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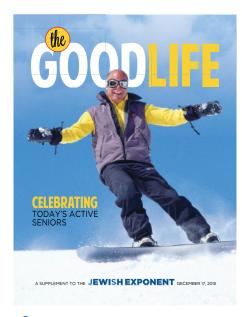
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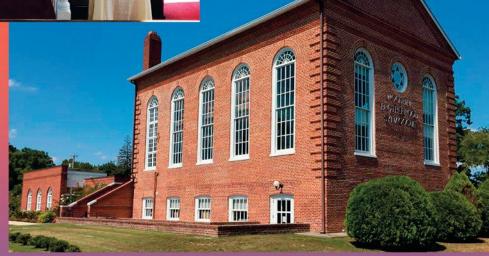
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Special K's Are Part of a Complete Fitness Regimen

KleinLife and the Kaiserman are oases of athleticism for active adults.

JON MARKS | JE STAFF



At 81, Norty Levine plays basketball three times a week at KleinLife then works out the other days.

At 83, Estelle Pomerantz, who used to teach the preschoolers at the Kaiserman JCC — and now sees many of them bringing their own children there — takes stretching classes.

Throughout both buildings, you'll find men and women of all ages — but particularly 55 and up — doing whatever they can to stay in shape. Their mindset is just because they may be retired or winding down in their careers, doesn't mean their minds and bodies are ready to pack it in.

"The most important thing at this age is to keep moving," said Pomerantz, who worked at Kaiserman from 1983 until she retired two years ago. "The exercise I do is very important, plus I meet some people I already know and have met some others. I know a lot of people in the area because I taught here so long."

For her and many others, the Jewish Community Center is a place of refuge; sort of their home away from home. The workouts,

the physical activity are only a part of it. There's also the opportunity to connect with peers, whether it's to have meaningful conversations or simply to shoot the breeze on sports, politics or what have you without being interrupted by children or grandchildren.

"That social piece is just as important as the fitness part," said Marti Berk, director of community engagement at Kaiserman, who handles all aspects of membership and marketing. "It's that healthy mind, healthy body concept. We have a café up front. They'll sit out there and have a nosh afterwards. I grew up in Lancaster. I very much wish there was a place like this for my dad in Lancaster — he sits in a La-Z-Boy all day."

In dramatic contrast, Norty Levine plays hoops. Lots of hoops. He's been coming to the Klein for 35 years, during which time he says the level of play has improved significantly now that more and more non-Jews are taking the court.

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Fitness

Continued from Page 6

But somehow he's still able to hold his own. "I play in the 55-and-over league," said Levine, who works seven days a week at his daughter's restaurant, Randi's, in the Northeast. "At this stage of the game, I take a couple shots, set a pick, get a rebound. And I can still run the floor."

He's selling himself short, according to one longtime fellow Klein participant. "He's tough as nails and as competitive as can be," said Charlie Pavlov, who not only plays at Klein during their weekly Thursday night league games, but also when they play pickup ball Tuesdays. "We always talk about getting 'Norty-sized' when he hits you. Believe me, you feel it."

And don't just think you can show up cold and compete with these guys. "Let's put it this way,"

said Levine, who's competed frequently in the Senior Olympics, where he's won gold medals in the 3-on-3 competition. "If you were a jogger and said, 'I think I'm gonna start playing with you guys,' you can't do it. Basketball is a tough, physical game, with all the jumping up and down and the banging. You can jog and be in shape, but being in basketball shape is different."

Basketball is big at Kaiserman, too, where they have leagues running constantly. "We have a great basketball program," said Berk, who's been working for local JCCs in some capacity since 1991, while also serving as local delegation head for the Maccabi Games. "We have 50-and-over, 60-and-over — what we affection-



ately call the "Alte Kocker' league.

"Basketball's a very big thing. We have a bunch of guys who come in for lunchtime pickup games. Sometimes, we have both courts going."

That's not all. During the summer, swimming is a big thing, while a few members may play tennis. Unlike Klein, there's no indoor pool, though.

But the lifeblood at Kaiserman is its wide array of exercise classes, which are conducted by certified professionals. And if you don't feel

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Fitness

Continued from Page 8

like taking a class, you can always hire one of them to lead you through a personal training session.

"We don't hire kids with big muscles who want to work out," said Berk, who estimates approximately 40 percent of the membership is comprised of baby boomers and seniors. "Many of them have multiple certifications, like kinesiology. Our trainers are busy, but not so busy you can't get one. We're about getting fit and healthy—and staying fit and healthy.

"When people join, we like to show them the group exercises and try to match them up with something at their level. Statistics show if you get yourself hooked into a group exercise class, you're more likely to continue a fitness plan."

As an incentive, Kaiserman offers several options for membership, many of which have discounts. They also accept "Silver Sneakers" and "Silver and Fit," where the fee is actually paid by their health insurer.

While there are varying degrees of activity, determined by health and fitness levels, a number of members — refusing to accept what it says on their birth certificate — have signed up for what they call "Boomers Boot Camp"

"I have people who are not boomers who take Boomers Boot Camp because the pace and the exercise are appropriate for them," said director of fitness Christine Labhart, who supervises the overall program but doesn't teach the class. "They don't mind being lumped in. They know they're seniors and they do want things geared toward them. But they're proud, and they come out every day."

"It started with a bunch of guys who were getting ready for the

50-and-over basketball league," continued Berk. "They got to the point where they realized, 'I haven't done anything physical. I don't want to have my lunch handed to me on the court and I might hurt myself.' So they decided to contact one of the trainers to see if he could do some group physical therapy.

"The trainer started working them out in the gym. He had them doing sprints and all kinds of activities. More guys saw it and said they wanted to get involved. It got to the point where it was too big for where they were working out, so we decided to turn it into an exercise class and open it up to everyone."

Of course, not everyone is equipped to handle boot camp. Some are just happy to be able to walk or do some of the basics without pain. "We have functional fitness for people just getting back or who haven't exercised in a long time or have some health issues that limit their capability," said Labhart. "They may work on balance and strength. We also have a LIFE class — Low Impact Fitness Experience — that has no impact in it. Impact is when you jump or bounce. Everything here stays on the floor."

Whether it's boot camp or LIFE classes, seniors are becoming a larger segment of the community by the day. "Statistics say in a couple of years, 55 percent of the population will be 55-and-over," said Berk. "It's one of our largest membership categories."

And those seniors intend to keep doing their part as long as possible. "I hope to just keep playing," said Norty Levine, who went against the grain of many of his contemporaries, growing up in Miami, then moving his family up here. "I just take each day I'm able to run around I enjoy it. At this point of life, you've got to keep doing it, whether you walk, run, jog or lift weights. Do it all. Don't stop. Keep moving." •

Jon "The Question" Marks is legendary among the local journalistic ballers for his skills with the rock.







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Taught in the Act

Immersive theater programs are just one of the ways active adults engage in the arts today.

MARISSA STERN | JE STAFF



Bingo and knitting might be the first activities you think of when "senior resident community" comes to mind.

And while those are popular hobbies (and for good reason, because bingo is *fun*), seniors are finding more ways to entertain themselves — sometimes, in the most literal sense of the word.

Arts and culture programs at resident communities are pushing those activities aside in order to allow the residents to participate in programs they have always enjoyed, from art to writing to theater.

Theater programs have taken on key roles in many senior communities in the last few years.

Philly Senior Stage is the brainchild of Robb Hutter, a Toronto native and past artistic director of Temple University's intergenerational educational theatre program, The Full Circle Theatre.

It started in 2007 as a way of working with seniors through acting classes to find their comfort zone, and then pull them out of it, as Hutter described it.

Since its inception, Hutter and his team of educators and workshoppers have continued to share the program with more than 15 senior centers around the Philly area, bringing the love for performance with them.

One such place is Shannondell at Valley Forge, which was where Philly Senior Stage got its start.

The center had completed a brand-new auditorium in 2005, and Hutter learned that it was being used for hosting musicals and per-

formance, but no one used the stage for theatrical performances by the residents.

He had to change that.

He created an 8-week course, which evolved into developing semiannual shows by the "The Shannondell Actors Studio" where his "kids" strut their stuff through acting and drama classes.

The benefit of this program, which includes improvisation exercises, musical theater performances and more, is one that Hutter notices every time he works with them.

"It breaks down barriers," he said. "It accesses a level of intimacy that many people — that by the time they're in their 80s they've lost that — with maybe another person or group."

Hutter, 60, works with the seniors, or "geezers" as he affectionately calls them — "They hate it," he said, laughing — to come out of their comfort zones through acting.

"My rule is to go into their comfort zone and then take them out of it," he said. "I stretch my actors. I take them to a place that's further or deeper than they thought they could or might want to go, and they're always grateful afterwards that I've taken them there."

With the Jewish residents he works with, Hutter, who is Jewish himself, noticed that there is a stronger affinity for the arts. They love their subscriptions to the theater, he said, and the proximity to these activities is part of the attraction to places like Shannondell.

With performing, they work with other people to access the intimacy Hutter described and, in the process, find a sense of belonging. "I really think the theater provides them with a real strong sense of belonging," Hutter said. "Not that the knitting group or the bingo group doesn't, but this is more powerful because you're interacting with your fellow performers and residents."

He sees the program and theater itself as a way of tapping into the seniors' "vitality" in ways that other activities might not.

"If people want intellectual stimulation, they'll go to a lecture, but my whole philosophy is: People go to the theatre to express their feelings," he said. "That's why we love musicals: Music, in general, it touches our hearts in a way that going to a current event lecture might not."

Sidney and Dolores Tessler have resided at Shannondell for a little more than four years.

They have kept busy through many programs — from arts programs, lectures and even concerts.

"Seniors don't want to just sit and do nothing," said Dolores Tessler, 85.

While the community isn't entirely Jewish, Sidney Tessler, 90, decided to start a club that attracts those who are Jewish to get involved, though there are many non-Jews who participate as well.

"They want to learn more, they want to hear more about Jewish history," said Dolores Tessler of the non-Jews who participate. "They're very interested in the topics, learning about how other people do things or live."

The Jewish Interest Group has brought in speakers such as the Israeli Consul General, musical performances, lectures about topics such as Jewish history and Jewish humor — all in the spirit of bringing people together, both Jewish and not Jewish.

They also bring in a maestro two or three times a year who talks about Jewish composers of waltzes, to attract the musically inclined.

"We try to vary the topics," Tessler said. "We've had a lot of good



success with the people that have come."

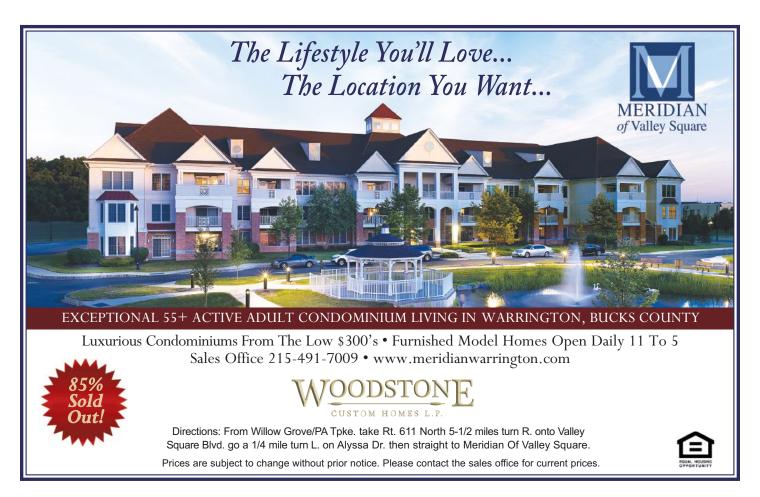
For her, an art and poetry enthusiast, she has found many ways to keep herself occupied, and so have many others who live there.

"If I were speaking on behalf of the whole community, there would be a lot of things I could tell you about because there are so many things of varied interest here," she said. "I've gotten into an art program. We're kept very busy with all kinds of lectures and programs and musical programs."

The benefit of theatrical activities and musical performances also includes transformation.

Benjamin Lloyd founded Elkins Park-based White Pines Productions back in 2009.

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Theater

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It offers classes and opportunities to engage in performance for all ages, from kids to adults. Its senior theater initiative — similar to Philly Senior Stage — brings theater to senior communities through its Bright Invention ensemble of performers.

"White Pines' mission is transform people's lives through performance creativity, and that leads us into many diverse communities," Lloyd said.

For Lloyd, this initiative was a personal one. His grandmother was in a home for a while — unhappily so, to the point where she committed suicide in 1999.

He wanted to ensure others did not have that same experience.

Through theater and working on improvisation and other aspects of performance, seniors gather and work with one another and can explore their own stories.

The collaborative nature of theater brings people together and "out of isolation," Lloyd said.

One way he has helped bring senior residents out of their shells was through not only acting out other people's stories that have already been written, but also by acting out their own.

At the Sidewater House in Northeast Philadelphia, a Federation Housing senior independent living site, Lloyd established a 12-week workshop residency under the direction of Jerry Perna, founding ensemble member of Bright Invention and director of senior programs for White Pines, which culminated with a performance called "Who We Are," that guests could share in.

People shared stories of starting their own businesses, even a few Holocaust survivors told their stories.

"We were interested in generating material from their own lives

and experiences, so a lot of what Jerry was doing was structured storytelling exercises," Lloyd elaborated. "In the end, we were so moved by the stories being told."

His goal is to continue fundraising for these programs so that they can establish a yearlong residency with the community rather than just three months.

Engaging with the arts and performance in this way is beneficial because it brings the seniors together in a fun environment.

While at first, perhaps, the residents might be resistant to communicating, Lloyd has noticed that over time, "people become softer and more vulnerable and in some way more tolerant and forgiving of each other."

"This is true no matter what age you're working with," he said. He has found that "the older you are, the more hilarious your

stories are," and he wants people to share them with one another through performance.

"This is an attempt on our part to say, you're alive until you're dead and as long as you're alive, you've got creativity to share," he said.

Other arts programs beyond theater have their own benefits, as well.

At Brandywine Senior Living — all 27 locations in 5 states — residents can enjoy programs from the space's "Escapades...For Life!" which offers activities from cooking to karaoke to gambling.

From theater groups such as "Curtain Call" to classes for budding artists through its "Artists' Palette" program, resident can partake in many different activities.

"They are important because it keeps our residents engaged and stimulated," said Krissi Kressler, corporate director of program excellence. "They are vibrant, energetic, rich, educational programs and sometimes people believe that maybe the senior population doesn't need that, they've done that, but it's human nature to want to learn things and want to be a part of something





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Through "Cooking with Class," residents partake in a cooking demonstration with the chefs of the facility "Rachael Ray"- style, Kressler said, and have the chance to try the culinary creation at the end.

They explore different themes each month to expand their palates. In April, for example, residents will try Jewish-American cuisine, which will be one recipe submitted by a resident or family member that they will try together.

In January 2016, Brandywine is starting a 10-week pilot partnership with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts called "Life Through Art: My Life Story" to provide lessons for residents at its Haverford Estates and Upper Providence facilities, whether they are experienced artists or newcomers.

These kinds of programs are created to move away from the stereotypical ideas people have about senior communities.

"We're trying to get away from that old-school thinking of senior living," Kressler said. "We're bringing the senior population into today's world. Bingo is something we almost don't mention anymore."

And through these arts programs — in addition to university-style lectures brought in about topics from the story of wine in America to a journey through theater history — the residents have a chance to reconnect with their passions.

"The benefits of any arts programs are endless," Kressler said. "We could be rekindling an interest of theirs. Maybe they were an artist years ago, and the goal is to not think of them as, 'Oh they were an artist,' they are an artist, and we want to make sure we bring that to the forefront for all of our residents.

"You're never too old to learn something new, regardless of age." •

Judging by her vintage card collection, Marissa Stern isn't joking about enjoying her bingo games.



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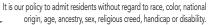


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A Lifetime of Being Asleep at the Wheel

Despite his Texas bona fides, Western swing superstar Ray Benson hails from a Jewish background in Wyndmoor.

BY GAIL SNYDER



A t 6 feet, 7 inches tall, Ray Benson casts a large shadow even when he isn't sporting a 10-gallon hat, spangled Western suit and cowboy boots. In mid-November, when he calls me from his recording studio in Austin, Texas, the baritone-voiced front man of the nine-time Grammy Award-winning Western swing band Asleep at the Wheel assures me he is dressed much more casually. In fact, he says, he is wearing the Merion Golf Club golf shirt he received about five years ago when he played in a tournament at the Ardmore club.

It seems fitting he is sporting a bit of Philly: The 64-year-old grew up in Wyndmoor, around the corner from where my own family lived. Known then as Ray Seifert, he was a childhood friend of my brother, Alan. So even though Benson officially moved away from the Philadelphia area in the 1970s — eventually landing in Austin at the urging of his good friend and golf buddy Willie Nelson — he

is at heart a Philadelphian and a proud product of its Jewish community.

Although he was named Texan of the Year in 2011 and Texas State Musician in 2004, his considerable musical accomplishments have only just been acknowledged here in his hometown. A musician, singer, bandleader and songwriter, he's been onstage with the likes of Bob Dylan, Dolly Parton, Charlie Rich and Emmylou Harris, and performed for Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Yet it was not until last month that he was named to the Philadelphia Music Walk of Fame, along with The Trammps ("Disco Inferno"), Jerry Blavat and The Roots. Benson, who was in town for the ceremony that gave him a bronze plaque on the sidewalk near the Kimmel Center, says it was "so cool" to be in such company. He recalls the reception he got from the au-

dience at the event.
"All of a sudden this big cowboy gets up and says, 'I bet y'all are wondering how a Jewish kid from Philadelphia became a cowboysinger. I can tell you in two words: Sally Starr.' They all just died laughing."

Benson's answer elicited laughter, but he was serious. While

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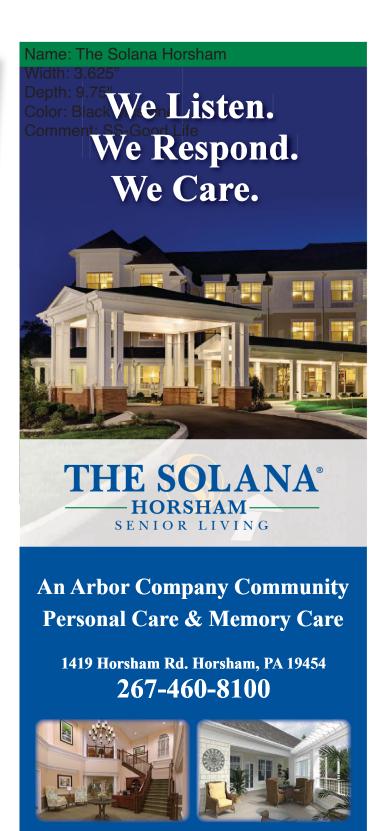
memoir was released last month to critical acclaim.

other baby boomers his age likely watched Sally Starr's *Popeye Theater* television show and delighted in the antics of Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Fess Parker's Davy Crockett on their shows, most quickly grew out of their cowboy fascination. Benson grew *into* his.

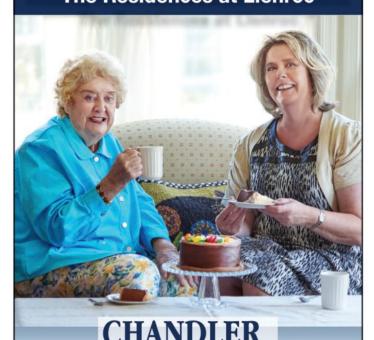
Perhaps it all began when he was 7 and his family took him to see Gene Autry when the star was making a personal appearance at WCAU on City Line Avenue. It was a moment Benson has never forgotten. Benson is in a reminiscing mood, trading stories with me about our shared idyllic upbringing in Springfield Township, Montgomery County, where he spent a lot of time outdoors in the woods catching toads, snakes and frogs and riding horses. The nostalgic look back has been prompted by his new, anecdote-filled memoir, Comin' Right at Ya: How a Jewish Yankee Hippie Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel (University of Texas Press, 2015).

When the publisher first contacted him, Benson quickly agreed to work with writer David Menconi because he thought it was time — after 25 Asleep at the Wheel albums and four decades of live performances — to share his life story. He explains, "For 45 years, I have existed as this guy who everybody thinks was born on a ranch in Texas and is probably Baptist." When he would point out that he was Jewish, the once skinny, red-haired Benson was often told he neither looked nor sounded Jewish.

Benson also agreed to the book because he had taken more than 70,000 words worth of notes throughout his career that were just waiting for a professional writer to turn into a book. Among the improbable anecdotes he tells in *Comin' Right At Ya* is the story of how he coaxed Janis Joplin's rental car into starting when Big Brother & the Holding Company was playing in Philadelphia, and how he bummed cigarettes from the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia — both of which happened when he was a teen. He even showed up at Woodstock, although he and his friends left before they heard any music.



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Benson

Continued from Page 17



Benson is a longtime friend and collaborator of some of the biggest names in country music, including Dolly Parton.

Benson's own career as a performer began at age 10, when he and his sister Sandy performed with a folk music group called The Four G's. Benson, who played guitar, found himself hooked on performing when the children's group played with the Philadelphia Orchestra in front of 5,000 people.

While he excelled at music, mastering the sousaphone and bass and playing in orchestras and marching band, Benson had a tough time in school; although highly intelligent, his attention deficit disorder made it hard for him to concentrate, and he frequently got in trouble for talking in class.

After graduating from Penn Charter in 1969, Benson enrolled in Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, as a filmmaking student, but dropped out in 1970 to start Asleep at the Wheel with friends Reuben Gosfield and LeRoy Preston. The idea was to bring everything they loved about Western swing music, which developed in the 1920s in the Southwest, to a new generation of fans who would appreciate its combination of jazz and blues accented by trombone, trumpet, clarinet, guitar and steel guitar. Benson describes it as "a great amalgamation of Afro-American, jazz, blues, swing and Texas country fiddling."

Some 100 musicians have played with Asleep at the Wheel over

the years and today Benson remains its only original member. His son, Sam, 32, has produced the group's last two albums and plays guitar on them. Son Aaron, 29, edits movie trailers in Los Angeles.

Like his friend Willie Nelson, who just turned 80, Benson has no plans to retire. He neither feels his age nor acts it, and still spends quite a bit of time on the road, traveling in his tour bus to appearances. Every 18 months or so, he and his band will do two shows at the Sellersville Theater.

He says, "The only time I'll stop is when it stops me. If I can't do it or people stop coming or my fingers don't work, or my voice don't work."

Gail Snyder recently put Asleep at the Wheel into her Spotify.



Benson is front and center for Asleep at the Wheel's first publicity shot in the 1960s.

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RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

A t 82, Charlotte Muchnick performs acts of kindness — one stitch at a time.

She coordinates the Shul Stitchers at Har Zion Temple in Penn Valley, a group of about 30 people who knit blankets for those in need.

They knit together individually in their homes and as a group, meeting once a month for the past 15 years to put all the pieces together.

The stitchers work together in an assembly-line fashion, each contributing a piece of the puzzle. Some crochet small squares, others sew those together into panels, which are then sewn into sixpaneled blankets, while still others crochet the edges using yarn or hand-stitching.

"There isn't any piece that anybody has done that we've turned away," she laughed. "It all goes into a blanket, and they're all beautiful when they're done."

Muchnick often washes the blankets once they're done before delivering them and sewing in the final touch: a tag that says "made with love from the Shul Stitchers of Har Zion Temple."

"We just reach out to people who have a special need," she said. "It's something that has created a community of mitzvah-doers."

They've donated the blankets to a variety of institutions and people, such as lone soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces, veterans, ill people and children in hospitals and shelters, and homeless people. They've also donated to HIAS and given some to the Jewish Relief Agency to dispense.

Muchnick said they try to distribute them every time they reach about a dozen or so blankets and hopes to donate twice as much before the holidays this year.

"The holidays can be very beautiful, and they can be very sad for a lot of people," she said. They try to give to wherever they see a need.

Muchnick also co-chairs another organization at Har Zion, the Caring Connection. The group of about 30 do-gooders deliver meals to people who are in mourning or sick.

For all the mitzvot Muchnick does, she remains humble.

"I live a life of reaching out to people," she said. "I think it's important, especially now, because so many people are not connected — and they're unhappy because they're not connected. It's just a human thing to do, and recognizing hurt in other people and trying to help them, it's a good thing. It makes you feel good that you're doing good."

Muchnick added that supporting others builds community, and it becomes its own reward.

"It's what I have learned by being Jewish. It's a Jewish value that I value highly," she said.

Muchnick recalled delivering blankets to people at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. when it was still open, and she met a young veteran who lost both his legs, so young he still looked like a teenager.

"I was happy that the blankets that we made would go to some people like him that could bring him some level of comfort," she added.

But Sue Aistrop, director of community services at KleinLife and RSVP Philadelphia, said the whole face of senior volunteers is changing.

RSVP — the Retired Senior Volunteer Program — is federally funded by the Corporation of National and Community Service and sponsored by KleinLife. It provides community service opportunities for almost 1,000 55-and-over volunteers.

Although the title implies an older crowd, Aistrop said RSVP recruits more baby boomers, and "55 looks a lot different than it did back then" when it started 40 years ago.

The majority of issues they support relate to hunger, food insecurity and literacy.

"We try to address serious problems in the community and put our volunteers in those directions," she added. "We're going to try and place people where there's a real need and they're really going to make a difference in people's lives."

Aistrop said volunteers help in any way they can, whether filing papers or ushering at theaters. While still appreciated, she said baby boomers want to give back in more hands-on ways.

"Studies show that people actually physically feel better when they're volunteering. It improves their health, it improves their state of mind, it improves their neighborhood. It's just a positive way to finish your career," she said.

"Baby boomers want to see more results from what they do. They want to feel much more engaged and needed. They want to share their thoughts on the best way it can be done. They want a much more complete commitment to the organizations that they're volunteering for."

Bob Slipakoff is a part of that baby boomer generation in RSVP. The 64-year-old is a volunteer delivery driver for one of RSVP's largest programs, Cook For a Friend, a Meals on Wheels-type of program that provides food to about 625 people each year.

Members of KleinLife and the community from across the Delaware Valley prepare the meals, some even with vegetables grown in a garden at KleinLife.

"I'm a lot younger than some of my cohorts at RSVP," he laughed. He delivers meals every Monday morning to, he says, "get the week off to a good start."



The Shul Stitchers pose with their holiday gift-giving bounty.

"I think that I have a deep feeling for seniors who want to stay as independent as they can and who may or may not have loved ones nearby," he added. "You never know somebody's situation until you get to know them."

Slipakoff has also tried to get to know the people he delivers to each week ever since his first day on the job two years ago.

Newly retired, he wanted to use his free time to go to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. on Yom HaShoah. However, he didn't want to switch his new schedule with RSVP, so he stuck to it.

He ended up delivering to a Holocaust survivor and, he recalled, "instead of being in a museum, here I was with this extraordinary woman who endured so much."

"This is living history, not just museums. In a way, bringing her a meal and giving her a little bit of sustenance, a little bit of strength... it felt great. That was just a great way to start it off," he added.

Slipakoff goes the extra mile for the seniors he assists. He shovels their sidewalks, takes out their trash or simply

talks to them on the phone whenever they need a friend.

"If I could interface with people," Slipakoff said, "even just for the few minutes it takes, help them stay independent, give them a friendly face that they can count on every week... that would be helpful to them and also feels good to do that. You could call it a mitzvah." •

Rachel Kurland is this close to getting past the "knit one, purl two" stage.



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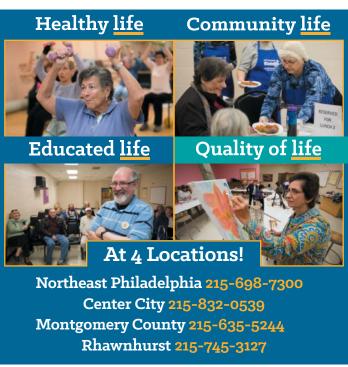
Thanks to local groups, more people than ever are able to stay in their homes, despite needing care.

JASON COHEN | JE STAFF

indy Citron never wanted her parents Harriet and Alfred to have to move to a nursing home. She felt it would destroy them emotionally and take away their independence.

"I wouldn't go in a nursing home," Harriet concurred unequivocally. "We would die there."

The Citrons aren't alone: Nursing home care continues to cost three times as much as in-home personal care. Only 4 percent of senior citizens said that









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they would choose a nursing home over in-home care, according to a 2007 survey by the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation.

One organization that helps families like the Citrons deal with this life-changing issue is JEVS at Home (JAH), one of the state's largest providers of non-medical home care support services to disabled and aging clients.

If Medicaid qualifications are met, families can receive home care support, which, in many cases, can come directly from family members themselves — who can now be paid for the care they were already giving for free. JEVS at Home provides the necessary training and assists in the process of becoming an official caregiver.

The Citron family of the Northeast can attest to the work JAH does. JEVS at Home provides 24-hour care to Harriet and Alfred Citron.

"It would kill him to be in a nursing home," Harriet reiterated, referring to her husband.

When Alfred was diagnosed with Parkinson's a few years ago, Harriet started to care for him. From bathing, grooming and dressing assistance to a myriad of other daily activities, Harriet was there for her husband.

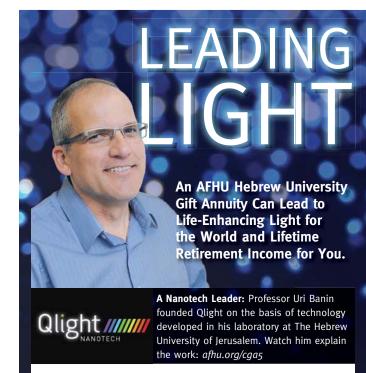
When Harriet broke her arm three years ago, the couple's daughter, Cindy, who works full-time as the principal of the Neziner Hebrew School at Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel in Center City, asked JEVS at Home to provide a caregiver.

Ellen Shimberg, a client care manager for JEVS at Home who arranged for a caregiver named Janice to help the Citrons, explained

See Homecare, Page 24



Cindy Citron (left), with her parents Alfred and Harriet, at their home in the Northeast.



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Homecare

Continued from Page 23

that people over the age of 60 who think they need help at home can call the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA), which will then send out an assessment team to see if assistance is needed. Once PCA deems a family eligible for home care, it works with JEVS at Home to help them.

Having 24-hour care at the Citron home has really changed their lives, Shimberg said. Alfred had just turned 80 and the Citrons had just celebrated their 53rd wedding anniversary and ultimately, life is much easier.

"Without the service, Mr. Citron would most likely be in a nursing home," she said. "The service allows them to stay at home, be a married couple and still see their grandchildren. The longer we can keep people home, the longer they can survive. Families like the Citrons are making it possible for other people."

At the time, Cindy was spending three to four nights a week caring for her dad, but that all changed the day Janice took a daytime ride with Harriet, only to witness her suffering from a conversion disorder that caused her to pass out.

Janice immediately brought it to Cindy's attention — and that was the last day Harriet drove. Cindy became an advocate for her parents and would call PCA and JEVS at Home nonstop pleading her parents' case for receiving full-time home care. With kids, a job and traveling from Delaware, taking on the role of primary caregiver was out of the question.

Ultimately, her advocacy led to 24-hour care for her parents. "It's unprecedented — people don't get 24-hour care at home," she said. "Typically, when you ask someone for help most people want to



Alyssa Lipschutz (left) poses at home with parents Stan and Evelyn.

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Now, her parents still have their independence and Cindy, her kids and other family members can visit them at home.

"I know that they are safe," Cindy said.

Al, who has had numerous health issues, including open-heart surgery, back surgery and Parkinson's, is grateful for his daughter's help, and thrilled JEVS at Home and PCA granted him and his wife 24-hour care — especially since Janice has become so dear to him. "She's very knowledgeable. She takes wonderful care of me," Al said, referring to Janice.

While he appreciates everything being done for him, he misses driving and his job as a salesman, where he sold everything from tobacco to cheesecake.

Cindy understands and sympathizes with her father to an extent. But, she said simply, "You can't put a price tag on a piece of mind."

In 2008, Evelyn Lipschutz, 69, a resident of the Northeast, began falling and was put in a nursing home for rehab for a year. She returned home, but has had a number of medical ailments, which caused her daughter Alyssa to become her primary caregiver in 2012. Previously, Alyssa worked in the foodservice industry but, after hearing about JEVS at Home, decided to make the switch.

Alyssa is now a JAH employee, just like the caregivers for the Citrons. JAH provides people with the ability to hire a family member as a caregiver, and it is often the deciding factor as to whether or not a consumer accepts services.

Her father, Stan, 67, had a small stroke in 2011 so his ability to help with her mom diminished. It has also pushed her onto a career path of nursing: She recently got her certified nursing assistant license and will be looking into night nursing school next year.

She doesn't want to see her parents end up in a nursing home. "I

thought they could still be independent if they had help at home," Alyssa said.

'They love that I'm here helping them," she said. "They are thankful. I never discussed putting them in an assisted living facility."

Stan and Evelyn both agreed Alyssa has made a difference in their lives.

"I'm very pleased about it," Stan said. "She does a very good job. I would say that it's been easier. She helps us a lot. I'm happy that we are able to stay at home." •

Jason Cohen is a staff reporter for the Jewish Exponent.

Get Help Finding Help

For people over the age of 60, they can call Philadelphia Corporation for Aging at 215-765-9000 to reach the Office of Long Term Living. PCA will send out a service coordinator who will complete an assessment that determines eligibility both medically and financially (through the County Assistance office).

The paperwork is then sent to the state for approval. Once approved, the service coordinator assists the family in identifying a home care agency. This is when they can request JAH. People under 60 can contact Maximus (877-550-4227) to undergo a similar process.



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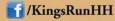
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Tours de Force

There are more options than ever for active adults looking to explore all that Israel has to offer.

BY HILARY DANAILOVA

or my travel-averse grandmother, a Holy Land trip was a lot like her diet — the one that always started tomorrow. When she and my grandfather finally joined a tour of Israel, the Yom Kippur War broke out on their second day in Jerusalem. But they had a wonderful time anyway, and the photos, stories and gold Chai necklaces from that trip were among my grandmother's most cherished mementos.

Whether it's a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage or an annual vacation, there are more options than ever for older Americans seeking to experience Israel — alternatives that go far beyond the traditional greatest-hits tour, though that, too, has evolved with changing tastes. No other demographic is as varied in age, interests, physical condition, or generational preferences as today's seniors, who might be anywhere from 50 to 100.

First-timers might enjoy a group visit to the Western Wall, a swing through Tel Aviv and a dip in the Dead Sea; repeat visitors, active adventurers and scholars will find itineraries tailored to their particular bents. On virtually every tour, couples predominate, followed by a sizable contingent of single women (single men are less common, though exceedingly popular). The average age is generally in the 60s, which is true even for trips not specifically aimed at seniors.

But there is one thing all sojourners have in common, according to Susan Blum, Israel department manager at Philadelphia-based Gil Travel Tours: "Every trip, they're yelling, 'Turn on the Wi-Fi!' "— her tone conveying that from 80-year-olds, this you wouldn't expect. "And it's like, 'Look on the right, there's something amazing,' "recalled Blum. "Come on, you're in Israel. Turn off your phone and look out the window!"

Nostalgic for Junior Year Abroad? The classic Israel tour is uniquely conducive to friendships that endure after the plane lands at Newark. That's because minutes into the welcome dinner, travelers are playing a game their guides call Jewish Geography — swapping stories of Brooklyn childhoods and exclaiming over mutual acquaintances in Michigan. For tour devotees, what you sacrifice in flexibility and independence, you more than gain in hassle-free roaming and conviviality. Friendships are forged over camel rides and hummus; couples broaden their social circle, while solo visitors find companionship (though the single supplement is still common.)

Most excursions cover the essentials: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Masada, Haifa, the Sea of Galilee, the Golan Heights and maybe Caesarea. Still, as times have changed, so have the trips. Itineraries have grown more adventurous, incorporating culturally immersive activities like home-based Shabbat and newer attractions like Abraham's Tent at Genesis Land. "And over the years, hotel quality has improved — from four to five stars, which in Israel is a big step up," said Michael Morse, a third generation member of the family behind Margaret Morse Tours, a Florida-based company that has specialized in Israel for 35 years. "The Jewish traveler from the U.S. prefers something better."

Morse offers more than a half-dozen adults-only departures in spring and fall, the most pleasant seasons in Israel, with 13- and 16-day programs from \$3,999 to \$4,399 per person, not including airfare. Groups are large — an average of 60-90 people, spread over two to three buses with lots of empty seats for comfort — and several departures are geared specifically for second-timers.

At Gil Travel Tours, another Holy Land specialist, 12-day trips for ages 55+ sell out as fast as Susan Blum schedules them. The average age is late 60s, though Blum has had energetic guests in their 80s and 90s; with 15 to 20 people, groups are large enough to keep dinner conversation lively but small enough to warrant spontaneous additions to the schedule. "If we have a real shopping crowd, we can make sure to do that," Blum explained, ticking off the advantages of a Gil senior tour: "They're all the same age. There's no kids on the trip. We go when it's not too hot. We become a family." Another benefit: the price, \$4,900 per person, includes airfare and nearly everything else.

See Tours, Page 28

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Tours

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For doctors who fancy a busman's holiday: Does your idea of a good time involve lunch with the Health Minister and cutting-edge research labs? This February, North American Jewish doctors can join an international team of colleagues on the Doctors for Israel Tour, one of a number of special-interest travel missions sponsored by the Jewish National Fund. Most participants are middle-aged and older, said Talia Aviani, JNF's missions manager, though many are still working.

The Americans meet with top Israeli doctors and researchers, learning about the achievements and challenges of a world-renowned medical culture. The group visits facilities around the country — august institutions as well as small border hospitals — and meets with patients at a military rehabilitation center. Price: \$2,595 per person (based on double occupancy, without airfare). Another medical mission is scheduled for December 2016.



I want to volunteer, but I'm not an M.D. Joining the morning commuters on the city bus, exchanging greetings in the elevator, discussing the day's challenges over lunch with colleagues: There is no better way to understand a country than to work alongside its residents. For visitors who prefer meaningful service to sybaritic vacations, Skilled Volunteers for Israel is an organization that matches North American adults and retirees with nonprofits in critical need of their skills — everything from editing and early childhood education to graphic design and legal research.

Apply for individual placement or join an upcoming group mission, Go Israel Volunteer: Tel Aviv, from February 15 - March 5, 2016. Go Israel Volunteer costs \$1,650, including orientation, transportation, activities, meals, and a lecture series; airfare and accommodations are extra. However you volunteer, you'll pay rather than get paid — but constructive engagement is its own reward.

Already worked your way through the Zahav cookbook? The weeklong Culinary, Wine and Music Tour, another JNF mission, might be the perfect next chapter. Ideal for aesthetes, gourmands and those who have already seen Israel's major sights, this June route takes in up-and-coming wineries, the jazz clubs of Tel Aviv, and the spice markets of Jerusalem. A typical day might involve a workshop on the evolution of Israeli cuisine with a top chef and cookbook author; a guided nature walk through biblical forests, followed by a meal prepared with locally sourced ingredients; and an ice creammaking event and discussion of Israeli diversity at a jointly owned

Arab-Jewish creamery. Price: \$5,999, based on double occupancy and excluding airfare.

For the lifelong student who schleps Will Durant to the beach: Would you rather debate the semiotics of a museum than its contents? You might enjoy one of the rigorously cerebral travel seminars organized by the Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning, a project of the Hebrew University. Melton, famous for its two-year adult Jewish learning curriculum, hosts four textually focused, idea-oriented Israel journeys themes include "Herzl's Dream Revisited" and "Biblical In-Sites" — as well as Jewish historical tours of Poland (Ashkenazim) and Spain (Sephardim) that culminate in Israel.

"It's a study seminar, but you're never in a classroom. You're studying as you're out walking the land," explained Judy Mars Kupchan, CEO of the Melton School. "You come as a participant in Israel, not as a tourist." In other words, don't expect a shopping expedition. You'll still swim in the Dead Sea, but after you dry off, you'll join a study session on false messiahs rather than go for cocktails. Then you'll dine at a kibbutz with staggeringly beautiful views, chat with the residents, and contemplate the relationship between land, history and people. Prices vary, starting around \$2,950 (land only).

Speaking of travelers who insist they're not tourists: When you're digging up Holy Land treasure alongside university students or watching the sun set over Jerusalem from your own apartment balcony, you feel less like a visitor — and more like an Israeli. Those are the kind of immersive cultural experiences Road Scholar had in mind when the company designed its all-inclusive, six-week Living and Learning program for adults over 50. At a cost of about



\$9,000 (excluding airfare), participants get a local cellphone on arrival, settle into their own Jerusalem apartments, attend daily morning Hebrew classes, and convene for happy hours and weekend excursions around the country.

Road Scholar — formerly known as Elderhostel, the pioneer of senior educational travel — will launch the program in Israel this January. One of very few language-immersions specifically for sen-

See Tours, Page 28

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Tours

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iors, Living and Learning promises free time to explore Israel and use your Hebrew in context, along with social diversity: Israel Road Scholars are typically split 50-50 between Jews and non-Jews...and 45 percent of them are single.

Prefer to roll up your sleeves and get dirty? Another Road Scholar offering, which begins this July for active adults over 50, invites participants on a two- or four-week archaeological dig in Tel Dor, a village on the Mediterranean near Haifa. Two dozen Road Scholars will join students and researchers from a local university for early morning digs, afternoons at the affiliated museum, and weekends in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv (cost without airfare: around \$3,400).

Herbal tea, meditation and Midrash, too: A stay at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, which describes itself as a holistic Torah retreat for Jewish women of all ages, is the antithesis

of your typical Israel tour. Seniors are in the minority, men are rare, participants commit to anywhere from two weeks to a year of full-time study — and it all takes place in the green Judean Mountains, far from the intensity of Jerusalem or the cosmopolitanism of Tel Aviv.

On a hilltop amid burbling natural springs, Midreshet Berot Bat Ayin aims to be a spiritual oasis for an international community of women whose ages range from 18 to the late 80s. "We find so many older students bring a certain wisdom for our younger students," said Elana Roth, the midrasha's administration director (who is originally from Minnesota, but warned that the damp, underheated Judean winter feels just as cold). The women are united by a desire



to plunge deep into Jewish learning in a nurturing, female-centered environment — whether for a two-week Passover "renewal," a yearlong conversion journey or an immersive summer ulpan.

Activities include classes in Jewish mysticism, meditation and classical philosophy; partner textual study; one-on-one spiritual mentoring; and workshops in herbology using Biblical plants from the garden. Few programs take the concept of going back to the land so seriously — or interpret it on so many levels. And if village life gets confining, Jerusalem is less than an hour away. •

Hilary Danailova is already packing for the culinary tour of Israel.



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