at that point, the liver may be so scarred (a condition known as cirrhosis) that the patient is at risk of liver failure or liver cancer.

In addition, the virus can also contribute to other conditions, such as diabetes

and vasculitis, which leads to restricted blood flow to other body organs and tissues, said Zobair M. Younossi, M.D., chairman of the Department of Medicine and vice president for research at Inova Health System in Fairfax, Va.

Given that hepatitis C is now curable, the biggest obstacle that liver specialists such as Shetty and Younossi face is spreading the word about its testing and treatment. Huynh Trung Truc of Annandale, Va., said he was grateful that his primary care physician was aware of the CDC's recommendations. She ordered a full blood profile and discovered that Huynh was infected with hepatitis C. "Based on all the test results, it is easy to say that I had been affected by chronic hepatitis C for at least 30 years without my knowledge," he said. Like Douglas, Huynh was not certain

Although some cases of hepatitis C in the baby boomer population may be attributable to the age of free love and psychopharmaceuticals, some might also be due a tainted blood transfusion or unsterile body piercings.

how he contracted the virus, although he suspected he got it during his nine years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam's communist "re-education camps," where he said "the living conditions were horrendous."

### THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

"We now have a simple screening blood test that requires only a few drops of blood, and we can have a rapid diagnosis within a few hours," Younossi said. Horror stories about treatment with interferon injections that produce unpleasant and lingering side effects are becoming a thing of the past.

Douglas said she watched a co-worker who also had hepatitis C struggle with interferon treatments. "My biopsies were good and I didn't feel bad, so I decided to sit it out [treatment with interferon] and watch



for a while,” she said. By the time she did seek treatment, she simply took a prescribed regime of oral medications for eight weeks. “I was told that my numbers started dropping immediately,” she said. Today, she is has been declared cured of hepatitis C.

Huynh endured some unpleasant side effects during his 24 weeks of a trial treatment with oral medications, including nighttime sleep disruption and body rashes. But with weekly blood tests showing that the medications were significantly reducing his hepatitis C infection, he remained committed to the regime. “I am very happy to learn that the FDA approved the trial medication I took,” he said. “I also learned that, in some cases, the treatment period may be reduced to only 12 weeks.”

Younossi said new treatment options continue to evolve rapidly. These new therapies do not create many of the unpleasant side effects of their predecessors, and he stressed that they could lead to an immediate improvement in quality of life, especially as related to the fatigue that many hepatitis C patients report.

Shetty acknowledged that these new antiviral medications were not cheap (some treatment plans can easily exceed \$100,000), but she said they only need to be

given for a short period of time, anywhere from eight to 12 weeks, as Huynh discovered. And as Younossi points out, “The cost of the drugs is small in comparison to cost of treating the disease. It’s what we call the cost of the cure.”

Private insurers may require documentation of the severity of the disease through liver biopsies or a new scanning test that can assess the level of scarring in the liver—while sparing patients the pain of a traditional liver biopsy—prior to approving treatment. But Younossi said that Medicare is beginning to ease some of its restrictions on covering the new anti-virals used for treatment of hepatitis C and he is seeing increased coverage by private insurers, as well.

## REVERSING THE STIGMA

The American Liver Foundation has developed a list of risk factors for hepatitis C that for many baby boomers, like Douglas, may represent nothing more than the naivety of youth. “The only thing I can think of that might have caused me to get hepatitis C was that I got a tattoo at a festival in 1982,” she recalled. Whether it was a tainted needle or ink, she can’t be sure. But she is comforted that neither her husband nor her children contracted the disease before she was cured.

Douglas is not ashamed of her diagnosis and is doing her part to spread the word among her peers about the importance of being screened. That is key, Shetty and Younossi said, because many primary care physicians still may not be ordering the basic screening test. “They may be aware of the CDC’s recommendations but not have strategies for implementing them,” Younossi said. It may be up to patients to ask their physicians to do the blood test.

But for those patients who are diagnosed, Shetty said it is important to be linked to specialized care such as an infectious disease specialist or hematologist. Younossi also encouraged lifestyle modifications such as abstaining from raw seafood and alcohol (even in moderation) and getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

But for those with the virus, the prognosis is excellent. “I feel so great now!” Huynh said, noting that he feels more energetic than he did prior to his diagnosis. His blood tests reveal he has been cured of hepatitis C. “Hepatitis C has gone from being a life-threatening, end-stage disease to being something we can cure,” said Shetty. “It’s really remarkable.”

## YOU MAY BE AT RISK OF HEPATITIS C IF YOU:

- Shared needles to inject drugs or straws to inhale them.
- Had tattoos or body piercings in an unclean environment using unsterile equipment.
- Worked in a place where you came in contact with infected blood or needles, (e.g., health care workers).
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant prior to July 1992.
- Received a blood product for clotting problems made prior to 1987.
- Needed to have your blood filtered by a machine (hemodialysis) for a long period of time because your kidneys weren’t working.
- Were born to a mother with hepatitis C.
- Had unprotected sex with multiple partners.
- Have or had a sexually transmitted disease.
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Source: American Liver Foundation



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The insured may need to submit for reimbursement. State and/or local taxes may apply. Prices and products subject to change. Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan will pay a hearing aid benefit up to \$2,500 every 3 calendar years for adults age 22 and over, and up to a \$2,500 total per calendar year for members up to age 22. Do not rely on this communication piece alone for complete benefit information. All benefits are subject to the definitions, limitations, and exclusions in your Service Benefit Plan brochure. The BlueCross® Discount Program offers access to savings on items that you may purchase directly from independent vendors, which may be different from items covered under your Service Benefit Plan or any other applicable federal healthcare program. For hearing aids, acupuncture, chiropractic and vision services, you must exhaust your Service Benefit Plan benefits first. To find out what is covered under your policy, contact the Service Benefit Plan. The products and services described herein are neither offered nor guaranteed under any local Blue company's contract with the Medicare program. In addition, these items are not subject to the Medicare appeals process. Any disputes regarding these products and services are not subject to the Service Benefit Plan's Disputed Claims process. Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) may receive payments from BlueCross vendors. Neither the Service Benefit Plan, BCBSA, nor any local Blue company recommends, endorses, warrants or guarantees any specific BlueCross vendor or item. The Service Benefit Plan reserves the right to change, modify, or terminate any item and vendors made available through BlueCross, at any time. Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association is an association of independent, locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield Companies. Offer ends: September 30, 2015.



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