

SENIOR

Lifestyles

FEATURING:

- **The Over-50 Job Club**
- **Sandra Nance, director of the CARE Cafe**
- **Tips for health, home and happiness**



Spring 2024

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Celebrating Older Americans Month

Established in 1963, Older Americans Month (OAM) is celebrated every May. Led by a federal agency, the Administration for Community Living (ACL), OAM is a time to recognize older Americans' contributions, highlight aging trends and reaffirm commitments to serving the older adults in our communities.

This year's theme, "Powered by Connection," focuses on the impact that meaningful connections have on the well-being and health of older adults — a relationship underscored by the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.

"It's not just about having someone

to chat with," said Pamela Sullivan, director of Stanly County Senior Services. "It's about the transformative potential of community engagement in enhancing mental, physical, and emotional well-being."

According to Sullivan, by recognizing and nurturing the role that connectedness plays, individuals can mitigate issues like loneliness, ultimately promoting healthy aging for more Americans.

How can community groups, businesses, and organizations mark OAM?

- Spread the word about the mental, physical, and emotional health benefits of social connection through

professional and personal networks.

- Encourage social media followers to share their thoughts and stories of connection using hashtag #PoweredByConnection to inspire and uplift.

- Promote opportunities to engage, like cultural activities, recreational programs, and interactive virtual events.

- Connect older adults with local services, such as counseling, that can help them overcome obstacles to meaningful relationships and access to support systems.

- Host connection-centric events or programs where older adults can serve as mentors to peers, younger adults, or youths.

What can individuals do to connect?

- Invite more connection into your life by finding a new passion, joining a social club, taking a class, or trying new activities at your Senior Center.

- Stay engaged in your community by giving back through volunteering, working, teaching or mentoring.

- Invest time with people to build new relationships and discover deeper connections with your family, friends, colleagues, or neighbors.

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

3 Queenz Q'uisine owner Latashia Davis discussed older workers at a meeting of the Over-50 Job Club. (Photo by TOBY THORPE)



Over-50 Job Club provides resources for finding work

By Toby Thorpe
for the SNAP

The Over-50 Job Club, which meets monthly at the NC Works Career Center in Albemarle, is an opportunity for employers to connect with mature and experienced job seekers.

“Many people who had performed the same kind of work ‘forever’ have found themselves unemployed, through no fault of

their own, as a result of today’s economy,” says Cathy Thurston of the NC Works office in Albemarle. “And we are here to help them.

“The 50-plus generation, as a whole, seems to prefer to meet and speak face-to-face,” added Thurston, noting that many of this age worked most of their careers when jobs were not so heavily

■ See **WORK**, 9C



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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Can we sit and talk?

“What do you do for a livin’? What does your husband do for a livin’?”

I am asked these questions several times each day. He forgets that he just asked a couple of minutes ago and he just wants to start a conversation.

At home, he does not have anyone other than his wife to talk to and she gets tired of hearing the same questions over and over.

She is patient, but it is difficult, as a caregiver, to entertain the same conversations continuously with someone who has changed so dramatically due to dementia. He is not the same man that she met and fell in love with 40-plus years ago.

She takes great care of him. He will tell you that, but we all need a break sometimes. We all need time to take care of ourselves. Family caregivers especially need time away from their loved one to devote to self-care so that they can come back refreshed and continue providing the best care possible.

That’s what I do for a livin’!

I am the director of CARE Café, a non-profit organization that provides respite care to caregivers of senior loved ones.

What does the word respite mean?

It is a brief period of rest or relief from something that is difficult. Each Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., a group of 12 participants, two volunteers and I meet with the goal of having fun and giving caregivers in

By
Sandra
Nance



our community some time away from their usual daily duties. We hope to open on Wednesdays when we get more volunteers.

We meet at the Taylor House Community Center in west Albemarle. It is a beautifully renovated historic home that served as the nurses’ quarters for the Yadkin Hospital in years past.

It is a bright and comfortable setting for our group. Each morning, we welcome our friends with a snack and coffee or hot chocolate, devotions and exercise. We serve a hot nutritious meal at noon from the Taylor House chefs.

The other activities vary each day. We enjoy Bible studies, music, trivia, games, crafts, educational classes and fitness activities. We are blessed to have brilliant and talented volunteers who share their talents and expertise with us. We are also blessed to be governed by a group of local citizens on our board of directors who genuinely care about reaching our goals and making a difference in the community. The

■ See CARE, 7C

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

■ CARE

continued from page 6C

greatest benefit for the participants is the socialization that this group provides. Social isolation is a serious issue for seniors who find themselves unable to get out and do the things that once kept them active and vibrant. Our goal is to show each person that they are still needed and that they still have a purpose.

I have been the director of CARE Café since it first opened in 2010. I remember the first day we met with one participant and one volunteer. I had several activities planned to keep us busy all day.

Dick Mills, our first participant, said, “Can’t we just sit down and talk?”

The crafts waited for another day, and we sat down and talked. The older generation has so much wisdom and love to share. They just need someone to sit down and listen. They need encouragement, respect and love in return.

Each participant and volunteer since Mr. Mills have made their own mark on the program.

I have seen it evolve over the years. In the first years, we served mostly the generation who were affected by the Great Depression and World War II. We still have a few of those, but most participants are of the next generation. I now get to learn from those who fought in Vietnam and worked hard to provide for their family during the 1960s and 1970s.

As the group has changed over the past 13 years, one thing has remained constant. That is the abundance of brotherly love and the fellowship between group members. It is humbling to watch them as they support each other during difficult times and celebrate victories together.

How do I answer the question, “What do you do for a livin’?”

I get to hang out with you, and I laugh every day!

Sandra Nance is director of the CARE Café in Albemarle.



CARE Cafe director Sandra Nance, center, is joined by Cheryl DeAbreu, left, and Janelle Bowles for a little gardening at the center. (Contributed)

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Seniors can boost energy with the right foods

A nutritious diet is a key component of a healthy lifestyle. And for seniors, the right diet can be a key part of treating any number of health issues. In fact, changing one's diet may be something seniors can consider if they are feeling sluggish. Food can be a helpful ally for seniors dealing

with fatigue and low energy.

WebMD says eating a balanced diet is one of the ways to improve low energy levels, and that balanced diet should include certain foods that are natural energy boosters.

- **Whole grains:** Switching refined grains for whole grains is a good way to boost energy. These grains are full of complex carbohydrates that help boost metabolism and provide energy. They'll also work longer in the body than the more refined options. Swap out "white" products like breads and rices for whole wheat or brown rice.
- **Lean protein sources:** While protein does not give the same quick boost of energy as a high carbohydrate meal, it will help fuel the body and keep a person feeling full longer. According to Discovery Senior Living, protein helps increase concentration levels, produces stronger muscles and helps maintain optimal blood sugar levels.

Chicken, tuna and legumes are some notable protein sources.

- **Nuts:** Most nuts are a complete package that provide healthy fats, proteins and amino acids that are good for the body. The fiber and carbohydrates in nuts digest more slowly and help provide a steady supply of energy throughout the day. Replace croutons in salads with nuts, or sprinkle some nuts on oatmeal at breakfast.
- **Fruits and vegetables:** Berries, sweet potatoes, dark, leafy greens, and other produce are low-calorie, low-sugar options for snacks and sides that boost health. They're full of fiber and antioxidants that can ward off illness, and they can provide an energy boost as well. Berries and vegetables can be added to smoothies or salads.

The right foods can help seniors restore energy levels and promote overall health.

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

■ WORK

continued from page 5C

computer and tech-based, and when employment applications and interviews were done in-person rather than online.

“Our club brings them together, and is an opportunity for us to notify job seekers of opportunities in the area,” she added.

As such, Thurston invites potential employers to attend club meetings and meet job seekers first-hand. In addition, she provides participants in the club meetings with flyers announcing upcoming hiring events, job fairs and area businesses and organizations that are accepting employment applications.

Information distributed at one meeting included notices from NC

Education Corps (seeking tutors), Hire Dynamics (upcoming job fair), Tarheel Challenge Academy (various positions), Southern Pipe (various positions), Mohawk (upcoming hiring event) and Save the Children (upcoming hiring event).

With computer skills a necessity in many jobs, NC Works offers “Technology and Engagement for Older Adults and Seniors,” a hands-on workshop offered in partnership with AARP.

Representatives from two employers spoke to club participants about job opportunities they can offer.

Latashia Davis, owner of 3 Queenz Q’uisine in Locust, said she prefers to hire those ages 50 and up as restaurant staff.

“Good staff is hard to find,” she said, “and the 50-plus generation is

reliable and takes the job seriously.”

Jennifer Lowder, director of nursing for Ally Home Care, related that those in the club may have a better grasp of their purpose and passion than the younger generation.

“Home care is not a high-paying job, but it is rewarding,” Lowder said.

“Money is important, but fulfillment is just as important,” she added in regard to the personal care services Ally offers.

The Over-50 Job Club meets at 10:30 a.m. the third Tuesday of each month at the NC Works Career Center, 944 N. First St., Albemarle. Those with questions are encouraged to contact Cathy Thurston at 704-982-2183.

Toby Thorpe is a freelance writer for The Stanly News & Press.



Jennifer Lowder spoke of how a rewarding job is important. (Photo by TOBY THORPE)



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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

How nutritional needs change with age

Healthy eating is important at any age and can set the course for a life of vitality and wellness. Sufficient nutrition can help prevent chronic illnesses and make sure that growing bodies develop properly. As one ages, various changes take place in the body, making healthy eating even more essential.

According to Healthline, nutritional deficiencies can effect aging individuals, which can decrease quality of life and lead to poor health outcomes. Individuals should pay attention to their vitamin and mineral intake at various ages so they do not miss out on important nutrients. As a person ages, here are some approaches to consider.

- **Consume fewer calories:** According to Connie Bales, PhD, RD, associate director of the Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center at Durham VA Medical Center, people need fewer calories every decade. That's because individuals are moving around less and have less muscle. This causes a decline in metabolic rate.

- **Include more nutrient-dense foods:** Even though caloric needs go down with age, it's important to pack as much nutrition into the calories a person does consume. That means finding nutrient-rich foods like whole grains, fruits, nuts, beans, vegetables, fish, and lean cuts of meat.

- **Consume more lean protein:** Muscle loss and loss of strength can develop as a person ages. Healthline says the average adult loses 3% to 8% of their muscle mass each

Individuals should pay attention to their vitamin and mineral intake at various ages so they do not miss out on important nutrients. (METRO)



decade after age 30. Eating more protein could help aging bodies maintain muscle.

- **Eat fortified cereals and grains:** The ability to absorb vitamin B12 can decrease as one gets older and with the use of certain medicines. Many health professionals recommend patients get more vitamin B12 by consuming foods enriched with this vitamin. Vitamin supplements may be needed in addition to food.
- **Drink more fluids:** Health.com says sensation of thirst declines with age. Drinking water and other fluids becomes a priority to stay hydrated. It also helps with digestion.

- **Prioritize bone health:** Osteoporosis is a concern for older adults, particularly women who have reached menopause. Osteoporosis

occurs when bones become brittle and can break from only the slightest bump or fall, says the Mayo Clinic. Vitamin D and calcium help strengthen bones, and older adults may need more of these nutrients.

Individuals should speak with their health care providers and nutrition-

ists for further insight into their changing nutritional needs. Such professionals can help customize diets to address specific health concerns.

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

What seniors should know about prediabetes

Most seniors recognize that routine visits to their physicians are an important component of preventive health care. Annual physicals are important for everyone, but they're especially important for individuals 65 and older who may be more vulnerable to disease and various other health conditions than younger adults.

The National Institute on Aging reports that millions of individuals 65 and older have visited their physicians



and learned they have a condition known as prediabetes. For some, the day they receive a prediabetes diagnosis also marks the first time they've heard of the condition. Since so many seniors are affected by prediabetes, it can behoove anyone to learn more about it.

What is prediabetes?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that prediabetes is a serious health condition characterized by higher than normal blood sugar levels. When a person has prediabetes, his or her blood sugar levels are not yet high enough to indicate type 2 diabetes, but that could change if prediabetes patients do not make changes to prevent such a progression.

How common is prediabetes?

A 2023 study published in the journal *Diabetes Care* indicates that 464 million individuals across the globe had impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) and 298 million had impaired fasting glucose (IFG) in 2021. Each of those conditions are hallmarks of

prediabetes, cases of which the study indicates are expected to rise significantly by 2045.

What causes prediabetes?

The CDC notes that when a person has prediabetes, the cells in his or her body do not respond normally to insulin, which is a hormone produced by the pancreas that enables blood sugar to enter cells, which then use it for energy. The pancreas then makes more insulin to get cells to respond, but eventually the pancreas cannot keep up, resulting in a rise in blood sugar.

Does prediabetes produce symptoms?

Many people have prediabetes for years and do not know it. In fact, the CDC reports that more than 80 percent of the 98 million American adults who have prediabetes are unaware that they do.

How can I determine if I have prediabetes?

The sheer volume of people who have prediabetes but are unaware that they do begs the question of

what individuals can do to learn if they have the condition before they develop type 2 diabetes. Recognition of the risk factors for prediabetes is a good start. The CDC urges anyone who has any of the following risk factors to speak with their doctor about having their blood sugar tested:

- Being overweight;
- Being 45 or older;
- Having a parent, brother or sister with type 2 diabetes;
- Being physically active less than three times per week;
- A history of diabetes during preg-

nancy (gestational diabetes) or giving birth to a baby who weighed more than nine pounds;

- Having polycystic ovary syndrome; and
- Being African American, Hispanic/Latino American, American Indian, or Pacific Islander. Some Asian Americans also are at greater risk for prediabetes.

Prediabetes can be a precursor to type 2 diabetes, which only highlights how important it is that older adults recognize their risk for the condition.

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

What people can do to prevent stroke

Stroke has been described as a “brain attack.” Stroke occurs when blood flow to a part of the brain becomes blocked or when a blood vessel in the brain breaks, which can damage or kill brain cells. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion says stroke is a leading cause of death and long-term disability in adults. It also can cause irreversible damage to the brain.

Individuals who experience stroke may end up with memory problems or experience difficulty thinking or forming words. Mobility issues like difficulty walking or paralysis and weakness may occur. Some individuals also may experience incontinence and other issues resulting from neurological damage.

Although stroke can come out of the blue and is not always preventable, there are several steps people can take to help reduce their risk for stroke.

- **Reduce blood pressure numbers.** High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a significant risk factor for stroke, says Harvard Health. Doctors may advise patients to work to lower blood pressure to between 140/90 to 120/80.

- **Work to lower BMI.** Overweight or obesity increases risk for stroke, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Losing weight and maintaining a health body mass index can help lower stroke risk.

- **Exercise more often.** Routine physical activity can not only help a person lose weight, but also lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels — all of which are risk factors for stroke. The U.S. Surgeon General recommends individuals get a minimum of two hours and 20 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week.

- **Get a cholesterol check.** High cholesterol can increase risk of stroke, which makes routine cholesterol checks important. The Office for the Assistant Secretary of Health says people should get their cholesterol checked at least every four to six years, with some needing to get it checked more frequently.



- **Drink only in moderation.** Alcohol can increase risk of high blood pressure. Individuals should reduce their alcohol intake, with one drink or less for women and two drinks or less for men per day.

- **Know your family health history.** Knowing one's family health history may illustrate a risk for genetic health conditions that can make a person more likely to experience stroke.

- **Treat heart disease.** Do not delay medical treatment for heart disease. Heart conditions like coronary artery disease or atrial fibrillation should be addressed promptly to prevent stroke.

Stroke is a serious medical condition that can leave a person debilitated. That is why it is key to reduce risk of stroke throughout one's life.

— METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Injury recovery tips

There is no escaping the fact that the human body changes as it ages. Some changes associated with aging are beneficial, such as increased wisdom and knowledge from past experiences. Others, particularly changes to health and wellness, can be disconcerting.

Generally speaking, recovering from any injury can be a time-consuming process. For those over the age of 60, the process of recovering from injury can be especially lengthy.

According to Restorative Strength, a fitness and personal training service for seniors, elderly adults generally heal from injuries slower than young people. Caring Senior Services says there are a few reasons why healing can be delayed:

- Having diabetes is one of the most common reasons why seniors have delayed healing. The disease can negatively impact wound healing because elevated glucose levels narrow the blood vessels and harden the arteries.

- The inflammatory response in seniors drastically slows down as people age. This response is the first phase when blood vessels expand to let white blood cells and nutrients reach wounds. When delayed, the wounds heal much more slowly.

- Reduced skin elasticity and diminished collagen fibers in seniors can contribute to the body's tissues not being able to return to a normal state after injury.

- Sedentary seniors may have lost muscle mass and flexibility, which help physically active individuals regain mobility after an injury. Bones also may be more brittle, particularly if osteoporosis is present.

Although it's impossible to reverse

the hands of time, there are steps seniors can take to recover from injuries more quickly, and potentially avoid them as well.

- **Slow and steady physical activity:** Exercise, including routine strength-training activities, helps strengthen muscles and bones. According to Pioneer Trace Healthcare & Rehabilitation, when complete bed rest is not advised after an injury, getting up and moving even just a little each day can jump-start recovery. Regular activity prior to any injury also may make the body stronger and more flexible to help reduce the likelihood of injuries.

- **Maintain a positive mindset.** The mind has a role to play in injury recovery. Minimizing stress levels through meditation, and engaging in positive thinking techniques, can make healing and therapies more successful. Reducing stress can boost the immune system, which also will offer healing benefits.

- **Improve diet.** The body needs certain vitamins and minerals to function properly. Eating a well-rounded, healthy diet can provide fuel that facilitates healing.

- **Work with a qualified professional.** Seniors should not take on exercise or recovery efforts on their own. Exercising the right way and following prescribed guidelines can speed up recovery and potentially prevent future injuries.

Recovery from injury could take longer for seniors. But with exercise, positive thinking and guidance from health professionals, there are ways to speed up the injury recovery process.

— METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



What is hospice care?

Hospice care aims to ease pain in patients who are not expected to recover from their condition; life expectancy is 6 months or less and treatment is no longer being pursued.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care aims to ease pain and help with symptoms caused by a chronic or serious illness but is not considered to be life-limiting at this time. This service adds an extra layer of support working in conjunction with an individual's medical team and life-prolonging medications or treatments.

Serious Illness Care: The Difference Between Hospice Care and Palliative Care

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Exercise remains beneficial for adults

Exercise is just as beneficial for older adults as it is for children and young adults.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, engaging in regular physical activity is among the most important steps older adults can take as they seek to safeguard their overall health.

Such activity can prevent or delay many age-related health problems and strengthen muscles while improving balance, which can reduce risk for falls

and injuries such as broken bones.

The CDC notes that certain physical activities can be characterized as multicomponent activities, which means they combine aerobic activity, muscle strengthening and balance training.

Examples of such activities include dancing, yoga, tai chi, gardening and even sports participation.

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

How empty nesters can repurpose rooms in their homes

It can be bittersweet when adult children decide the time has come to move out of the family home. Parents perhaps get their first trial run of this scenario when their children go off to college or enlist in the military. Rooms are left empty, if only for a certain period of time. Eventually, those rooms will remain empty as adult children move out of the house for good.

Converting a child's bedroom into an area for adults may take some planning. It can be exciting to regain space, but at the same time, it can be disheartening to convert a child's bedroom once and for all. When the time comes and homeowners are emotionally ready to tackle bedroom conversions, these tips can help the process go smoothly.

- Repurpose the space for them. Give a childhood bedroom an adult spin without changing too much. If furniture is in good shape, replace the bedding, change the flooring, swap out artwork, and remove "youthful" items like toys, trophies and other collectibles. When the child comes home to visit, he or she will still feel comfortable in the space.

- Create extra storage. The bedroom can be transformed into a walk-in closet or dressing space. According to the design experts at Houzz, many clients request this type of dressing room situation. There's a bonus if the layout allows

the space to connect to the owner's suite or bathroom. This is a major overhaul, so homeowners should enlist a professional contractor.

- Make a fitness center. A bedroom can be turned into a home gym to make working out more convenient. Homeowners should take inventory of equipment they may have and then figure out where existing and new equipment will go. They may need to consult a structural engineer to ensure that the flooring can bear the weight of additional equipment.

- Create a work space. One of the best ways to transform adult children's bedrooms is to convert the spaces into home offices. Those who have been setting up "desks" at dining room tables or elsewhere may be excited about the prospects of finally having a private, dedicated space to work from home.

- Turn it into a craft room. The bedroom can be converted into a space to explore hobbies and various other interests. A dedicated craft space, a reading nook, a place to store photography equipment, or another function can serve as a useful way to repurpose an empty bedroom.

Empty nesters have many possibilities when it comes to converting their children's old bedrooms into adult spaces.

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