

# Seniors Living Well

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## Seniors making a difference

Volunteering helps older residents remain active and engaged in their community

BY NANCY LEWIS

“Senior living” is not an oxymoron. Hardly. In fact, the Pleasanton community is filled with active seniors who are living their days quite fully and well, enjoying time with family and friends, traveling, and engaging in sporting activities and other personal endeavors and hobbies.

And then there are those seniors who do even more, by choosing to pursue meaningful volunteer activities that align with their personal interests, skills, passions and causes, and confer substantial benefits upon others in the community.

Volunteering gives these seniors a heightened sense of purpose in their lives, and a feeling of continued connection to the town.

Seniors report that volunteering is also a great way for them to remain engaged, both mentally and physically, as they age, and that they feel tremendous personal gratification, satisfaction and pride, knowing that their actions and deeds are helping others, and, they feel true joy when they see the positive impacts their efforts make on others’ lives.

Indeed, many believe volunteering enhances their longevity and quality of life, improves their overall physical health, and bolsters their emotional well-being. Senior volunteers also often serve as inspiration for others; their actions set an example for their children, grandchildren, friends, and even strangers,

who may choose to similarly get involved in volunteer work that helps to improve the lives of others.

James Howard, a Pleasanton senior and retired clinical psychologist for the Department of Veterans Affairs, embraces volunteering. Howard gathers, fixes and reconditions bicycles for school-aged kids, as well as for Pleasanton’s Muslim Community Center’s Refugee Outreach Program.

He first became interested in repairing and restoring bicycles as a young child, growing up in a working-class neighborhood of Detroit, where parents did not just buy their children a new bicycle when their bike broke. Instead, kids like Howard had to learn to repair their broken bicycles so that they would be able to use them for several years.

According to Howard, the older boys in the neighborhood would teach the younger boys how to make necessary repairs, like fixing flat tires and broken gears, and replacing worn parts like brake pads and cables. Those boys, in turn, as they got older, would teach even younger boys. They all loved the freedom, empowerment and independence that cycling gave them, to travel wherever they wanted to go, either as a group or on their own.

The bicycles Howard personally restores in retirement and provides to the schools are given to students as “rewards” to incentivize those



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There are a range of volunteer activities that help keep seniors engaged in their communities.

who need some extra motivation to work hard and do well.

He said he does this because he recalls growing up with other young Black boys whom he thought were actually smarter than he was but who did not do as well in school (Howard was placed in the classes with the “smart white kids” while his buddies were not) because their teachers believed them to be unmotivated and unwilling to learn. In Howard’s family his parents — both college graduates — were strong advocates for their children and demanded that they do well academically, regardless of what some teachers thought of them.

As for the Muslim Community Center’s outreach program, which operates as non-denominational and offers assistance to anyone/everyone in need, Howard is on a team that helps to restore bicycles that the program then provides to refugees as a means of transportation. These bicycles enable the refugees to get to and from their jobs, as well to other places they need to

go in order to create a better life for themselves and their families here in the Bay Area.

Howard finds it very gratifying to be able to provide to others the same sense of liberty and self-reliance that he knows from his own experience, a working bicycle brings. Additionally, he said that keeping himself busy with an activity he finds so rewarding helps him navigate his way through retirement and stave off depression and other negative phenomena associated with aging. More information about the center’s programs, which are always in need of volunteers, can be found at [mcceastbay.org/bike-donation](http://mcceastbay.org/bike-donation).

Tamra Girvan, another Pleasanton senior, has spent over eight years volunteering as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for children in the Alameda County foster care system.

For children in this complex system, a trusted mentor and advocate can be tremendously helpful. The county recruits, trains and supports

dedicated volunteers to be a consistent, stable force in a foster child’s life — a person they can rely on for compassion, guidance, advocacy, information, and to speak up for them when necessary.

CASAs like Girvan come from all walks of life and dedicate about 12 hours a month toward helping a foster child. Although being a CASA involves only a two-year commitment, the unique relationship between a foster child and their CASA forges bonds that often last into a foster child’s adulthood, years after they have aged out of the system.

Girvan said she became interested in volunteering as a CASA because she often felt lonely as a child and was eager to help other youths from feeling that way. She has been a CASA for multiple foster youth over the years, including “Jasmine J” for whom she became a CASA when Jasmine was in eighth grade. Jasmine recently graduated, with honors, from college.

See **VOLUNTEERING** on Page 18



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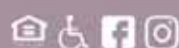
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# Seniors team with teens to craft blankets for puppies

Local pet rescue says groups' efforts help foster dogs who 'come with nothing'

BY CHRISTIAN TRUJANO

More than a dozen Pleasanton senior residents have been meeting with San Ramon high schoolers over the past few months to hand-tie blankets that they then donate to puppies at a local pet adoption program.

Melody Chen — founder and president of Love and Second Chances, the adoption program based in San Ramon — told the Pleasanton Weekly that not only do these blankets mean a lot to her and her organization, but they also have a real impact on the dogs who go through their rescue.

"The blankets have been amazing because a lot of these dogs come with nothing," Chen said. "The blankets go with them to foster homes and leave with them to their forever homes."

The groups of senior residents from Stoneridge Creek Senior Living Community and high school students from California High School in San Ramon first met in March and have been meeting once every month since then, according to a press release from public relations specialist Chelsea Wilson.

"The Love and Second Chances organization holds a special place in the hearts of many Stoneridge Creek seniors who have adopted fur babies from the organization," Wilson said in the press release. "As a pet-friendly retirement community, the residents will bring their dogs for the blanket-making sessions."

Linda Godbier, one of the seniors who takes part in the program, told the Pleasanton Weekly she originally heard about the blanket-making event and what piqued her interest was the fact that not only did it seem like a fun time — which it has been for her — but there was a purpose behind it.

Just on the first day of making the blankets, Godbier said the groups were able to make over two dozen blankets to donate to Love and Second Chances.

She said apart from the high schoolers being a delight to work and chat with, she has enjoyed being able to help them achieve their goals of helping out dogs in need of blankets.

Godbier said she doesn't know how much longer the program will last, but as long as they keep offering it, she will continue to help.



COURTESY LOVE AND SECOND CHANCES

Pleasanton senior citizens and students from California High School in San Ramon pose for a photo with several blankets they handcrafted at the Stoneridge Creek in March, which they then donated for puppies at Love and Second Chances.

"I'll do it just because I enjoy ... doing it with the kids," she said. "Especially because the kids have a purpose and if we didn't show up to help them, whatever they're striving for wouldn't be accomplished."

Apart from giving the blankets to foster dogs, Chen said the

organization also gives the hand-made blankets to people experiencing homelessness who have pets. She also said if the blankets are torn or become loose, they are then recycled into toys.

"Their program to work with the senior community is such an

inspiring one that brings two communities together to make a difference," Chen said. "The effort of the students makes a huge difference in rescue and we are so proud of the dedication and compassion from this program and those involved." ■

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# Finding new beginnings — senior success in Tri-Valley

Process to sell house can be scary and exhausting, but most ‘wish they’d done it sooner’

By Devin Davis

For seniors in the Tri-Valley, selling a longtime home represents more than a real estate transaction — it’s the beginning of a significant life transition.

“For anyone moving it can be scary and exhausting, but most of my clients that are seniors have told me they’d wish they’d done it sooner,” said Tracey Esling, 2025 president of Bay East Association of Realtors.

The transition can bring inevitable challenges like the sounds of a new space, getting around an unfamiliar area, and meeting new people. “You cannot really be prepared for something so new after being accustomed to your life for so long. It’s one day at a time,” Esling said.

Esling explained many of her senior clients may move in with family and love it, while others find it to be overwhelming.

“Every situation is different, but emotions are still high whether you’re someone moving closer or further from family,” Esling said. “I’ve had clients tell me things like they miss their old church, going to breakfast with longtime friends, or

just a new sense of loneliness.”

Esling explained that the moving process itself can help seniors manage the complex emotions triggered by big changes.

“Any transaction can be difficult and for senior clients with children and possibly grandchildren, it adds extra layers of stress because there are more people to consider with lots of memories floating to the top of their minds,” Esling said. “But once things start moving quickly that stress tends to fade.”

Esling mentioned one of the best things seniors who are moving can do to manage stress and the adjustment period is for them to understand they’re not alone.

Generally, after the sale concludes, seniors will experience a huge sense of relief and find new joy in their new home. “The typical new home for a senior is a single level, less space and maybe even less landscaping,” Esling said. “The lack of maintenance their new home needs takes a world of stress off their shoulders.”

Esling recalled following up with a client who moved who had a new sense of freedom and peace as



COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

One of the best things seniors who are moving can do to manage stress and the adjustment period is to understand they’re not alone.

though he’d lived in his new home for years.

Esling shared that she and many other real estate professionals define the success of helping a senior move as “seeing clients thrive afterward”.

Working with seniors has deepened Esling’s understanding of what “home” means.

“It has helped me realize that home means something different to everyone,” she said. “It may be somewhere you spend more time with family, or somewhere you find peace in being alone. Regardless, being able to listen and help in that transition is worth its weight in gold.” ■

*Editor’s note: Devin Davis is a public affairs specialist for the Bay East Association of Realtors, which is based in Pleasanton.*



Devin Davis

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# Livermore police flag common scams, prevention tactics

Reserve Officer Don Swanson reaches thousands in community via public presentations

By JUDE STRZEMP

**A** fishy FasTrak toll, cryptocurrency request or a message from an illegitimate email address may all point to one thing — fraud.

Spreading awareness of scams such as these and safety-related tips has become a multiyear goal for Livermore Police Department Reserve Officer Don Swanson.

In fall of 2023, he began giving ad hoc presentations on how to recognize and avoid becoming a victim of in-person, phone and online scams. Since then Swanson has reached approximately 2,500 community members through 56 events at senior centers in Livermore and large senior gatherings.

While geared toward seniors, Swanson said all age groups can benefit from increasing their awareness of scams, especially in cases where children help their senior parents with technology.

“The only way to combat this is education,” Swanson said of scams. “We’re not going to find this with extra patrol cars on the street. It’s going to be talking to people and educating the public about it.”

There are hundreds of ways that people can be swindled out of money, Swanson said during an exclusive presentation for Livermore Vine. Additionally, the frequency of scams is accelerating as more people are learning how to do it.

Seniors can be especially vulnerable

to scams because they didn’t grow up with current-day technology, Swanson said.

“These scammers are quite good at what they do, very convincing,” Swanson said. “For not the trained eye, it’s easy for individuals to fall prey to it.”

In recent years, Swanson has seen two Livermore seniors swindled out of their life savings.

Both residents were convinced to purchase gold, he said. After it was delivered to their house, scammers offered to secure the precious metal. But instead of storing it for safekeeping, thieves took the gold worth a combined value of approximately \$2.2 million. All without a trace.

“When I see stuff like that happening, it upsets me,” Swanson said. “I don’t like seeing anyone be preyed on. Everybody deserves protection and I see our seniors as one of the most vulnerable in our community.”

The two recent cases in Livermore mirror a common trend in scamming, wherein stolen money oftentimes cannot be retrieved. At times, the police can only advise victims on how to protect themselves from further scams, Swanson said.

“Out of this entire presentation I do, they need to secure their email account,” Swanson said of advice to audience members.

Likened to the “information kingdom,” a scammer can reset various account logins with access to a victim’s email, he explained. Essentially,

a thief could drain bank accounts or make online orders.

In an effort to prevent email break-ins, Swanson recommends a unique password and two-factor authentication for accounts.

As for in-person thefts, staying alert serves as a major deterrent, Swanson said. Be especially vigilant to those who are showing extreme interest in you or encroach on your personal space, he added.

Being alert also means demonstrating that awareness to others, he explained.

“They’re looking for somebody that’s not paying attention,” Swanson said of potential thieves.

As seen in security camera footage from Swanson’s presentation, something could be stolen in a matter of seconds. In the recording, a shopper is picking fruit from a grocery aisle. A woman steps between the shopper and her purse, which sits in a nearby cart. The woman then acts like she is picking fruit too, but is actually rifling through the purse under the cover of a produce bag.

As for vehicle-related thefts, criminals are looking for backpacks and laptops, or anything seemingly valuable. They can break into a car to swipe something in under five seconds, given a tool called a center punch, Swanson said.

To prepare, Swanson suggests travelers minimize their items and avoid placing bags in the passenger seat of a car.



COURTESY LPD

Since kickstarting LPD’s scam awareness presentations in 2023, Reserve Officer Don Swanson has educated approximately 2,500 people in Livermore.

If personal belongings are needed, always hide them before arriving at a destination because suspects will commonly wait in a parking lot to see where people hide items, he said. This makes it really easy for the suspect to find valuables.

In case of an incident, know your location at all times, Swanson said. This will be among the things an emergency operator will ask of a caller.

In addition to in-person theft, there can also be dangers through the phone, Swanson said.

Don’t feel like you have to pick up every call, especially since caller ID may be inaccurate, Swanson said. If you do pick up, don’t provide

personal or private information to people you don’t know.

One way to avoid phone scams is to establish a password or phrase among family and friends to identify callers, according to Swanson.

As for online scams, fraud email addresses and malicious links are just some of the cons to be aware of, he said.

Swanson encourages any victim of scams to report it to local authorities and the Federal Trade Commission.

Large groups can request LPD’s scam and safety presentations via the department website at [police.livermoreca.gov](http://police.livermoreca.gov). ■

## VOLUNTEERING

Continued from Page 12

Only 3% to 4% of children in the foster care system become college graduates. Jasmine said that Girvan has been “such a stable source of support for me and I am so glad we were put together. She has advocated for me in court, answered late night phone calls, been a shoulder for me to cry on, and has been there to celebrate my accomplishments, and motivate me through failures.”

According to Jasmine, Girvan even took on the challenging process to become a temporary foster parent for her when her current foster parents gave her two weeks’ notice to move out of the home while she was still a minor. “I will forever be so grateful for all she has done for me. She is not only my CASA worker, but someone I can call family,” Jasmine said.

Girvan sees the youths assigned to her at least once a week. While they are together, typical activities include having a meal at a casual restaurant, going for walks in a park, catching a movie, going to

Meadowlark Dairy for an ice cream cone, and occasionally going shopping at Target.

She finds this type of volunteer work tremendously rewarding because “CASAs help give foster youth the voice they deserve and the hope and consistency they desperately need to make it through the foster system and go on to live a good and productive life. Of all of the various volunteer activities I engage in, being a CASA is my favorite because I feel it makes the greatest impact.”

Girvan said she would be thrilled for other seniors in the community, or even just a single one of them, to get involved with the CASA program because it will give them the same opportunities to truly make a positive impact on the lives of at-risk children.

Currently, there are more than a thousand youth in the Alameda County foster care system, but only about 200 CASAs advocating on their behalf. Girvan said she would love to see that ratio improve. More information about the CASA program can be found at [casaofalamedacounty.org](http://casaofalamedacounty.org).

Howard and Girvan are illustrative of the benefits of volunteering, and how there are numerous opportunities throughout the community to get involved, to meet and become friends with new people, to develop new skills, to feel fulfilled, and to combat feelings of isolation or loneliness that can arise.

Seniors looking for volunteer opportunities may consider becoming a docent/tour guide at a local landmark they enjoy, or volunteering at a food bank, house of worship, animal shelter, senior center or library.

Becoming a tutor or mentor to a young student is also a way to volunteer as it is an activity that goes far beyond the subject matter involved; older people, on account of their age and life experiences, have a lot of acquired wisdom to impart to today’s youth. The ability for a child and a senior to connect is beneficial for the additional reason that it fosters intergenerational respect for one another.

Other volunteer activities to consider might be joining local efforts to clean/maintain parks, beaches and other areas in need of a helping hand, or lending specific expertise



COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

in areas like technology and engineering from which others can learn. There are also several websites that help seniors find volunteer opportunities based upon location such as [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org) or [createthegood.aarp.org](http://createthegood.aarp.org).

Reaching out to local organiza-

tions (schools, hospitals, shelters, senior centers, etc.) over their websites is also a good departure point in terms of finding just the right volunteer role. Opportunities are abundant, with each one providing a chance to really get involved and do some local good. ■

# Seniors Calendar

## Hobbies

**JUNE CRAFTING SOCIAL** Enjoy time with new friends, creating fun and imaginative crafts and decor for home or as gifts for friends and loved ones. 1-2:30 p.m., June 10. \$22R/\$24/NR. Robert Livermore Community Center. Visit [larpd.org](http://larpd.org).

**DROP-IN BILLIARDS** Join for Billiards at the Livermore Senior Center, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., weekdays. Drop-in fees apply. 4444 East Ave.

**BRIDGE AT PLEASANTON SENIOR CENTER** Join for Bridge 1-4 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursday. Drop-in fees apply \$3.00R/\$3.50N.

**POKER AT PLEASANTON SENIOR CENTER** 1-4 p.m., Tuesdays/Thursdays. Drop-in fees apply. Must be familiar with the game of poker.

**DROP-IN BRIDGE AT RLCC** Join for Bridge, 1-4 p.m., Thursday and Friday afternoons. Robert Livermore Community Center, 4444 East Ave. Drop-in fee \$2.

**KNITTING AT THE PLEASANTON SENIOR CENTER** Refresh skills, pick up some new tips, share techniques, get help or just sit and knit. 9-11:30 a.m., Fridays. Drop-in fees apply.

**WOODSHOP AT SENIOR CENTER** Join for Woodshop at the Pleasanton Senior Center 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Drop-in fees apply.

**AMERICAN STYLE MAH JONGG** Join for American Style Mah Jongg at the Pleasanton Senior Center, Tuesdays/Fridays, 1-4 p.m. Drop-in fees apply.

**SENIOR PLAYERS READERS THEATER** This program at the Pleasanton Senior Center is 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Thursdays. Drop-in fees apply.

**PLEASANTON VIP TRAVEL** The Pleasanton VIP Travel office is located at the Pleasanton Senior Center behind the front desk, open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mondays to Wednesdays. For more information, visit their office or call 925-931-5370.

**PUZZLE AND GAME MEET-UP** Join other adults for drop-in puzzles, board games and memory kits. 1-3 p.m., May 21. Pleasanton Library.

**VINTAGE LOUNGE PUZZLING** Stop by the Vintage Lounge to enjoy puzzle-solving. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., weekdays. Robert Livermore Senior Center.

**DROP-IN CRAFTS AT RLCC** The Golden Circle Craft group meets at 12:30 p.m., Mondays. Bring a

craft project to work on. Robert Livermore Community Center.

## Talks

**HARRINGTON FREE ART TOURS** The Museum on Main, partnering with the Pleasanton Cultural Arts Council, offers a free 1 hour and 15 minute tour of the Public Art pieces at the Firehouse Arts Center. 10 a.m., May 17, June 7, 21. Pre-registration is required. Visit [museumonmain.org](http://museumonmain.org).

**MENTAL HEALTH LECTURE SERIES** Nolan Williams, MD, Psychiatrist, Neurologist and Associate Professor at Stanford University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences will discuss "Speaking the Language of the Brain". The lecture includes a presentation followed by a 15 minute Q&A session. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., May 20. Register by May 19 at [alanhufoundation.org](http://alanhufoundation.org).

**SIPS WITH SHERIFF SANCHEZ** Join this Sips with AICo Sheriff Sanchez, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., May 21. Sunol Coffee, 11882 Main St., Sunol

**CONE WITH A COP** Join for an afternoon of sweet treats and community connection in partnership with Meadowlark Dairy. This family-friendly event offers a great opportunity to meet and chat with members of the Pleasanton Police Department. Each attendee will receive one free cone. 2-4 p.m., May 28.

## PET OF THE WEEK



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**AN AFTERNOON OR EVENING WITH MARY TODD LINCOLN** Mary Todd Lincoln lived a life filled with triumphs and tragedies, but few people know her story today. Librarian Laura Keyes will share Mary's story in an entertaining and educational program. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., June 5. Tickets \$15-\$25. Firehouse Arts Center. Visit [museumonmain.org](http://museumonmain.org).

**ARMCHAIR TRAVELERS: A UNIQUE VISIT TO VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA** Vicki Stephens will share her experiences of places and events

off the beaten path in Vietnam and Cambodia with the highlight of the trip, a visit to Angkor Wat, Cambodia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. 1:30 p.m., June 12. Livermore Civic Center Library.

## Exercise

**SOLE MATES WALKING GROUP** This free walking group at the Pleasanton Senior Center is 8:45-10 a.m., Wednesdays.



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