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As a benefit of RTOERO membership, you receive a paid print or digital subscription to our award-winning *Renaissance* magazine. Each quarterly issue brings you the information you want to live a healthy, active life in retirement.

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Behind the scenes

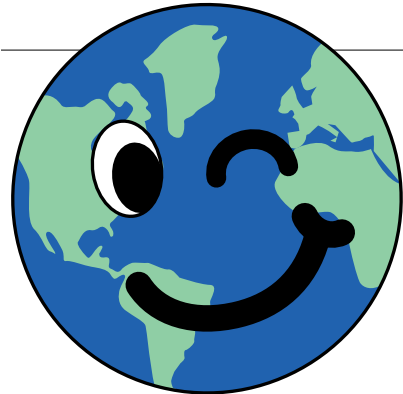


We wanted to recognize our *Renaissance* editorial team members, who bring you the articles you love! Reader letters – your chance to let us know how you’re enjoying the magazine – will be back in the next issue of *Renaissance*.

THE TEAM THAT BRINGS YOU RENAISSANCE AND eRENAISSANCE

Front row, from left: Doug Wallace, Travel; Brooke Smith, Wellness; Pauline Anderson, Health; Fran Berkoff, Nutrition; Elizabeth Baird, Food; Alison LaMantia, Research & Action; Sue Horner, Features; Danielle Norris, RTOERO Director of Marketing & Communications; Erin Pehlivan, Features.

Back row, from left: Ylva Van Buuren, Fitness; Charlotte Empey, Executive Editor; Martin Zibauer, First Person; Stefanie Martin, Editor-in-Chief; Lesley Fraser, Copy Editor; Patricia Ogura, Advocacy; Josiah Gordon, Senior Designer; Claude Forand, Translator; Stuart Foxman, Features; Jim Grieve, RTOERO CEO. **Absent:** Andrew Dobson, Notable; Charlene Rooke, Cheers; and Lesley-Anne Scorgie, Money Matters.



RENAISSANCE ALWAYS KEEPS THE ENVIRONMENT IN MIND

Environmental stewardship is one of RTOERO’s main advocacy issues. Responsible use of resources, conservation, and protecting our air, land and water are critical to a sustainable future.

We honour our commitment by printing *Renaissance* on ethically sourced paper and using plant-based ink to ensure the magazine is produced using materials that are environmentally sound; in addition, more than 10,000 RTOERO members choose to go paperless, receiving only *eRenaissance*.

Occasionally, we bundle other important information with your copy of *Renaissance*. We use a clear wrap made of a compostable, 100 per cent biodegradable plant-based substance you can simply toss in your compost bin.

If you’d like to change your *Renaissance* subscription preferences to receive only the digital edition, please email membership@rtoero.ca and the RTOERO membership team will update your subscription preferences for you.

We asked RTOERO member Marvin Sandomirsky and Jill Moreash – group fitness instructor at Variety Village in Toronto, personal training specialist, and *Renaissance* consultant for exercise modifications for members with limited mobility – to tell us about the one event that opened a new chapter in their life.



MARVIN SANDOMIRSKY

The one event that turned it around was the day that I finally had the courage to leave my abusive relationship. I say to anyone who asks, “It took me 42 years to learn how to stand up for myself, and my whole life turned itself around after that.”
(District 28 Region of Durham)



JILL MOREASH

The one event that opened up a new chapter in my life was my move from the Peterborough area, where I was working as an elementary school teacher, to Toronto, where I began working at Variety Village with a wide variety of clients, gaining expertise with modifications for folks who have multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, hip/knee replacements, osteo- and rheumatoid arthritis and Parkinson’s disease.




WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!


We welcome your feedback, so please send your letters to renaissance@rtoero.ca. Letters may be edited for length and clarity at the discretion of the editor.

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Keep being you
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A new season is the perfect time to start your journey to better hearing. If you've been wondering about hearing aids but aren't sure where to start, here are some answers that can make a big difference when it comes to understanding your hearing health.

What Are Hearing Aids, and How Do They Help?

Think of hearing aids as tiny personal assistants for your ears. They're designed to bring clarity to conversations, reduce background noise, and enhance the sounds that matter most to you.

Can Hearing Aids Help with Tinnitus?

Yes, they can! Tinnitus, that constant ringing or buzzing in the ears, can be frustrating. But many modern hearing aids come with features designed to make tinnitus less noticeable.

Addressing hearing loss alone often reduces tinnitus symptoms for many people. When the brain gets more of the sounds it's been missing, it tends to focus less on the ringing. And for those with persistent tinnitus, specialized programs within hearing aids can provide soothing sounds to help you concentrate on what matters most—like enjoying your day without distraction.

Why Choose Professional Hearing Care?

Your hearing is as unique as your fingerprint, and what works for one person might not work for you. A licensed hearing care provider like HearingLife offers a free 30-day trial* of the latest hearing aids, so you can find the right hearing solution for you. **Plus, RTOERO members and their family receive exclusive benefits at HearingLife and Network Partner clinics, including an EXTRA 10% off the final purchase price of hearing aids!****

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Simply the best

Celebrating Exemplary
District Award winners



by **John Cappelletti**
RTOERO Chair

At last year's Fall Forum, we recognized the winners of the inaugural Exemplary District Awards. Our hearty congratulations to Norfolk, Algoma and Toronto. These districts, representing small, medium and large by membership, were the best of the best, but all the entries deserve kudos.

I helped to review the 18 entries and was proud of and impressed by what I saw. I observed a wide variety of district clubs, activities and events – from book clubs and movie nights to yoga, local theatre and foodie groups. There were also terrific examples of creative newsletters and websites. A few districts had the added challenge of building member-focused activities over a vast geographic area.

The Exemplary District Awards were created to help promote awareness of RTOERO's strategic goals:

- Be the trusted voice of the broader education community.
- Improve the lives of members and seniors.
- Broaden the membership base.

Applicants also score points by demonstrating how they promote the values of accountability, community connection, giving back/making a difference, inclusion, leadership/vision, service to members and well-being.

The winning districts received a digital tool kit with the Exemplary District Award emblem to help them celebrate their award throughout the year. Each of the winning districts was invited to bring an additional guest to the Fall Forum banquet, someone who contributed greatly to the award or success of the district initiatives, so they could share in the recognition.

The inaugural Exemplary District Awards were adjudicated by a committee of the Board of Directors. Moving forward, representatives from each of the winning districts will serve on the evaluation committee for the following year's awards. In this way, the winning districts help to support the program, and no one district can win two years in a row.

The application deadline for this year's Exemplary District Awards is June 27. I invite you to strut your district's stuff. 🎉

Looking forward to your entries.
John

New beginnings

Change can be a
transformative journey



by **Jim Grieve**
RTOERO CEO

New beginnings and change were constants in our education careers. Every year was a fresh start with another chance to be a better learner or improve as an instructor or provide exceptional leadership and support.

Growing up in a military family, I was fortunate to experience a new country almost every year, and of course that meant new schools somewhere in the world. I realize now that moving to a new school every year was actually an invaluable life experience. It made me a much more empathetic teacher and always helped me to anticipate and adjust to change. New beginnings are natural for me.

I understand and appreciate that for those who always lived in the same town, attended the same school and still have friends from kindergarten, change is stepping into the unknown and an adjustment that takes time.

New beginnings can be a transformative journey, especially for a not-for-profit organization seeking to enhance its impact and outreach. In 2025, we are embarking on an exciting and much-needed path to grow the membership in our Entente Group Insurance Program throughout Canada. We envision a future that not only supports our members' health and wellness but also fosters a vibrant community of like-minded individuals.

Your Entente program aims to provide comprehensive health benefits tailored specifically for members and their immediate families. We are committed to offering exceptional and affordable coverage along with engaging district activities that encourage active lifestyles and promote overall well-being for older adults.

To facilitate our outreach, we are developing targeted marketing campaigns that highlight the benefits of our Entente program. We are partnering with alumni associations and education-adjacent organizations throughout Canada to create awareness and share the value of membership.

The 2023 member survey reconfirmed that our health plan is the significant reason members join. In 2025, we are excited that our new beginning is to bring an understanding of our Entente program to other deserving older adults. 🎉

Here's to our new beginning.
Jim

LEFT PHOTO, JASON GORDON, RIGHT PHOTO, PAUL ORENSTEIN

Environmental stewardship

Working together for a sustainable future

by **Patricia Ogura**

Since 1946, ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, has brought global experts together to agree on the best way of doing things – for anything from making a product to managing a process. It also guides businesses in adopting sustainable and ethical practices, helping to create a future where your purchases not only perform excellently but also safeguard our planet.

Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, ISO is currently composed of 170 member countries. On a voluntary basis, global experts, related to specific fields and independent of governments, write papers, standards and guidelines accompanied by customized evaluation methodologies.

ISO 14001 standards are blueprints for companies to establish successful environmental management systems (EMS). After a rigorous two-year ISO review and audit period, this past April RTOERO received the ISO certification for environmental management. RTOERO is delighted to join more than 300,000 companies worldwide that are ISO 14001–certified and corporately dedicated to environmental sustainability.

The ISO 14001 certificate reflects RTOERO's steadfast focus on EMS. In spirit, the certificate is not a reward for past practice; rather, it recognizes RTOERO's unwavering commitment to environmental performance, continuous improvement of that performance and third-party evaluation of company practices on a regular basis. It is a commitment to the future.

RTOERO's advocacy efforts have always promoted environmental responsibility to its members and on behalf of its members. RTOERO addresses environmental challenges and suggests how to address them using a variety of communication platforms.

Our initiatives include:

1. Creating the framework for environmental stewardship

- implementing the RTOERO Environmental Policy
- developing the RTOERO Environmental Management System

2. Changes in office operations

- implementing a computerized HVAC system to manage energy use
- changing lights to LED in our offices
- eliminating desktop office printers
- significantly reducing paper use:
 - creating electronic meeting agendas
 - encouraging members to register for electronic-only communications and publications
 - maintaining most records in electronic format and requesting electronic-only copies from our vendors and partner organizations
- introducing composting bins

3. Building awareness, providing training, advocacy position

- regular training/orientation sessions at staff meetings
- information shared with members through articles in *Renaissance*, monthly *News You Can Use* and other publications
- webinars on environmental stewardship with guest speakers
- environmental stewardship advocacy position shared with politicians and members
- district executives surveyed on the importance of environmental stewardship
- district environmental stewardship digital tool kit, which is now live on our website on the District Executive Resources page

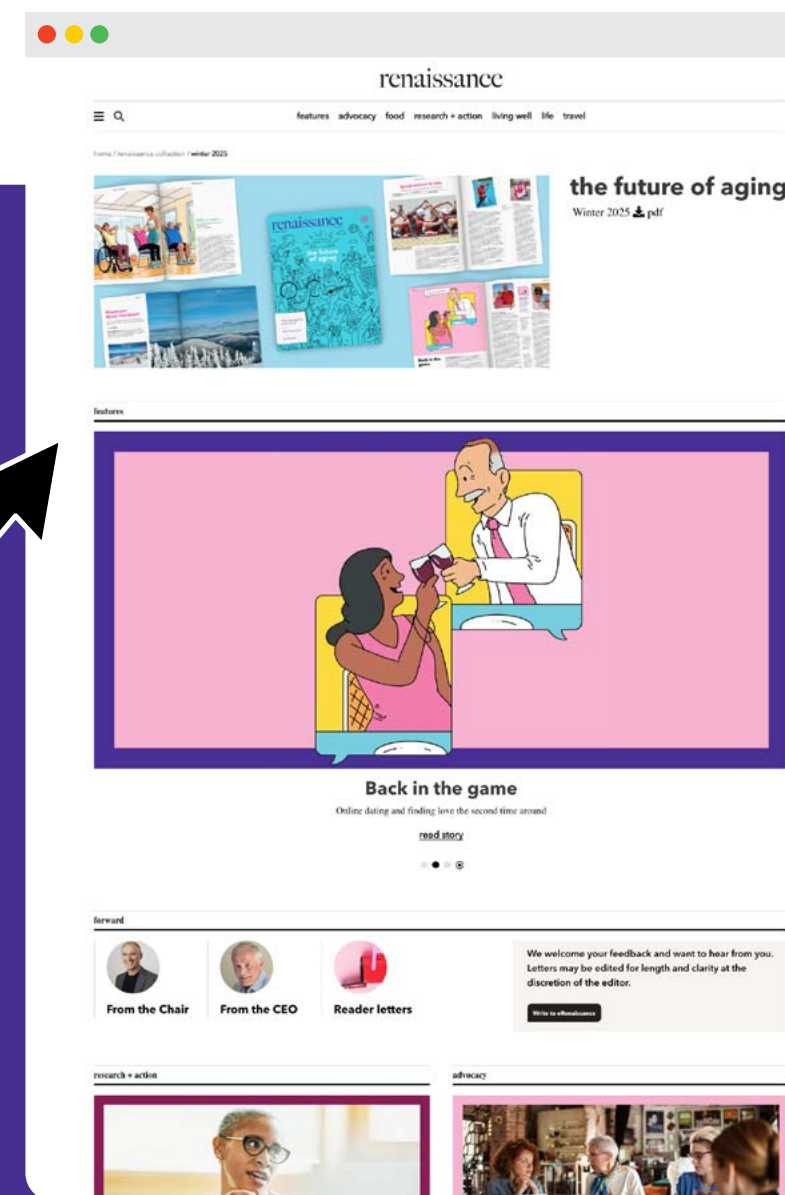
RTOERO also meets with government leaders to voice concerns about environmental negligence and to urge enacting and applying effective policy. For example, this spring we advocated with government officials on recycling practices, environmentally friendly transportation, and protecting ecosystems, water resources and the quality of drinking water.

RTOERO educates, motivates and inspires members to participate in sustainable environmental practices, personally with their families and in their communities, to minimize waste, reduce consumption and conserve energy and other valued resources.

To find out more about environmental stewardship and how you can get involved in effecting change, visit rtoero.ca and click on “Giving back.” Your votes and your money are powerful influencers. 🌱

PHOTO: KEREM35

eRenaissance has arrived!



eRenaissance is **RTOERO's** fresh, new, user-friendly digital version of the magazine you count on to live a healthy, active life in retirement.

eRenaissance will be updated as each new issue of *Renaissance* magazine goes to press. You can still read the PDF versions of past issues on the **RTOERO** website, and printed copies will continue to be mailed to members who prefer a hard copy.

Explore *eRenaissance* at renaissance.rtoero.ca

Beyond quinoa

Ancient grains worth trying now

by **Fran Berkoff**, registered dietitian



Remember the days when quinoa was the new kid on the block? Marketed as a superfood and ancient grain (even though it is technically a seed), it was higher in protein, fibre and other nutrients than simple grains like pasta and bread. Quinoa remains popular, but it’s now just one of many ancient grains readily available that also offer excellent nutrition profiles and intriguing tastes.

Some ancient grains to try include farro, sorghum, teff, freekeh, spelt and kamut. Like quinoa, they’ve been around for centuries and provide a broad range of nutritional benefits that many modern grains can’t match.

Largely unchanged, these grains are typically eaten in their whole form, or in some cases minimally processed, and are rich in fibre, essential minerals and vitamins. Most of these grains are more nutrient-dense than popular processed grains, and their toothsome texture gives a more satisfying eating experience than plain pasta or white rice. They typically have a lower glycemic index than refined grains, making them helpful in stabilizing blood sugar and reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes. Rich in antioxidants, they help lower the risk of many chronic diseases, including some cancers and heart disease. Many ancient grains are a great source of plant-based protein, too, making them an option for vegetarians.

Farro: Also known as emmer, farro has a nutty and slightly sweet taste, making it a good contrast to slightly bitter foods such as kale. One cup cooked farro has about 255 calories, 12 grams of protein, 10 grams of fibre, plus iron and B vitamins. Add it to soups, stews, salads or almost any dish where buckwheat or quinoa is called for. It’s a smart nutritional stand-in for a bed of rice when serving stir-fries. Farro comes in whole grain, semi-pearled or pearled – check the label. Pearled farro has some of its bran removed, and while it’s less nutritious, it’s faster to cook. Many people find semi-pearled their go-to option.

Freekeh: Emerging in the Middle East about 2,000 years ago, freekeh is a good source of manganese, magnesium and iron. One cup cooked freekeh has about 250 calories, 9 grams of protein and 11 grams of fibre. It’s crunchy and nutty tasting, so it’s good in salads, pilafs, tacos and soups. Mix it with fresh veggies and a flavourful vinaigrette for a yummy grain salad.

Kamut: Also called Khorasan wheat, kamut is rich in protein, fibre, magnesium, zinc and is an excellent source of selenium, a mineral that promotes a healthy immune system. One cup of cooked kamut has about 230 calories, 10 grams of protein and 8 grams of fibre. It’s a nutritional alternative to wheat flour and can be used to make bread, cookies, muffins and more. Cooked kamut works as a high-protein, high-fibre cereal and can be tossed into salads, stews and soups. It’s a healthy substitute for pasta or white rice or as a base for vegetable stir-fries and pasta sauces.

Read labels: When shopping, always read labels carefully. Some ancient grains may be refined and not as nutrient-dense as the unprocessed grains. The ancient grain should be the first item on the ingredient-list label, and you should also look for the words “whole grain.”

Not gluten-free: Most ancient grains contain gluten, so they’re not suitable for people with celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity. Again, read labels carefully.

Satisfying seed: Despite being a seed, quinoa is considered a whole grain. It’s called a pseudocereal, coming from a plant that produces seeds similar to grains and eaten in virtually the same way. The good news: These seeds most commonly are gluten-free.

Cooking: Typically, grains will be cooked in water (as you do with pasta) and the time will depend on the grain. Look for the cooking time on the package.

There are infinite ways to enjoy ancient grains and seeds. An easy start: Use as a healthier substitute for pasta and white rice. Make a trendy grain bowl using one of the ancient grains as a base or mixed with brown rice. Toss cooked bulgur with ground beef or chicken. Add farro or barley to soups, an easy trick to improve the nutritional profile of canned soup. 🌱

LOOKING FOR TASTY RECIPES TO INCORPORATE ANCIENT GRAINS INTO ROTATION?

“*Ancient Grains for Modern Meals* is a delicious and accessible way to invite these nourishing grains into our kitchens and onto our tables. Maria Speck is the award-winning author who takes her recipe inspiration from the Mediterranean, stirring in easy cooking methods, time-saving tips and nutrition information.”
—Elizabeth Baird, *Renaissance* food editor

PHOTO, LOST MOUNTAIN STUDIO



Live sun-safe

Celebrate summer under the sun

by **Pauline Anderson**

Your body needs vitamin D to stay healthy. Sun exposure produces vitamin D in your body.

Sunscreen blocks the sun’s harmful UVB rays, limiting the amount of vitamin D your body produces. So . . . should you wear sunscreen when you’re outside?

Dermatologists want to set the record straight: Yes, you should.

Vitamin D is essential for building and maintaining healthy bones and muscles, especially in children and older adults. There’s some evidence from observational studies that vitamin D may also prevent heart disease, type 1 diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. And not getting enough vitamin D can lead to muscle aches and weakness, weakened

bones and perhaps to osteoporosis.

A vitamin D deficiency is defined as a concentration of 25-hydroxy vitamin D (the active form of vitamin D) below 30 nanograms per millilitre, although 30 to 50 ng/mL is considered inadequate for bone and overall health.

Yes, one source of vitamin D is the sun. Ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation is absorbed through the skin, goes into the bloodstream and travels to the liver and kidneys, where it’s turned into the active form of vitamin D. But that UVB radiation is the same wavelength that damages DNA.

But the sun doesn’t provide adequate amounts of the vitamin. For one thing, during Canadian winters, you’re unlikely to get much UVB, “even if you stood

out naked all day long,” says Dr. Cheryl Rosen, head of the dermatology division at Toronto Western Hospital. And if you get too much sun, your body stops making vitamin D. Instead, it’ll start turning vitamin D into inactive compounds called tachysterol and lumisterol, she says. “That’s very clever of the skin; it prevents you from being vitamin D toxic if you stay out in the sun too long.”

For these reasons, dermatologists keep emphasizing that you should get most of your vitamin D from diet or a supplement.

The recommended daily allowance for vitamin D is 600 international units (IUs) per day for those aged 51 to 70 years old and 800 IUs per day after that.

Vitamin D is found in small amounts in only a few foods, including egg yolks and fatty fish such as herring, mackerel, sardines and tuna. Vitamin D is also added to some dairy products, juices and cereals. So it might be difficult to get your daily allowance of vitamin D from diet alone. That’s where supplements come in; experts recommend that adults older than 50 take a supplement with at least 400 IUs per day.

Ask your healthcare provider if taking a vitamin D supplement is right for you. And whether or not you take a supplement, you should eat foods that contain vitamin D and practise sun safety.

So what does being sun-safe mean? No more than five to 15 minutes a day of unprotected sun exposure. Anything more than that can raise risks of skin cancer.

Older Canadians may be at particularly high risk for skin cancer because they’ve had a lot of sun exposure over the years. “They’ve spent their life out in the sun, and when they were young, no one talked about sun protection,” Rosen says. “That’s why the skin on their face and arms and the backs of their hands doesn’t look like the skin on their stomach or other hidden areas of skin.”

To protect against photoaging – sun exposure that makes your skin look older – and skin cancer, dermatologists strongly recommend using a broad spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher as well as wearing sun-protective clothing such as wide-brimmed hats and shirts and sunglasses that filter UV rays. And remember, the sun is strongest between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., so wear extra sun protection at that time of day. 🌱

PHOTO, ARIA ARMOKO

Fit for life

Five moves for healthy aging

by **Ylva Van Buuren**

illustrations by **Jori Bolton**

Tricia Ham, owner of the Healthy Aging Coach Inc. in Calgary, and her 80-year-old mom just came back from holidays in Invermere, B.C. “The place we rented had 80 steps from the beach to our front door,” says Ham, “and my mom, who’s not even five feet tall, carried two lawn chairs and her backpack every day to and from the beach.”

“This is not what you’d expect an aging senior to do, but my mom has been preparing for it all her life,” she says. “She’s always had an active lifestyle and enjoys group fitness classes and other exercise. I love the example she sets, and she is one of the reasons I got into teaching fitness to seniors and mobility-challenged individuals.”

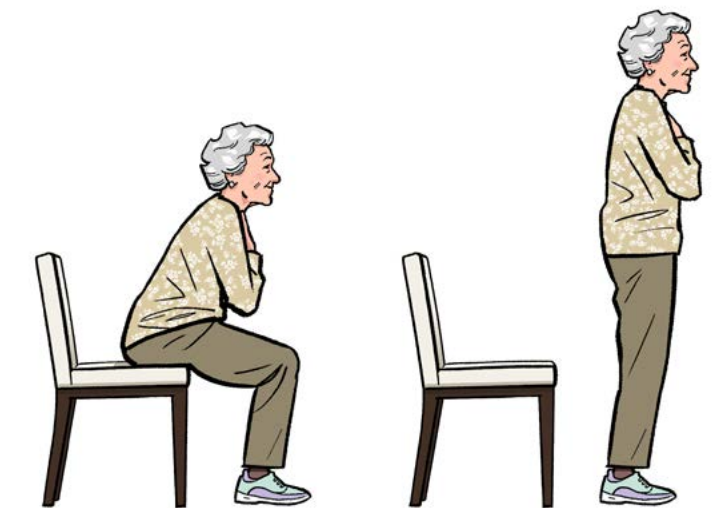
In the exercise classes she teaches and during one-on-one training, Ham uses functional training exercises that provide anti-aging and quality-of-life benefits. “We work on core strength, for example, because it’s so important for keeping our balance and our backs strong as we age. Impact exercise can help bone health. Flexibility and coordination are also important for mobility as they increase range of motion and contribute to our ability to execute controlled body movement, respectively.”

Integrate these five healthy-aging moves into your day or your regular exercise program. Special thanks to Jill Moreash of Variety Village, Toronto, for modifications for mobility-challenged readers.



Sit-to-Stand Squats

“Squats are a classic,” Ham says, “and so important not just for your lower body but for your core.”

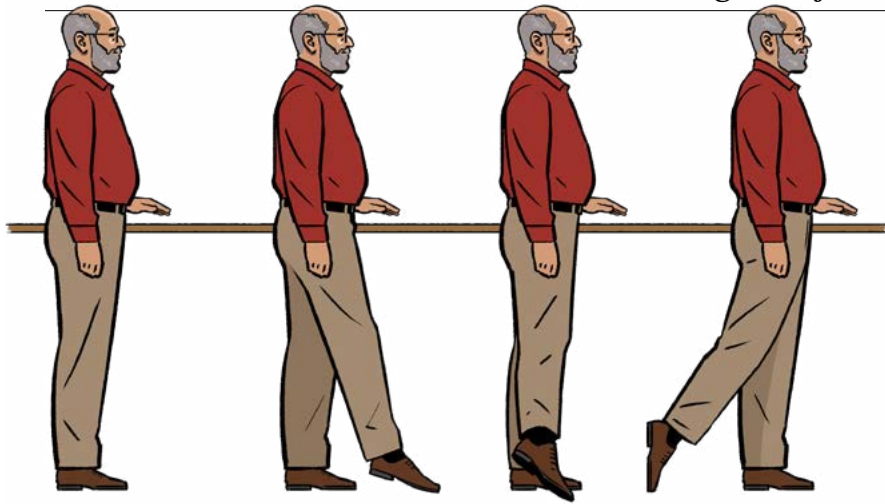


Starting position: Sit toward the front edge of a sturdy chair (or chair in your living room while watching TV) with feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Keep your back straight and lean a little forward, so your chest is over your knees. Fold arms across your chest or place hands on your thighs or on arm rests if necessary.

The move: Push your heels down into the floor (to better engage your bum muscles) and stand up straight by straightening your knees and hips. You can push your hands on your thighs or arm rests for added support. To sit back down, keep your back straight and lean forward slightly. Then push your bum back a little and slowly lower yourself back down to the chair. Repeat 10 to 15 times. Do these squats every time you go to sit down with a goal to do 3 to 5 sets a day.

Modifications:

- If you use a wheelchair and cannot stand, push yourself up using your arms and core muscles to as far as you can. Engage glutes by doing bum squeezes, pushing down into your heels and pretending that you’re going to stand up.
- Alternatively, if you have some ability with your legs, push your weight into your heels to perform “bum squeezes” instead of stands.



One-Foot Balance

“Practising your balance is a good way to reduce your risk of falls and maintain your independence,” Ham explains.

Starting position: Stand with your left side beside the kitchen counter or bathroom vanity, about six inches away. Stand on your left foot and let your hand hover over the counter, using it only if necessary to get your balance.

The move: Tap the right toe lightly to the floor in front; return to starting position, pause, then tap to the right side and back to starting position; pause, then tap behind you and back to starting position. Keep your spine straight and try to maintain your balance while tapping. Repeat sequence 3 times, then switch sides. Stand with your right side beside the counter, balance on your right foot, and repeat the sequence tapping with your left foot.

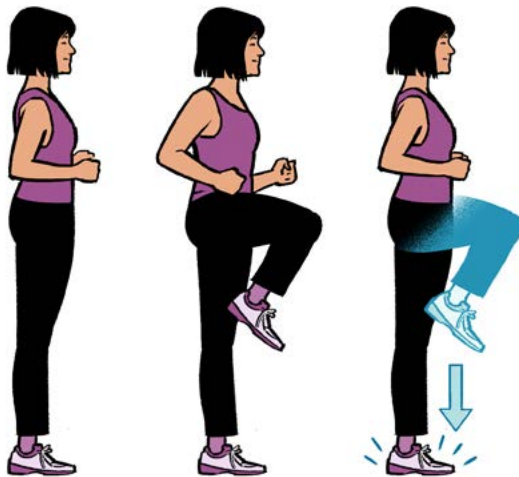
Modifications:

- If you cannot stand, sit in a chair or wheelchair toward the front of the chair. Tuck in belly button and tap the right toe lightly out to the floor in front; return to starting position; pause, then tap to the right side and back to starting position; pause, then tap towards the back of the chair and back to starting position. Repeat sequence 3 times, then switch sides.



Stomping

“Stomping,” Ham says, “is a fun way to improve balance and coordination, as well as providing safe impact exercise to improve bone health.”

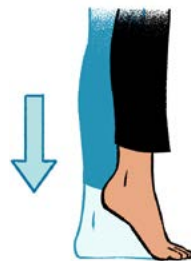


Starting position: Stand up straight with arms bent by your sides. (You can do this anywhere – in your living room, while walking through the park or from your car in the parking lot to a store.)

The move: With arms bent and pumping by your sides, stomp your feet one at a time, imagining you are crushing an imaginary block under your feet as you stomp. Imagine that your feet are heavy and control the movement. Stomp for 30 seconds. Take a break. Repeat up to 3 times.

Modifications:

- If you have had knee replacement, these exercises are contraindicated.
- If you have mobility issues, do the stomping exercise while seated.
- If you have knee pain, do a heel drop instead. In a standing position, go up on your tiptoes, then, keeping knees a little bent, drop down on your heels with some impact. Repeat 10 times.



- If you cannot use your legs, do a gorilla slam instead. Sit in a wheelchair or chair with a few cushions in your lap. Inhale as you lift both arms up by your head, exhale as you bring both arms down together to slam the cushions. Repeat, bringing first your left hand down to slam the pillow, then your right hand. Repeat 10 times. Pause. Repeat once or twice more.



Dead Bug

“Dead Bug engages your core but also your brain to coordinate these moves,” Ham explains.



Starting position: Lie flat on your back on a mat or towel with arms extended straight up above chest, and hips and knees at 90 degrees with feet off the ground.



The move: Engage your core by pushing your lower back into the ground. Slowly reach your left arm back and over your head as you simultaneously extend right knee and hip, reaching right heel toward the floor (if straightening the leg is too much, keep your knee bent and touch your heel down to the floor). Control these movements. Don’t rush. Pause, then reverse the movement and return to starting position. Switch sides. Repeat, working your way up to 10 to 15 repetitions.

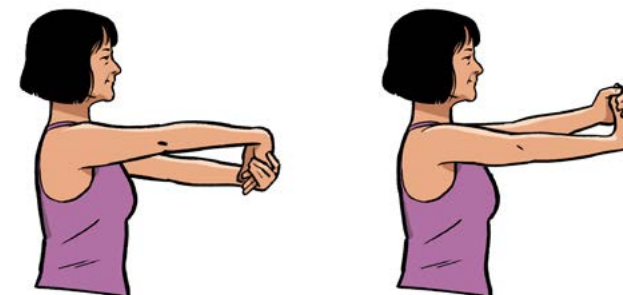
Modifications:

- For a seated move, sit at the front of a firm chair, feet flat on the floor and arms extended straight out at chest height. With left knee bent, lift your left foot off the floor six or more inches while simultaneously lifting your straight right arm overhead. Keep belly button in and back straight. Pause, then return to starting position. Repeat with the right leg and left arm. Complete as many repetitions as you can, working your way up to 10 to 15.
- For an arms-only variation, follow the sequence above but focus on engaging the core and sitting up as straight as possible and raising the arms only.



Wrist and Ankle Stretches

“Wrist and Ankle Stretches help keep all of your joints moving to keep you agile and help you maintain your range of motion,” Ham says.



For wrists, stretch one arm out in front of you. Slowly point the fingers down until you feel a stretch. Use the other hand to gently pull the raised hand toward the body. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Point the fingers toward the ceiling until you feel a stretch. Use the other hand to gently pull the raised hand toward the body. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times. Change sides.



For ankles, sit in a chair and lift one leg up using your own strength or by lifting it with your hands. Holding the leg up, turn the raised ankle around slowly in circles to the left 10 times. Turn the ankle around slowly in circles to the right 10 times. Repeat this sequence 3 times. Change legs. 🌱



The power of puttering

Taking care of the small stuff can be good for mental and physical well-being

by **Brooke Smith**

You're sipping your morning latte and running through your plans for the day. Maybe edit your closet. Tidy up your garden. Clean the silver. Putter.

And guess what? That's activity that is good for your mental and physical health. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, putter means "to do things in a relaxed way, without rushing or trying very hard." And while doing daily chores may not seem very relaxing, one Canadian study shows the benefits of cleaning house.

PHOTO: PIKSELSTOCK

It all comes down

Researchers at the Rotman Research Institute (RRI) looked at 66 older participants and the links between household chores, brain volume and cognition. During the study, participants were asked about the amount of time they spent on everyday-living chores – dusting, making jam, doing a load of laundry, mucking about in the garden and such.

"We found that household chores predominantly were related to brain volume," says Dr. Nicole Anderson, senior scientist at the RRI, director of the Ben and Hilda Katz Interprofessional Research Program in Geriatric and Dementia Care, and senior author of the study. In other words, mopping the floor, for example, equals increased brain size – specifically in the hippocampus (critical for memory) and the frontal lobe (important for organization and planning), she says. That means those who spend more time vacuuming under the couch, for example, likely spend less time sitting on it. And that's a good thing.

In addition, some chores – such as scrubbing floors or vacuuming – are more physically taxing. And this type of "exercise" can help with things like depression, Anderson says. But there isn't anything special about cleaning

activities, she says. These activities could be repairing a dripping faucet or grocery shopping, for example. "Our perspective in this study was more about the physical activity that [chores] provide compared to just being sedentary." And we could all use a little more physical activity – 150 minutes per week, according to guidelines from the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology.

But puttering is about more than not being a couch potato. In a long-term study in the United Kingdom, more than 500,000 dementia-free participants were recruited to establish their risk of the brain disorder. After an average follow-up of about 10 years, the researchers identified more than 5,100 cases. Results show that those adhering to regular routines of physical activity – including household work – had lower risk of the disorder.

Focusing on any kind of puttering can also be a good distraction – but the key is to focus, which leads to a better mood. A study from Florida State University had 51 college students participate in washing dishes. Half were asked to read information encouraging them to "focus" on the sensations of the task. The other half were asked to read instructions on how to wash dishes, with no mention of focusing on the sensations. According to the study, the first group of participants said they had "significantly better mood," such as increased inspiration and decreased nervousness, as well as more mindfulness.

to getting yourself

off your seat.

Puttering can also provide us with a sense of what is called "perceived control." A large number of studies over the last half-century suggest that "perceived control" is key to improved physical and mental health. In other words, when people feel they have control, they have better overall health outcomes, including physical strength and life satisfaction.

Consider this US study of nursing home residents. The residents were divided into two groups: One group was allowed to rearrange their room furniture as they saw fit and care for a plant; the other was told that the staff would rearrange the furniture and water the plant. Those who were responsible for their own rearranging and watering "enjoyed better physical health."

And while puttering involves actual physical movement, Anderson says that doing chores also frees up our minds. "When you're ironing or vacuuming, you don't really have to think about what you're doing too much." (Unless you're ironing a linen dress, she jokes.) "You can think about other things, work through your issues, or plan for your next day."

Or even be more creative. Another US study suggested that performing tasks that let the mind wander could assist in "creative problem solving."

And doing those chores that maybe you don't have time to do or don't necessarily want to do could keep your anxiety at bay. "There are a lot of differences between people and what puts their minds at ease," Anderson says. "For some, having a clean, orderly house helps them stay in good mental health. They get less anxious about things." So, really, why should you putter? It comes down to getting yourself "off your seat," Anderson says. But it's also a "meditative practice – and we know there are benefits from meditation." 🌿



PHOTOS, RYASICK

Second chances

Given the opportunity, what would you do over?

By **Sue Horner**

Maybe you regret not having taken that job or gone on that trip. Or you don't feel regret but wonder what a different choice would have meant. Or you simply imagine your life taking a different turn.

We asked members: If you could have one "do-over" in life, what would it be?

Cheryl Fowler (District 30 Northumberland) would care less about the little things, be braver and bolder – and laugh more.

Linda Welch (District 34 York Region) would choose an arts-related course of studies rather than the one encouraged by her parents.

Other members mentioned alternate careers, like archaeologist, veterinarian, doctor or football coach. Others regretted not taking an opportunity to work in a different country, get braces as an adult or buy a hobby farm. Some wished they'd been more confident, or had opportunities that weren't open to women at the time.

Here are some others:

David Pyper (District 40 Brant) would have loved to have entered politics. “Politics is an important sector that needs people who are involved and want to make things better,” he says. He’s always had leadership roles in politics at various levels. He’s been approached to run for office at local, provincial and federal levels. But when he was younger, it never seemed to be the right time to run, and as he got older, he didn’t want to take on all the electioneering. Now retired, it’s one thing he feels he missed out on.

Having said that, he loved teaching and was happy with his roles as teacher, school principal and superintendent in the public system – a role that is about half politics, he notes.



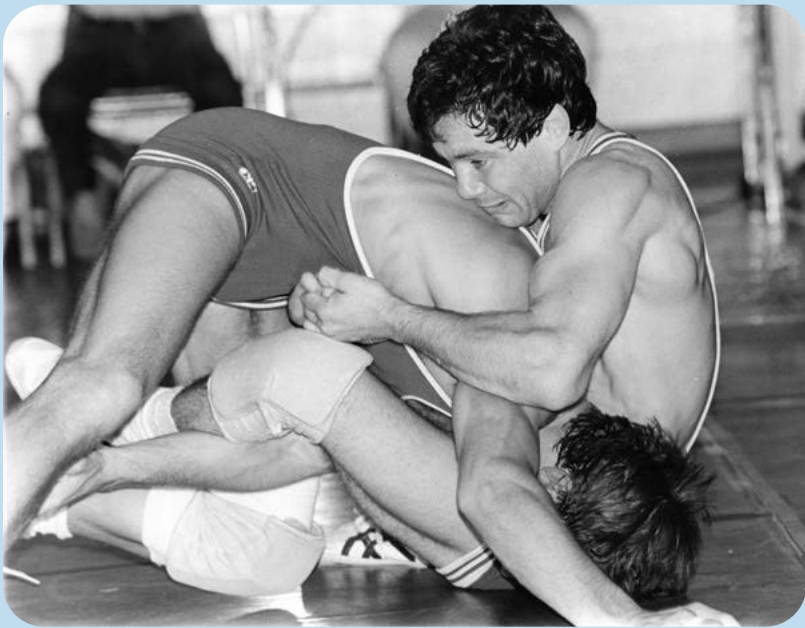
Eileen Schwartz (District 16 City of Toronto) started teaching at 50 and wouldn’t have chosen any other career. She just wishes she had started earlier. The reason for the delay? Schwartz had her BA, but after marrying she had four children in quick succession. “In those days, I was the one taking care of the kids, and my husband made the money,” she says. It was always in the back of her mind to teach, but she couldn’t make it happen because of childcare costs. In the meantime, she did everything she could to be in education. She took a course at the synagogue so she could teach in her children’s religious school. She was the school’s librarian. She was president of the parent/teacher organization at another school. When her youngest son was 17, Schwartz took a year-long teacher apprenticeship program that allowed her to be a supply teacher. She then got into York University in Toronto to make it official. “Part of my time was spent working in schools I already knew from the apprenticeship program,” she says. “One of them offered me a job at the end of the school year. I ended up being there for 10 years, teaching grade 6 and concentrating on children with learning disabilities and later ESL.” Schwartz went on to get her master’s, then a doctorate at 67. Now retired and 82, she is thinking about what to do next.



Gary O’Dwyer (District 30 Northumberland) played a lot of baseball in his youth, and given the opportunity might have gone further. But practical reasons stopped him. “There weren’t many opportunities for Canadian kids to play baseball,” he explains. “If you didn’t make it to the major leagues, you might become a permanent triple A player, and the pay wasn’t great. And you’d just have a high school education.” O’Dwyer doesn’t have any regrets and considers himself lucky with a career that he “stumbled into.” He spent his high school years in a seminary boarding school but left the calling when he graduated. He majored in history at university, simply because the timetable fit his part-time job and he had grown up talking politics and history with his family. After university, he decided to teach until he figured out what he wanted to do. “It turned out I had developed a real passion for teaching and truly loved my job,” he says. After retiring, he was part of a small church community that broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. He took up his studies again and was ordained, becoming pastor of the new church. He’s still a huge baseball fan and loves going to spring training with his youngest daughter.

PHOTOS, COURTESY OF EILEEN SCHWARTZ AND GARY O'DWYER

If **Sholom Glouberman** (District 16 City of Toronto) could go back in time, he’d become an astronaut. “I’d love a chance to look at the Earth from above and meet the other crazy people who want to get away from the hurly-burly of everyday life on Earth,” he says. Glouberman taught philosophy and is fascinated by advances in the field over the centuries. He says the astonishing view of Earth from space gives a sense of where we are in the world and what humanity has accomplished. Now retired, he’s just finished writing his fifth book. It’s a novel about the rise of individualism and how that’s affected many different fields, especially medicine. “Just as much of our knowledge is collective, so is a great deal of our health. We’ve lost sight of the social aspects of health, and that seems to me to be a terrible mistake.”



Dale “Spike” Adams (District 15 Halton) never misses watching the Olympics, and that relates to his do-over: “Compete in the Olympic Games.” Adams started wrestling in high school and set out to make it his career. He was a member of Canada’s national wrestling team from 1980 to 1984 and was alternate at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the year the Games were boycotted to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. On the way to the trials that would decide who went to the 1984 Olympics, a dump truck hit Adams’s car. He made it to the match with no time to warm up and lost trying to avoid a tie. Then while finishing his master’s degree in 1987, he was attacked by three men in a parking lot and required knee reconstruction. “You cannot make this stuff up,” he says. Complications meant weeks in the hospital, followed by more medical procedures over two years. He tried to come back for the 1988 Olympics but couldn’t bend his right knee past 90 degrees. The Olympic dream was gone. After various jobs, Adams finished teachers’ college and joined the Halton District School Board in 1989. He retired as program leader and head of athletics, technology and HALE (healthy active living education) and has mentored thousands of successful athletes and coaches. “Everybody has a few regrets, but I’ve had a great life,” he says. “And the Olympic spirit lives on!” 🌀

What’s your “do-over”?

“Build homes.” –Michael Creaghan (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)	“Work in construction.” –Terry Shaw (District 26 Kenora)	“Start flying earlier.” –James Brian McKinley (District 31 Wellington)
“Have the opportunity to choose any career. The School of Forestry at U of T, for example, did not admit women until 1980.” –Sylvia Cows (District 34 York Region)	“Teach overseas.” –Laura Lee Millard-Smith (District 17 Simcoe County)	“I had a chance to get into radio when I was in university. I didn’t take it because I worried my mom wouldn’t approve. To this day, I wonder what would have happened if I’d had the courage to ask her opinion. I might have become a star radio personality on a major-market radio station!” –Marvin Sandomirsky (District 28 Region of Durham)
“[Become] a famous singer.” –Coral Eling (District 24 Scarborough and East York)	“Stay in my first job after leaving school.” –Lionel Rudd (District 4 Sud-bury, Manitoulin)	
	“I would try working as an officer on a freighter navigating the world.” –Kent Brown (District 14 Niagara)	

PHOTO, COURTESY OF DALE ADAMS

Strength in numbers

Communities aren’t just where we live

By **Stuart Foxman**

What is a community? A location, like a city, town or neighbourhood? Or people who share something fundamental, like language, heritage, religion, culture or interests? Sure. But a community isn’t just a place or a group — it’s also a way of being. The word “community” comes from the Latin “communitas” and “communitatem,” which refer to joint use or a fellowship. An early meaning, from the 14th century, centred on common possessions or enjoyment. More than being what we are, a community is what we do. It’s about building and growing together, making the changes that recognize the needs of us all. Here’s how three RTOERO districts have turned that idea of community into action. One looked in its backyard to spur an effort that promotes well-being and combats isolation. Another helps female students abroad with one of their most basic needs. And a third supports students at home who’ve demonstrated social responsibility. Together, they show the power of the collective, where engaging a community enriches a community.



Building social and community bonds

“Somewhere to go. Something to do. Someone to talk to.” That’s the motto of the Bruce Men’s Shed, an initiative that’s bringing together retired and other older men in a new social network.

The men’s-shed movement started in Australia and the United Kingdom and spread to Canada. It’s designed to help men develop new friendships, learn new skills and engage in community projects. Ultimately, that contributes to better mental health, says Sharron Colter, first vice president of District 10 Bruce, Grey, Dufferin, which made an RTOERO community grant to the program.

“After retirement, men seem to retreat. That’s a real concern,” she says. Without work, a daily opportunity for socializing disappears. That’s true for anyone, but men, more than women, tend to tie a big part of their identities to their careers. Women can become lonely too but, on average, have more close friends and larger networks to lean on.

A community like Bruce Peninsula in Ontario poses other challenges to socializing. It’s smaller, more rural and has seen many retirees moving in from larger cities, leaving behind their old support networks, as well as the family ties of their children and grandchildren. “This has been important on Bruce Peninsula,” Colter says. She’s well aware of the need through her involvements with the Grey Bruce Council on Aging (second VP) and the Northern Bruce Peninsula Community Support Advisory Action Committee (chair). She says that she was getting calls from women asking what kind of programs existed for their husbands to spur a renewed social life. “Men socialize differently. They’re very hands-on. They like projects, they like to be doing things,” Colter says.

The Bruce Men’s Shed has about 50 members who take part consistently, with others coming and going. They meet up regularly at a branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Lion’s Head, which is located in Northern Bruce Peninsula, about halfway between Owen Sound and Tobermory. Other settings have hosted guest speakers.

Members of the Bruce Men’s Shed barbecue for the staff and residents of Golden Dawn long-term care home.

Members have come together to fix up kitchen cupboards at a local community centre, make birdhouses for a seniors’ residence, and construct bat houses and wooden nest boxes for the non-profit Nature Conservancy of Canada. Smaller groups have taken up hobbies, like building scale models. And almost every week, members walk part of the Bruce Trail together.

The members of the Bruce Men’s Shed learn about the many programs or organizations on the Bruce Peninsula in need of volunteers, from the Bruce Trail to the Lion’s Head Library.

According to Men’s Sheds Canada, the concept can take on many forms — no actual shed required. Different groups offer drop-ins, volunteering, woodworking, cooking, gardening, mentoring and skill sharing, cultural events, home repairs, bike and auto repairs, and more. Every shed is independent. Its members decide where and how often to meet, and what to do.

UK figures show that regular participants in men’s sheds experienced a 75 per cent reduction in anxiety and an 89 per cent decrease in depression.

“It has been amazing watching men come out of their shell and become more social,” Colter says. “Many have talents and skills that they’re willing to share with the community.”

Whatever its nature, a men’s shed provides a safe and friendly environment where men can find new purpose, opportunities and interests, all while giving back to their communities. That strengthens their social bonds — and ultimately the community fabric.

“It has been amazing watching men come out of their shell and become more social.”

—Sharron Colter

PHOTO, COURTESY OF SHARRON COLTER

PHOTOS, COURTESY OF LINDA DI IANNI

More than being what we are, a community is what we do.



Fighting back against period poverty

Thanks to an RTOERO community grant from District 37 Oxford, a group of 10 women get together twice a month to assemble kits that address a major yet often overlooked global health and equity issue, helping to make an impact on students half a world away in Uganda and South Sudan.

They’re the Woodstock chapter of the international non-profit Days for Girls, and through the end of 2024, they’ve produced about 1,000 kits.

In many parts of the world, girls often miss several days of school each month for an entirely avoidable reason: They lack access to what they need to manage their periods.

Days for Girls believes in a world where periods are never a problem. To that end, volunteer-led chapters worldwide assemble kits with flannel liners, cotton shields, a washcloth, a small bar of soap, underwear, a bag that carries it all, a card that explains how to use the kit and a card to track a menstrual cycle. As a core offering, Days for Girls developed a washable and reusable pad, allowing each kit to be used for up to three years.

A UNESCO report estimates that 10 per cent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa miss school during their menstrual cycles. In some countries, the rate is 50 per cent. Overall, Days for Girls says that 500 million girls are forced to miss school or work (and wages) because they lack adequate menstrual supplies. “That’s an astounding number,” says Linda Di Ianni, a past president of District 37 and co-chair of the local Days for Girls chapter. She has done presentations to

The Woodstock Days for Girls team sewing kits that will contain what young girls need to manage their periods — and stay in school.

The entire Woodstock Days for Girls team.



service clubs and church groups to raise awareness around, and some funds to combat, the issue.

Community efforts include a partnership with a Salvation Army thrift store in Norwich, to obtain some unsold goods to use in the kits. The chapter also has a relationship with the Upper Deck youth program in Norwich to help pack the kits, which are shipped abroad by World Vision Canada and by Canadian Economic Development Assistance for South Sudan.

To date, Days for Girls has reached more than three million girls, so they can continue to attend school with hygiene and dignity. Many girls either aren’t taught about menstruation or believe menstrual taboos and myths that make them feel ashamed of their bodies. So Days for Girls also aims to eliminate the stigma and offers training to help advocates deliver menstrual-health education.

The value of each kit is only about \$20. Di Ianni says that modest investment reaps results that are profound for not only the recipients but also for their families and communities. “If you’re missing three or five or seven days of school a month, that has a residual effect,” she says. “Girls are dropping out of school, losing their dreams and ambition. Education is the key to reducing poverty, fostering social and economic development, and achieving gender equality.”



Supporting intergenerational ties

When Juanita Everett was 16 in the late 1960s, she worked as a sort of candy striper at a rehabilitation and long-term care facility in Toronto. There, she encountered a lot of older people who were residents or convalescing. She says they always appreciated her positive attitude. “I was perky!”

More than that, the seniors were grateful that a teenager was interested in helping them. “I listened and wasn’t judgmental. It was so rewarding,” Everett recalls.

Today, she’s secretary of District 20 Frontenac, Lennox & Addington, and under her presidency, District 20 launched a scholarship for secondary students who show a high degree of interest in and interaction with the senior community.

The Les Forkes Memorial Intergenerational Leadership Scholarship was named in honour of a passionate educator and active leader in the Kingston area. He retired as the principal of R.G. Sinclair Public School in Kingston, the same school he had attended as a child, and where he began his 32-year teaching career. Forkes died in 2021 while serving as past president of District 20.

Criteria for the scholarship are intentionally broad in order to encourage the widest possible scope of interests, including medicine, gerontology, technology and sociology. “We tried to keep the window wide open,” Everett says.

Two scholarships of \$1,000 each are available each year. Unlike most scholarships, they’re based not on academic achievement but on long-term dedication to seniors. Applicants explain what they’ve learned through their involvement with the seniors they’ve met and their commitment to work within that community in the future.

The six scholarship recipients to date had spent time volunteering at local hospitals, seniors’ residences, long-term care residences and hospices. Everett says they look for

Left photo, from left, Lorraine Tank; a Pine Meadow resident; scholarship recipient Jillian Shezza, Napanee District Secondary School, who volunteered at the convalescent unit at Lennox and Addington County General Hospital; and Juanita Everett.

Right photo, from left, Mathilde Ducharme-Gauthier, École Secondaire Publique Mille-Îles, who volunteered at Providence Care Hospital; and Lorraine Kenney.

students who go above and beyond their mandatory secondary-school volunteer hours. They are pursuing post-secondary studies in health and nursing and have expressed a desire to work with seniors upon graduation.

While the scholarships encourage community involvement, the inter-generational component is especially important, Everett says, since people increasingly live in siloes and young people and seniors often exist in two worlds. We grow stronger when we engage with and support each other. That’s true of volunteering, collaborating on projects and causes, or simply crossing paths. It gets back to the concept of community as a fellowship; we’re all in this together.

Intergenerational bonds can be a foundation for healthier family ties, and ultimately community ties. “One of the things I’m trying to do with my grand-daughters is build appreciation,” Everett says. “Through an interaction with an older person, you can be a kind and giving little person.”

That’s just one form of breaking down barriers between groups, she says. “When we respect our differences, meet each person where they are, and take into consideration all the folks around us, then the community is a better place.”

PHOTOS, COURTESY OF JUANITA EVERETT

PHOTO, ROC CANALS

The changemakers

Celebrating members who make a difference
by Erin Pehlivan

In challenging times marked by global conflicts, rising prices and climate concerns, it’s easy to feel the future is bleak. Our changemakers – activists and volunteers – prove that positive change is possible, even in difficult times.

Barbara Bohlin

District 18 Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes
Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary
Rescue and rehab centre volunteer

For the past eight years, Barbara Bohlin has been volunteering at the Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary in Haliburton, where she moved 21 years ago after teaching in Toronto schools for three decades. She helps rescue, rehabilitate and release wild animals, including foxes, coyotes, porcupines and orphaned deer fawns. Her weekly tasks involve feeding, preparing formulas, cleaning, monitoring, administering medication and assisting with wound care, in addition to helping with fundraising efforts. Bohlin finds the work incredibly rewarding, because it offers continuous learning about wildlife care through collaboration with other rescue organizations.

“I loved my career, every day of it, and I’ve always enjoyed animals, especially wildlife. My husband and I have been great wilderness travellers and outdoor canoeists, and we’ve seen a lot of wildlife, so we have respect for them. As a teacher, I always had animals in my classroom, so children, especially [those who lived] in apartments, that couldn’t have pets could learn about the value and life of animals, and how to look after them and respect them.”

One of Bohlin’s proudest moments came last spring when a young fox arrived at the sanctuary with a broken back leg. Thanks to donations, the sanctuary was able to use their X-ray machine to assess the injury. Realizing it was a complicated break, Bohlin drove the fox to a wildlife vet in Orangeville who performed surgery, inserting pins and plates to save the leg. Bohlin assisted during the procedure and helped care for the fox afterward. Against the odds, the fox survived, thrived and was eventually released – one of her most rewarding and memorable experiences.

“There’s nothing better than releasing an animal you’ve cared for. I get joy from the animals and seeing them thrive,” Bohlin says. The impact of community is another big benefit of her role. “You build relationships with others who greatly care about the environment and our animals. In Haliburton, there are so many people who volunteer that make this a thriving community. Every single person plays a role and contributes, and I consider them changemakers. No matter how much time or how many days a week you have, you make a difference. And change isn’t always the big momentous change. It’s the day-to-day, week-to-week things that make an organization or group better, stronger and more effective. Everybody counts.”



Margaret Beaudette

Sustainable Milton
Grassroots environmental organization volunteer
District 15 Halton

Margaret Beaudette, a retired French immersion teacher in Milton, has witnessed the city’s rapid expansion. She saw its population surge from 30,000 in the 1980s to more than 100,000 today, following the construction of a water pipeline from Lake Ontario. Milton is now one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada.

Concerned with the rate of growth and its impact on water quality, Beaudette realized there weren’t any sustainability plans in place – she wanted to get involved. Her advocacy around water protection led to her involvement with local environmental issues. In 2019, just before the pandemic, she became a founding member of Sustainable Milton, volunteering on the events team to raise awareness about environmental initiatives and gather like-minded people to advocate for climate action.

As part of Sustainable Milton, Beaudette is involved with many local initiatives. Recently, she volunteered at the Halton Children’s Water Festival, leading educational activities about invasive species. Sustainable Milton also plants native gardens in community spaces, partnering with the urban Indigenous group Grandmother’s Voice. They’ve worked on projects like building and installing bat houses, with the help of high school students and a bat expert who gave a community talk. At the Milton Public Library, they manage a community garden filled with native plants, giving away free plants during events. “In my own yard, we stopped mowing a big part of our yard and have allowed it to become naturalized,” Beaudette says. “We have little garden areas within the yard that we’ve planted with native plants.”

“In my own small way, my work gives me satisfaction, happiness, that I’m doing the right thing,” she says. “That I’m not just sitting back and complaining about the problems but trying to be part of the solution.”

“I’m at the end of the baby boomers,” Beaudette says. “It seems that everything that was good and convenient came about during the time I was working, but now as a retired person, we’re seeing all the negative results of all that. There are people who blame my generation for the problems, and my response is we didn’t know any better. All these inventions like plastic things that made our lives easier, we didn’t realize what a toll it was having on the planet. Now that I know better, I’m doing better, and I’m trying to get others to do better.”

PHOTO, COURTESY OF MARGARET BEAUDETTE



Jane Matthews

Local hospital (undisclosed for confidentiality reasons)
Patient partner
District 23 North York

Jane Matthews has been a “patient partner” at her local hospital since 2017, serving as a trusted volunteer adviser to healthcare professionals. With a 30-plus-year career in education, including roles as a teacher and board-wide computer consultant, she realized she could use her transferable skills to work with hospital administrators to develop and refine initiatives that benefit patient recovery and care.

“It’s a mandated role. Hospitals need to ensure they’re somehow getting input from the community,” Matthews says. “The patient and family perspectives can be missed when staff are focused on the clinical and legal sides. Sometimes they make choices that, from the patient’s side, can be counterproductive.”

As part of the hospital’s patient-partner community, Matthews makes sure that patient and family perspectives are considered when shaping organizational policies and procedures. She usually sits at the table in conversations with managers, directors and administrative staff as new initiatives develop, or when challenging initiatives are in review. “We’re counted on to raise points and say, ‘Yes, but from the patient’s side, this is how it might look.’”

Matthews was drawn to this role after her own surgery at the hospital and became a patient partner after a chance encounter with a staff member during her first visit. While discussing the challenges of wayfinding for new patients, the staff member recognized Matthews’s insightful perspective and

PHOTO, COURTESY OF JANE MATTHEWS

encouraged her to apply for the volunteer role. “I realized that this was a public health organization. I was curious about how the world was working 15 or so years after retiring, and it was in my community.”

Matthews has played a key role in implementing digital tools at her hospital. “That’s not out of line with the computer stuff I’d started back almost 40 years ago,” she says. Recently, she contributed to the implementation of MyChart, a widely used app that allows patients to manage appointments, update medical information and complete pre-appointment questionnaires, improving the experience for both patients and healthcare staff. She also helped introduce bedside iPads for patients to access tailored health educational resources. Currently, she’s collaborating on revising the mental health unit’s discharge survey to better capture patient feedback and improve services. She appreciates working across departments, like pharmacy and mental health, because it allows her to gather insights that bridge different areas of healthcare. “Being able to cross silos is very interesting. That’s something I’ve really appreciated – having the flexibility to make connections and ideas.”

“What I love is it’s a community of people who are younger than me. It’s exciting to see the very smart minds who are in their 30s and 40s really making a difference. I think if I were sticking to my 70-year-old cadre, I wouldn’t be as aware of that. It’s nice to be treated as a peer. If you’re interested in learning about health literacy and healthcare system literacy, there’s nothing better than this.”

HOW MEMBERS ARE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

DIETER BRUECKNER

District 20 Frontenac, Lennox & Addington
“I support Fair Vote Canada financially, have distributed leaflets for them, manned a table at a local outdoor arts festival, and corresponded with political folks, both personally and as a member of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation’s local communications and political action committee about electoral reform.”

CHRISTINE HAMMOND

District 30 Northumberland
“I helped start Supper’s Ready, a once-a-week meal at Trinity St. Andrew’s Church. It’s made a difference to those who were hungry and those who need socialization. We serve between 80 and 100 people every Wednesday night from September to the end of June.”

GEORGE HEIGHINGTON

District 24 Scarborough and East York
“I’m delivering the *Bluffs Monitor*, the last standing newspaper in Scarborough, once a month. I volunteer to deliver 100 copies because I need to walk. The paper is free. I used to pick it up in the stores all the time, but then I thought, no, my neighbours need to see this, and I volunteered. I like working with print.”

JOANNA OOSTHOEK

District 10 Bruce, Grey, Dufferin
“I belong to deaf associations in Canada and in the United States advocating for accessibility.”

JANET KNIGHT

District 17 Simcoe County
“I advocate for people who are disabled.”

MARG BOOZE

District 49 The Prairies
“I volunteer with Jammies from Grammies. We provide pyjamas for children and the elderly in nursing homes.”

Virginia Beach bliss

Take a wellness break along one of the East Coast's most exuberant and creative stretches of sand – boardwalk, breweries, oysters and all

by **Doug Wallace**

The flash of Florida is fun, but sometimes you want a break that's a little more laid-back. Virginia Beach, Virginia, could be this new happy place. Growing from a tiny resort town to a modern metropolis with about half a million people, this US Navy town offers pockets of community creativity, ecotourism sensibility and seafood succulence.



Sink into beach culture

It's billed as the longest pleasure beach in the world at 56 kilometres, with a boardwalk that's almost five kilometres – on Virginia Beach, you have room to roam. Park yourself in a lounge and let the breeze settle into your soul, or find a chair at one of the many beach cafés.

Sitting still is not a requisite, however. You can enjoy beach bliss, but you'll also find a vivacious oceanfront culture, particularly during peak season, from late May to early September. An exceptional concert series always draws a crowd – this is a big town for live music. Cultural events fill the calendar, including art shows, car rallies, food and wine festivals, and outdoor movies, even the Jackalope action sports festival. Fall's Neptune Festival takes over the boardwalk with artisans, music, sand sculptures, athletics and regattas.

LARGE PHOTO, COURTESY OF VIRGINIA BEACH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
SMALLER PHOTO, COURTESY OF DOUG WALLACE

Play to your creative side

The city's pedestrian-friendly ViBe District – an artistic enclave just a few blocks in from the beach at 18th Street – is home to artists and artisans, leather smiths and candle-makers, graphic artists and marketers, baristas and bakers. Explore the fashion boutiques for jewellery and vintage clothing, and stop for sustenance at hot spots like Java Surf Cafe & Espresso Bar, the Beach Bully BBQ or Commune restaurant.

There are sculptures and murals everywhere you look, including painted parking meters and utility boxes. Poking around can take an hour or all day – whatever you have time for – and offers farmers' markets, artist workshops, street fairs and music. Local artists are also featured in rotating exhibitions at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, in the ViBe's northwest corner.



Discover maritime agritourism

There are few things more relaxing than being out on the water. And one of the most intriguing places to do this is just outside Lynnhaven Bay, on tour with Pleasure House Oysters. Oysterman Chris Ludford grows and harvests oysters on leased marshland along the Lynnhaven River by the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and takes small groups out on his boat for an hour or two of aquaculture immersion. It's an educational, behind-the-scenes look at the intricacies of oyster farming, with everything managed by hand.

The Lynnhaven oyster is famous – big and salty, fat and firm. Bivalves from this region fed entire communities a few hundred years ago and were coveted by European royalty for more than a century. Today, Ludford supplies oysters to restaurants and will shuck a few right off the side of the boat for you. After the tour, sit on the patio at Chick's Oyster Bar, one of the original waterfront seafood shacks.



PHOTOS, COURTESY OF DOUG WALLACE



WHEN YOU GO

Virginia Beach is a foodie favourite. Step out to these top spots for superb, healthy dining:

Orion's Roof at the top of the Marriott Virginia Beach Oceanfront hotel delivers Asian fusion, particularly sushi and sashimi in the Japanese-Peruvian Nikkei tradition. orionsroofvb.com

Tides Coastal Kitchen inside the Delta Marriott Hotel is the gathering place for sunset cocktails overlooking the Chesapeake Bay, followed by the freshest seafood. tidescoastalkitchen.com

Becca Restaurant & Garden in the Cavalier Hotel features modern American cuisine via its local and seasonal menu. beccavb.com

Aloha Snacks is best for breakfast, offering a modern take on traditional Hawaiian food with Asian and Southern influences. alohasnacksvb.com

Moxy Virginia Beach Oceanfront is perfect for the young-at-hearts, whether you're wandering in for cocktail hour or checking in for the weekend. tinyurl.com/25y5hsk5

Drink in the beverage scene

The beach and a beverage go hand in hand, even more so at one of the numerous distilleries and breweries throughout the Virginia Beach region.

Tarnished Truth Distilling, in the basement of the historic Cavalier Hotel, will walk you through their distilling process before sitting you down before a dazzling flight of bourbons, each one more subtle than the last. After which, you can enjoy a cocktail in the hotel's storied Raleigh Room. If your tastes run to sour ales, Italian pilsners or bourbon-barrel stouts, stop at Aslin Beer Co., an East Coast craft brewery with a new Virginia Beach location. Taste your way through a flight or two, but stick around for a snack on the colourful outdoor patio. And if there was a Virginia Beach signature drink, it would be the Orange Crush, a mix of vodka, orange liqueur, lemon-lime pop and fresh orange juice. Find the basis of this ready-made at Waterman Spirits, makers of organic, coral-filtered vodkas. 🍹

VISITVIRGINIABEACH.COM



TOP PHOTO, COURTESY OF TARNISHED TRUTH DISTILLING
BOTTOM PHOTO, COURTESY OF DOUG WALLACE

Having a healthy holiday

“When we travel, all our health routines go out the window – we’re ‘on holiday’! How can we stay on track health-wise?”



While I try to plan otherwise, I often return home from vacation exhausted and tipping the bathroom scales a bit harder. But there are ways to maintain good lifestyle habits while you’re away from your regular routine.

Try to do something active every day for at least 30 minutes. Head out for a walk, make use of the resort pool or gym, or join a local stretching class – your resort concierge or guest-house host can help you find classes in the neighbourhood. Physical exertion makes relaxing by the pool afterward all the more rewarding.

Try to limit your alcohol intake, even though the temptation is there and the drinks, in many cases, are free. Drinking less will also help you sleep better. Averaging your regular number of hours of sleep is another must-do.

At mealtimes, choose whole foods and plant-based menu items as much as possible. Making smart meal choices will help you steer clear of the sofa after lunch or avoid retiring early on a full stomach. Try to curb the snacking that often comes with vacation downtime. Feel free to splurge on a rich food favourite; just don’t overdo it.

And lastly, keep an eye on stress management. Don’t overbook your daily agenda, and plan ahead so there’s no last-minute rushing about. Above all, remind yourself that your health isn’t on vacation just because you are.

Solo travel: How to stay social when going it alone

While travelling by yourself is a rewarding, rejuvenating experience – because you are your own best company – there are no rules that say you can’t make an active, social time of it.

- Work with a travel agent, who can point you to tour companies that specialize in solo travel. They also know where to find the best deals for single travellers, and all the tips and tricks for side-stepping solo supplements, such as those specified by cruise lines.
- Speaking of which, cruise ships have special events, dining configurations, cocktail parties and shore excursions for solo travellers that you can dip into as you wish throughout the sailing.
- Rather than choosing a big, anonymous hotel, go with an accommodation that encourages social interaction, such as a B&B or a guest house.
- Seek out activities at your destination that include a social angle – a cooking class, a wine-tasting, a dance class or even a language session. Fitness classes, yoga and aqua-exercise groups also let you make friends.
- “Voluntourism” combines volunteering and tourism; a local cause or organization can introduce you to a larger, like-minded community.
- Do your research! Resources like JourneyWoman (journeywoman.com) and Solo Traveler (solotravelerworld.com) have some great ideas for setting off on a singular vacation.
- In the end, if you want to just read a book, go ahead. You don’t need an excuse for “me” time. 📖



Doug Wallace
Editor & publisher,
TravelRight.Today,
and your in-the-know friend
for travel tips and trends.

TOP PHOTO, CANDY RETRIEVER. DOUG’S PORTRAIT, DAVID LEVES

Four fuss-free dinners

One pot, one pan, one skillet or sheet pan
by **Elizabeth Baird**

Here’s a simple way to cut back on time, energy and washing up – just one pot, one pan, one skillet or one sheet pan and dinner’s on the table.

CHICKEN AND SHRIMP WITH RICE AND SAFFRON

This one-large-skillet dinner based on paella, the famed dish of Valencia in Spain, sounds fancy enough for dinner with friends and family, but it’s very easy to make. Brown the meat, sweat the aromatic vegetables and herbs, then simmer the rice. The finale, a flourish of shrimp and a squirt of lemon. Serve in warmed shallow pasta or soup bowls, making sure that the chicken and shrimp are evenly divided.

- ½ tsp (2 mL) saffron threads
- 3 cups (750 mL) hot chicken stock
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs, a generous 1 lb (450+ g)
- 2 fresh chorizo sausages, 8 oz (225 g) total
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large sweet yellow or red pepper, diced
- 2 cups (500 mL) chopped cherry tomatoes
- 1 tsp (5 mL) mild paprika
- ½ tsp (2 mL) crumbled dried thyme
- ½ tsp (2 mL) each salt and pepper
- 1 ½ cups (375 mL) short-grain rice
- 1 cup (250 mL) frozen or fresh green peas
- 1 lb (450 g) peeled and deveined shrimp, 26/30 size
- ¼ cup (60 mL) finely chopped parsley
- 2 green onions, thinly sliced
- 8 lemon wedges

Steep the saffron in chicken stock. Trim any excess fat from thighs and cut lengthwise in half. Cut sausages into small bite-size chunks.

In a large paella pan or deep wide skillet or pot, heat oil over medium-high heat; add chicken and brown



all over, about 8 minutes. With a slotted spoon, scoop onto a plate. Add sausages to the skillet; cook for 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in onion, garlic, yellow pepper, tomatoes, paprika, thyme, salt and pepper. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring often until onion is translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add rice, giving it a good stir. Pour in the saffron-enhanced stock. Scrape up any brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Nestle chicken into rice. Cover and simmer over low heat until the rice

is tender and creamy, the liquid almost absorbed, about 25 minutes. Gently stir in peas; nestle shrimp into rice. Cover and cook until shrimp are pink. To serve, sprinkle with parsley and green onions, and add a lemon wedge to each bowl.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.
Tip: Saffron is the most expensive of spices – in fact, more expensive than gold. You can replace the saffron with ¼ tsp (1 mL) ground turmeric, or simply omit it; the dish will be a little different, but just as delicious.

PHOTO, GKR PHOTO

POT ROAST WITH MUSHROOMS

The words “pot roast” may make you think “old-fashioned,” but there’s nothing boring or out of style about the rich flavour of braised beef as it pairs up with mushrooms rich in umami, the flavour enhancer.

- 1 boneless cross rib, chuck or blade pot roast, 3 ½ to 4 lb (1.6 to 1.8 kg)
- 1 tsp (5 mL) salt
- ¾ tsp (3 mL) pepper
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) canola oil
- 4 cups (1 L) sliced mushrooms, generous 8 oz (225 g)
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 large cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp (10 mL) each dried thyme and basil
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 cups (1.5 L) beef stock, approximate, reduced sodium recommended
- ½ cup (125 mL) red or white wine
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) tomato paste
- 2 tsp (10 mL) Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) balsamic vinegar
- 3 lb (1.4 kg) vegetables made up with your choice of large chunks of potatoes, carrots, parsnips, butternut squash, cauliflower florets and more
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) cornstarch
- ½ cup (125 mL) cold water
- ½ cup (125 mL) minced parsley

Pat pot roast dry; season with the salt and pepper. Measure oil into large heavy-bottomed pot, such as a Dutch oven, set over high heat; brown the roast on all sides and ends. This takes about 10 minutes to get a good colour. Reduce heat if necessary to prevent burning. Use tongs to lift beef onto a plate.

Reduce heat to medium; stir in the mushrooms, onions, garlic, thyme, basil and bay leaf. Cook, stirring often, until mushroom mixture is translucent and softened, about 8 minutes. Stir in 2 cups (500 mL) of the stock, along with the wine, tomato paste, mustard and vinegar. Return beef to the pot. Cover and simmer, turning beef every 30 minutes until it’s just fork-tender.

Stir in the remaining 4 cups (1 L) of stock. Arrange the vegetables around the beef and spoon or use a turkey



baster to squirt the liquid otop. Cover and simmer, turning the roast twice, and the vegetables as needed, until beef and vegetables are tender, about 1 hour.

Lift roast onto a cutting board and cover. With a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables to a warmed platter; cover and keep warm. Discard the bay leaf. Skim fat off sauce and return pot to medium-high. Stir together cornstarch and water until smooth; stir into the sauce. Simmer until the sauce glistens and thickens to a delicious spoonable gravy. Season to taste and keep warm.

Snip the strings from the meat; with a sharp knife, cut beef crosswise into generous slices. Arrange alongside the vegetables; drizzle with some of the sauce/gravy and sprinkle with parsley. Serve remaining sauce in a gravy boat or pitcher.

Makes 6 to 8 servings. Leftovers are more than welcome.

Pot roast: sliced or pulled? A shoulder roast like a chuck roast is made up of several muscles, making it tricky to cut neat thin slices. The easiest choice to get dinner on the table is to let the roast rest for 10 minutes before cutting the meat across the grain. Yes, the slices have to be thicker to hold everything together.

Another option: pulling or shredding the meat, something that pulled pork has made popular. Remove the fat, separate the various muscles, and using gloved hands and small tongs or large fork, pull the lean meat into thick shreds. Drizzle with mushroom sauce/gravy and serve hot with the vegetables.

Make the roast more mushroom-y: Soak 2 g (1/2 cup) dried wild mushrooms such as porcini for 20 minutes in 1 cup (250 mL) of the warmed beef stock. Drain and dice; add to the pot with the cultivated mushrooms.

PHOTO, NADIA NICE



ALL-IN-ONE-POT PASTA WITH RICOTTA

- All-in-one cuts out the big pot and lets the sauce pot take over sauce and pasta.
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) olive oil
 - 1 large onion, diced
 - ½ large sweet pepper, diced
 - 3 large cloves garlic, minced
 - 1 tsp (5 mL) crushed oregano leaves
 - ½ tsp (2 mL) each salt and pepper
 - 6 cups (1.5 L) chicken or vegetable stock, approximate
 - 2 tbsp (30 mL) fresh lemon juice
 - Dash hot sauce
 - 6 cups (12 oz) short pasta such as rotelle or penne
 - 2 cups (500 mL) chopped broccoli florets
 - 1 cup (250 mL) extra-firm ricotta
 - ½ cup (125 mL) freshly grated Parmesan cheese
 - Shaved Parmesan to top each bowl

PHOTO, ZI3000

In a medium-large pot or large deep skillet, heat oil over medium-low. Stir in onion, sweet pepper, garlic, oregano, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, until vegetables are softened and translucent, about 8 minutes.

Pour in 5 ½ cups (1.4 L) of the stock, lemon juice and hot sauce. Bring to a boil; stir in the pasta. Bring back to a boil, stirring often to keep the pasta from sticking to the bottom of the pan. Over medium heat, cook the pasta, stirring often, especially as the pasta expands and the liquid thickens, and

reduces, about 10 minutes. Add any of the remaining stock if needed for the sauce to be creamy. Add broccoli; cover and simmer gently over low heat until broccoli is bright green and still a little crisp. Stir in ricotta and Parmesan. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Makes 4 generous servings. Top with shaved Parmesan.

Variation: Spinach works as well as broccoli in this recipe. Add 2 cups (500 mL) lightly pressed-down shredded spinach just before the ricotta and Parmesan.

SHEET PAN CHICKEN FAJITAS

Great for a cook and family/friends to make together as there are quite a few fast little jobs prepping the vegetables and toppings.

- 3 tbsp (45 mL) canola oil
- 1 ½ tsp (7 mL) chili powder
- 1 tsp (5 mL) each ground cumin, smoked or unsmoked mild paprika and dried crumbled oregano leaves
- 1 tsp (5 mL) garlic powder
- 1 tsp (5 mL) salt
- ½ tsp (2 mL) pepper
- 3 sweet bell peppers, orange, red and yellow
- 1 small red onion
- 3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, about 1 pound (450 g)
- 1 cup (250 mL) cooked black beans
- 1 cup (250 mL) fresh or frozen corn kernels
- 8 wheat tortillas

- Fresh toppings:**
- 2 cups (500 mL) shredded lettuce
 - 1 ½ cups (375 mL) shredded Monterey Jack cheese
 - 1 or 2 ripe avocados, sliced
 - 1 cup (250 mL) quartered cherry tomatoes
 - ½ cup (125 mL) cilantro leaves, chopped if desired
 - 1 cup (250 mL) sour cream
 - Salsa and hot sauce
 - 1 lime, cut into wedges

Line a large sheet pan with foil or brush lightly with oil; set aside. Arrange a rack in the centre of the oven. When just about ready to roast, heat the oven to 400°F (200°C).

In a medium bowl, mix together oil, chili powder, cumin, paprika, oregano, garlic powder, salt and pepper; set aside.

Core and seed the peppers; cut lengthwise into strips about ½ inch (1.3 cm) wide. Peel and slice onion lengthwise into strips about ¼ inch (.5 cm) thick. Transfer to a large bowl; scrape in half the spice mixture and toss well.

Cut the chicken lengthwise into strips about ½ inch (1.3 cm) wide. Add to remaining spice mixture in the medium bowl. Toss well and, if making ahead, cover and refrigerate for up to 4 hours.

Meanwhile, helpers can be shredding lettuce and cheese, slicing avocados, chopping tomatoes and cilantro, and spooning sour cream and salsa into small bowls, arranging them all on a large serving tray. Add hot sauce and lime wedges. No helpers? Do ahead; cover and chill.

Roast fillings: Using tongs, spread the pepper mixture over the sheet pan. Roast for 20 minutes. Stir in black beans and corn; roast for 5 minutes. Arrange the chicken strips over the pepper mixture; roast for 10 minutes. Turn chicken strips and roast until chicken is no longer pink inside, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, wrap the tortillas in foil and warm them briefly in the oven. To enjoy, wrap up the tortillas with pepper and chicken filling and toppings from the serving tray.

Makes 8 stuffed tortillas, enough for 4 generous servings.



Sheet pan: This is chef-speak for a rimmed baking sheet or jelly roll pan. The sheet pan recipes were tested in 15x10-inch (38x25 cm) pans, measured on the bottom.

MORE EASY SHEET PAN RECIPES

Instead of the fish, roast chicken thighs – skin-on and bone-in work well – adding them skin-side down at the same time as the dense vegetables. At the half hour, turn chicken so it crisps and cooks through and juices run clear. If the chicken takes longer than the vegetables, remove the vegetables and keep them warm and finish cooking chicken under the broiler.

Use skin-on chicken breasts, starting them about 20 minutes after dense vegetables start baking.

Try fresh Italian sausages with fennel, mild or hot. Start them off about 15 minutes after the dense vegetables.

Start extra-firm blocks of tofu, pressed and patted dry, when the firm vegetables have roasted for 30 minutes.

PHOTO, RIYANTAJIENG



Let spring be-gin!

Beyond an old-school gin and tonic

by Charlene Rooke

Gin might just be the ultimate spring drink: Whiffs of juniper and other evergreens meet fresh floral, herbaceous and fruity notes. Instead of defaulting to sugary tonic, pour a tall glug of citrus-flavoured soda water, or low-calorie sodas (like Fever-Tree’s Sparkling Lime & Yuzu, Sicilian Lemonade or Pink Grapefruit), over an ounce of gin and plenty of ice.

Or experiment with mixing traditional or non-alcoholic gin bottlings with Martini’s excellent non-alcoholic vermouth alternatives, Vibrante (red and Campari-like) and Floreale (straw-coloured and reminiscent of Lillet Blanc), widely available at grocery stores.

Garnish simple and elegant seasonal cocktails with fresh sprigs of mint, thyme, rosemary or even edible violets and other flowers for an Easter, Mother’s Day or any-spring-day refresher.

PHOTO, LORENA BÓSSO

Consider these eco-friendly gins to honour spring renewal:

They make wonderful gifts or cocktails for toasting on Earth Day, April 22, 2025.

The opaque, botanical-adorned bottle holding Georgian Bay Eco-Friendly Gin (georgianbayspiritco.com) is one secret to its sustainability. The lightweight packaging is Canada’s first lined paper bottle, which is completely recyclable. The gin inside is full of bright citrus flavour, and the Ontario company plants a tree for every bottle sold.

Each year, grey whales make a migration pilgrimage from Mexico to the Arctic, and Gray Whale Gin (graywhalegin.com) celebrates their Pacific journey. A bold American gin with local, sustainably sourced California lime, mint, almonds and sea kelp plus juniper and fir brings a wild journey to your palate. One per cent of sales goes toward California wildlife and nature conservation.

Ramsbury London Dry Gin (ramsbury.com) brings the idea of “single estate” drinks, so common in wine, to the spirits world. Its Wiltshire, UK, farm supplies grain and a farmers’ philosophy of sustainability. Solar power, a biomass boiler, eco-filtration of wastewater and feeding spent grains to livestock are just some of the earth-friendly practices there. See if you can taste a trace of tart, estate-grown quince in this lively gin.

Non-alcoholic or de-alcoholized gins aren’t technically gin because they don’t contain the legal minimum amount of alcohol by volume (abv), but they can successfully bring gin’s signature juniper, citrus and herbal notes when mixed into non-alcoholic cocktails.

Canadian options include Lumette (enjoylumette.com) from Vancouver Island, which comes in Bright Light (with rose, mint and cucumber notes) and London Dry (classic juniper and lemon, with a hint of star anise) formulas. From Calgary, Burwood Distillery’s (burwooddistillery.ca) Non-Alcoholic Gin combines lemongrass, Szechuan pepper, tea and ginger for a fresh, exotic spin on no-alc gin. Sobrii 0-Gin (sobrii.ca) from Ontario features local ginseng along with savoury spices and gin’s traditional juniper and citrus notes.



On the road

A love of teaching turned into a whole new career

by **Marvin Sandomirsky** (District 28 Region of Durham), as told to **Martin Zibauer**
photographed by **Jaime Hogge**

"I taught math, economics, marketing and accounting, and when I retired in 2002, I was 55 and looking for something else to do.

"I found a job at Pearson Airport in Toronto, driving a passenger shuttle bus on the tarmac, between terminals. A year into it, Air Canada's passenger count went way down, so I retrained to operate a snowplow on the runway. It was a fascinating environment, being around the airplanes, working on the runways and around the airport. I enjoyed the job very much, even though it was 180 degrees opposite from teaching.

"But after 15 years, some aspects of the job weren't fun anymore. Commuting 75 kilometres each way, staying awake on the overnight shifts, clearing snow off the plow at 3 a.m. with a minus-30 windchill – I figured I'd had enough.

"I considered retiring completely, but I was having lunch one day and I picked up one of those employment newspapers that lie around. There was an ad for a local school bus company. Years before, when my wife was pregnant with our first child, I took over her school bus route temporarily when she had to stop driving. So I already had a B licence, and when the company called to see if I wanted to drive for them, I thought, 'Sure, why not?'

"I get up at 5:30 – earlier than I really need to – for breakfast. Around 6:30, I drive about 10 minutes to where the buses are parked, and I spend the next hour or so checking over my bus. That's a legal requirement. (At the end of each run, we're also required to check for sleeping students – and, yes, it does happen.)

"After inspecting the bus in the morning, I usually shoot the breeze with the other drivers, then take a leisurely drive down to my first bus stop. My route takes a little over an hour to do, and then I'm back to park the bus. My morning ends right around nine o'clock.

"I drive about 35 high school students. I always liked teaching that age group, so that part of my job hasn't really changed. In the morning, teenagers are pretty much comatose; they talk with each other, but a lot of the time they're just sitting there quietly, on their phones.

"Elementary students are a whole different issue, because they can be a lot bouncier and more excitable. Those drivers have to work harder to keep the kids seated, simply because of their age.

"Most of my interaction with students is when they get on and off the bus. Sometimes they'll make some remark I overhear on the bus, and I'll kibitz with them. I can see them

in the rear-view mirror, but obviously I'm focusing on the road when I'm driving. In a sense, I'm a little disconnected from them while I drive, but talking with them as they get on and off is one of the most enjoyable, satisfying parts of the job.

"We don't see parents much, and company policy doesn't allow us to interact with them. It's different if you drive young elementary students. They have to be met in the afternoon by somebody – often a parent – or they're not allowed to get off the bus.



“Elementary students are a whole different issue, because they can be a lot bouncier and more excitable.”



But my students are basically adults. “One of the challenges is bad weather, especially snowstorms. But any bus driver will tell you the scariest part of the job is seeing other drivers doing stupid, stupid stuff – running red lights and stop signs and sometimes almost hitting students. “I recently went to the police station to ask them to watch a stop on my route that’s particularly bad for cars going through the lights. And there seems to be a law I’m not aware of that on every narrow street, cars must illegally park opposite other cars and park as close to every 90-degree corner as possible. I’ve driven through gaps with inches to spare on either side, and I take every corner slowly; part of our training teaches us to be very aware of the size of our vehicle and how it manoeuvres. “For many of our drivers, a school bus is the first large vehicle they’ve driven, but the bus companies train you as you’re getting your B licence.

Essentially, you’re learning to drive a large commercial vehicle. Part of getting the licence is the road test, but there’s a lot of study, too; you have to upgrade your road knowledge, learn how to park your vehicle safely, what your distances are for pulling out, how and when to put out flares and all that kind of stuff. “Driving a school bus is a great retirement job for teachers – the majority of drivers are retirees. It’s part-time, with a mid-day break to run errands. If you’re a teacher who really enjoys kids, driving a bus allows you to see students again and be part of their school experience, even though you’re not in a classroom. “You do need to enjoy driving. I love road trips, and I love to drive. And for me, whether it’s driving a larger vehicle, remembering students and their names, or interacting with them – all of that – driving a bus keeps my brain sharp. It gives me something to do, and it gives me purpose.”

THE BENEFITS!

You’ll keep your brain sharp by manoeuvring a large vehicle in busy traffic and winter conditions, remembering your route, and remembering student names. You’ll be socializing every school day, with students and adults. For many drivers, the job becomes a reason to get up in the morning and something to look forward to. You’ll be doing more of what you enjoy – working with students – and none of the marking, lesson plans and parent meetings. Driving may not be the most lucrative side hustle, but you can add a reasonable supplement to your income with part-time work. This last benefit is really the best, especially since you became a teacher because you love learning, you love students and you love interaction. All of that continues when you drive a school bus, and the students (and often their parents) will love you back!

PHOTO, COURTESY OF MARVIN SANDOMIRSKY

ILLUSTRATION, DETHAL

Suddenly single?

Here’s your financial checklist
by Lesley-Anne Scorgie



If you find yourself suddenly single, it’s time to embrace your financial reality. Follow this financial empowerment checklist – especially if you weren’t the lead money manager in the relationship.

SPEAK TO YOUR ADVISERS REGULARLY Whether it’s a financial planner, lawyer, doctor or insurance adviser, make sure you’re meeting with them regularly to understand what’s coming up for you, such as a major tax bill, how to update your CRA My Account portal with your new status, what to change in terms of your will and beneficiaries, when an insurance payout might happen. Learn about your total financial wellness picture from these pros. Tell them what you think you need. If you don’t like who these people are, switch them. Get a trusted referral (or a few) and find the right fit for you.

GATHER UP A LIST OF ALL YOUR ASSETS AND LIABILITIES Assets are things that you own, which grow in value, such as a home, an investment, a savings account, a pension or a business. Liabilities are debts such as a mortgage, car loan, line of credit, a

credit card balance or money owed to friends and family. List the total value of each asset and liability, then subtract your liabilities from your assets to determine your current net worth. Your net worth is a key measure of financial health, and the goal is to preserve it so it lasts throughout retirement. **PREPARE A PRELIMINARY MONTHLY BUDGET** The information from your bills and payments should reflect all the income and expenses running through your bank account every month. For now, while you’re resetting, try not to make any major changes until you’ve spoken to a financial adviser or money coach who will help you target the right changes, like trimming back your subscriptions or renegotiating your insurance. The main takeaway with budgeting is that you want your budget to balance. If you are overspending,

you run the risk of going into debt, and there are only two solutions: cut back or increase your income. One of the biggest financial mistakes I see people make is not adjusting their lifestyle and costs after separating (typically there’s less money for both parties). Carefully build a new budget that is based on what you can afford to spend in this new chapter of your life. Include investments for retirement, as those may have also been affected by the separation. If you were left with a pile of debt as a by-product of the separation, ensure that there is a realistic payment plan for it. Ensure there’s money earmarked for emotional well-being support as you go through this transition. If you are a giver or receiver of support payments as a result of the separation, include that information in the budget too.

UNDERSTAND YOUR MONTHLY BILLS AND PAYMENTS Bills and payments are different from liabilities because you need to pay them monthly, and sometimes biweekly. These can be regular fixed amounts, like rent, or they can vary depending on how much you use a service, such as water. List each bill and payment, with the amount and the time of month that it’s due. If you previously paid bills for the household separately and now you need to pay the whole lot of them on your own, make sure you contact the providers to set up pre-authorized debits and likely your own account portal.

PULL OUT INSURANCE POLICIES Insurance protects you in the event of something extremely unlikely like death, disability, a break-in, a car accident or a critical illness. Many policies are, unfortunately, quite tough to read and digest. But you need to understand what you’re covered for and if you still have the same needs now that you’re solo. If you’re not sure, get advice from an insurance professional.

DIG UP LEASE AGREEMENTS AND FINANCING DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR HOME AND CAR These financial agreements renew at various times, and you’ll want to be prepared to either renegotiate or, in worse cases, to move or swap out your car. Read through these documents carefully to understand your financial obligations and those of the lender.

New beginnings

Has retirement opened a new life chapter?



I learned how to fly kites indoors – single-line gliders – by taking lessons in South Padre Island, Texas. Started an indoor flying kite group back home in Dorchester, Ont., and have been flying weekly at the local gym since 2011.
Penny Wearne
(District 8 London, Middlesex)

I started volunteering with Classrooms Without Walls, a not-for-profit organization committed to providing children and youth living in conflict zones with access to free education.
Margit Muller
(District 28 Region of Durham)

I was privileged to work for a First Nations community as their educational administrator, which was an opportunity to open my mind to a different system and political environment.
Ruth Jackson
(District 33 Chatham-Kent)

I started a new hobby: energy healing through Reiki and reflexology.
Anita Cook
(District 4 Sudbury, Manitoulin)

I joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.
Richard James
(District 32 Prescott-Russell)

I moved to the Maritimes, got married.
Pamela Baker
(District 50 Atlantic)

I moved to a new country, learned to paint, developed an interior design business, learned to speak Spanish fluently, embraced a new culture and a new circle of friends, became a mentor to a university student and initiated a piano enrichment program for talented and needy young musicians.
Brian Care
(District 23 North York)

I now work 24/7 to combat climate chaos through personal, municipal, provincial and federal action and educating others in my community.
Susan McKenzie
(District 46 Muskoka)

I'm an actor and a full member of ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists), a lovely way to spend retirement.
Barbara Rajnovich
(District 3 Algoma)

I have moved back to the city where I raised my children. I have volunteered, started exercising at the gym and in the pool, and discovered pickleball. I have also travelled a lot and adopted two adorable kitties.
Marie-Anne Pronovost
(District 44 Franco-Nipissing)

I've taken a part-time job in a long-term care facility. I spent 38.5 years working with children; now I'm working with their parents and grandparents.
Milton Martyn
(District 2 Thunder Bay)

I took retirement following a horse-riding accident – another fall could have confined me to a wheelchair. I decided to follow my passion by doing some volunteer work at the horse-riding centre. I have registered for many courses to better understand these fascinating animals and made new female friends in the process. I might eventually submit a story about this to *Renaissance*.
Louise Sylvestre
(District 27 Ottawa-Carleton)

I built a new house in another town, did some broadcasting, started two new jobs, learned to curl, joined a new baseball team, started golfing on a regular basis, became active in RTOERO and joined a classic rock band.
Alfred Guidolin
(District 12 Norfolk)

I took on the task of including the Holodomor in curricula across Canada as the director of education at the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, University of Alberta.
Valentina Kuryliw
(District 16 City of Toronto)

ILLUSTRATION, DREW SHANNON



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