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INSIDE



4



6



8



10

- 4 Liz Perry: Take Risks And Embrace The New
by **Jennifer Sexton-Riley**
- 6 Brown Breaks Down Barriers To Senior Fitness
by **Rowan Wood**
- 8 Shining A Light For Seniors
by **Ryan Bray**
- 10 Retiree Arun Taneja Finds Inspiration
In Teaching, Mentoring
by **Joy Jordan**

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LIZ PERRY: Take Risks



Liz Perry hikes up to the Monhegan Museum last September while on Monhegan Island in Maine. COURTESY PHOTO

by Jennifer Sexton-Riley

For Brewster artist Liz Perry, one little word is the key to a whole lot of discovery and enjoyment, as well as the secret ingredient for a life lived free from many limiting norms.

That little word is “yes.”

Perry, who turned 71 this week, explained that she tends to say yes to most things when they are offered. At least 10 percent, she finds, will be worth your while. So why not try?

“I call it my 10 percent rule,” Perry said.

Having said that, Perry also points out that she takes care not to take on more than she can comfortably handle. She has an unusual assistant to help out when the phone rings and someone presents one more request or suggestion than Perry can juggle.

“I keep this plastic turkey next to my phone,” Perry said. “When someone asks me if I can do something and I am not sure I can, I am reminded: don’t be a turkey. At that point, I’ve trained myself to say, ‘Let me think about it, and I’ll call you back.’ In that way, I am giving myself the option to say

no. You have to find a balance at any age, whether you are taking care of yourself, doing things for your community, or especially taking care of your health.”

Perry said she is always on the lookout for new things to try and new challenges to take on, whether she is creating art or pursuing other interests. As an artist, she may try her hand with unfamiliar materials or risky new images. (“Why not try?”) In the kitchen, she may investigate a few new cookbooks and take on cooking an experimental meal for her vegan daughter. (“My husband loved it!”)

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And Embrace The New

In the great outdoors, which she enjoys with husband Carl and their energetic dog Keira, Perry recently planted a new pollinator garden.

"I love gardening, and although it is physically demanding, I do almost all the work myself," Perry said. "The pollinator garden attracts everything I love: birds, butterflies, bees, everything I want in my yard."

Community is a vitally important factor in Perry's equation for a balanced, youthful approach to life. As many people do, she finds herself part of a variety of different communities which combine to make her life interesting, fulfilling and fun. Among the communities Perry enjoys are her art community, her walking community, and her Buddhist community.

"As you age it's important to have a strong community of friends with whom you have things in common, with whom you can receive companionship and support," Perry said. "You go through a lot in life; challenges with health, family, all the various things we struggle with. I am grateful to find community with the fellow artists I meet with, the people I walk with and my Buddhist community, in addition to my family."

Perry, who creates hand-pulled collagraph and monotype prints and watercolor paintings at her

Blue Jacket Studios and Gallery in Brewster, has been involved with the Creative Arts Center in Chatham since moving to the Cape 41 years ago. It was one of the first places where she showed her work. She teaches there on and off, and developed a remote color theory class which she taught through the Center via Zoom during the COVID pandemic.

"That was something positive I could do when everyone felt so isolated," Perry said. "That was a challenge for me because I am pretty shy. I hesitated, but then I thought, why not? It's a great way to reach out to people. I think I will probably teach it again this summer."

Perry enjoys walking about three miles with friends once a week to a local pond and back. She points out that taking good care of the physical body is an important aspect of her Buddhism practice.

"I've been a Buddhist most of my life," Perry said. "I chant and meditate, and part of Buddhist practice is trying to think of yourself as young and energetic. Being your best self and inspiring other people is a big part of the practice. You think about your needs, but try to stay positive. And as you age, it does seem to really help. When I have health problems and sit at the altar and chant, it gives me a good feeling. It really helps me."



Monotype by Liz Perry.

"You have to find a balance at any age, whether you are taking care of yourself, doing things for your community, or especially taking care of your health." ~ LIZ PERRY

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Brown Breaks Down Barriers



When you get to a certain age, maintaining mobility is crucial, Jill Brown says. COURTESY PHOTOS

by Rowan Wood

Harwich resident Jill Brown's journey to holistic nutrition began, as many stories do, with her upbringing.

"I've had type 1 diabetes since I was 9," said Brown, "so taking care of my health and managing a lifelong condition inspired me, and I realized I wanted to use all that I had learned and put into my own health to help other people."

Brown grew up in Harwich and has always had a love for the community, so much so that she chose to return and live there after completing college with a bachelor's degree in social work. She's since started a family and committed herself to focusing on exercise and nutrition and became certified in personal training, with a specialization in holistic nutrition.

"I had a vision when I was getting my training license of having clients that were all-inclusive," said Brown. "I was always a little nervous going to group classes or working with people, because when you have diabetes, sometimes you have to stop and eat or you have to take a break if your blood sugar's off."

"I wanted to create a space where people could come with different health conditions and all be in one group. I started holding small classes at the Harwich Community Center, and one day I looked into the gymnasium and noticed a man teaching a class with what looked like a hundred people."

"I said to myself, 'I want to do that someday,'" Brown said. The man who was teaching senior

fitness, Charles Abate, recently retired after leading the class for over 20 years.

"I couldn't let it stop," said Brown, "so I ran down to the council on aging office and asked them to give me a chance."

Brown's appeal was successful, and now she teaches the class, Jill's Senior Fit, two days a week at the Harwich Community Center to groups of about 75 people.

"I have people from their 50s up through their 90s," said Brown. "I have people with walkers and who have multiple sclerosis, knee replacements, hip replacements, heart conditions, you name it. We're all in one room, and we do it together."

Brown's class functions not just as a space for physical exercise, but also as a support group. "Studies have shown that when you exercise in groups, it increases your happiness and helps with depression and anxiety," said Brown. "Getting people out in a community setting with other like-minded individuals is important."

Additionally, Brown emphasized that when you get to a certain age, maintaining mobility is crucial. She teaches several smaller classes of varying levels of intensity, including one focused on people with Alzheimer's disease, which can sometimes consist of purely social interaction. But Brown considers it a personal victory when she can get her students out of their wheelchairs and into an exercise rhythm.

For those who don't necessarily have access to Jill's Senior Fit or a comparable class, Brown recommends balance as the primary focus for those advancing in age.

"Older people sometimes lose the correct



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To Senior Fitness

momentum in their step, and end up getting hurt when they fall,” she said. She also recommends light strength training, which is very important for bone density and muscle mass.

In addition to teaching classes there, Brown is on call in the weight room at the Harwich Community Center on Monday and Thursday mornings. The weight room can be accessed through a membership fee, proof of Harwich residence, or SilverSneakers eligibility.

Brown also works as a personal trainer and offers one-on-one services, and can be found and contacted via Facebook at Holistic Nutrition and Personal Training by Jill Brown. She is licensed and insured to go into clients’ homes, which helps, according to Brown. “Sometimes people want to be in the comfort of their home, especially if they’re recovering from a stroke or surgery. It can be nice for me to see the home and make sure it’s set up safely for moving around,” she said.

“It can be very overwhelming to start an exercise program if you’ve had surgeries or a heart attack, or anything that you might be nervous about,” said Brown. “It helps to have somebody there to ease you into it as opposed to putting everything on you. Your body’s not the same, and you can feel isolated, especially if you have a hard time accepting the aging process.”

Brown plays a 10-minute guided meditation at the end of every exercise class, and she’s satisfied with how her pupils are benefiting from the relaxation. Additionally, as part of her effort to make the class as inclusive as possible, “you can get water whenever you need it, go to the bathroom whenever you need it, and sit down when you need to. I always tell people that they’re welcome to watch, and if it’s not for you, I’ll help you find something that is.”

She adds, “Once you come through the door, you realize nobody’s looking at you. Once somebody gets themselves to that point, they end up loving it.”



Brown teaches Jill’s Senior Fit two days a week at the Harwich Community Center.



“I have people from their 50s up through their 90s. I have people with walkers and who have multiple sclerosis, knee replacements, hip replacements, heart conditions, you name it. We’re all in one room, and we do it together.”

~ JILL BROWN

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Shining A Light For Seniors

A Free County Service Is Helping Folks Make Sense Of Medicare Options

by Ryan Bray

When Ellenmarie Rhone retired full time to Chatham from New York City with her husband this past summer, one of the first things on her to-do list was to enroll in Medicare.

But the process was complicated, even for Rhone, a seasoned human resources professional who dedicated her career to helping employees at her company find healthcare options that best fit them.

“It’s so difficult, and if I’m having difficulty understanding it, how does a lay person without many years of experience with healthcare and insurance understand it?” she said.

Rhone quickly found out the differences between Medicare and traditional health insurance are many. There are separate coverages for medications and doctors. You also can’t be on your family’s plan.

To better understand her Medicare options, Rhone got a consultation through the Cape and Islands SHINE program.

SHINE, an acronym for Serving the Health Insurance Needs Of Everyone, is a federal program geared toward helping seniors save money on their health insurance costs. Kristina Whiton-O’Brien, regional program manager for the SHINE program servicing Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, said the program helps between 5,000 and 6,000 people in the region annually and is largely run by a team of 70 volunteer counselors who are trained to help seniors find the Medicare plan that best fits their individual needs.

“Our services are free, and they’re also unbiased,” Whiton-O’Brien said. “We’re not influenced by any particular company. We have to be very fair and diplomatic in terms of the advice we’re sharing with folks.”

Through her consultation, Rhone was inspired to become a volunteer counselor herself. She underwent 40 hours of training and completed the necessary exam. She was also mentored by two other counselors, Pat Burke and Joanne Crowley. Together, the three counselors work as team servicing seniors in Chatham.

“They’ve been very supportive, and the program itself, I’ve met so many great people in Chatham, and I’ve gotten a really good view of the healthcare issues that are going on in the community and some of the struggles that people have,” she said. “So I feel that it’s been a really good use of my time.”

Local SHINE teams typically operate through senior centers and councils on aging in their communities. A consultation with a SHINE counselor begins with an interview, where they go over a person’s current coverage.

“We talk to them about their doctors and try to help them find plans that their doctors participate in,” Rhone said. “And then we help them select from all of the different options they have available to them, first from a financial perspective and then from a coverage perspective.”

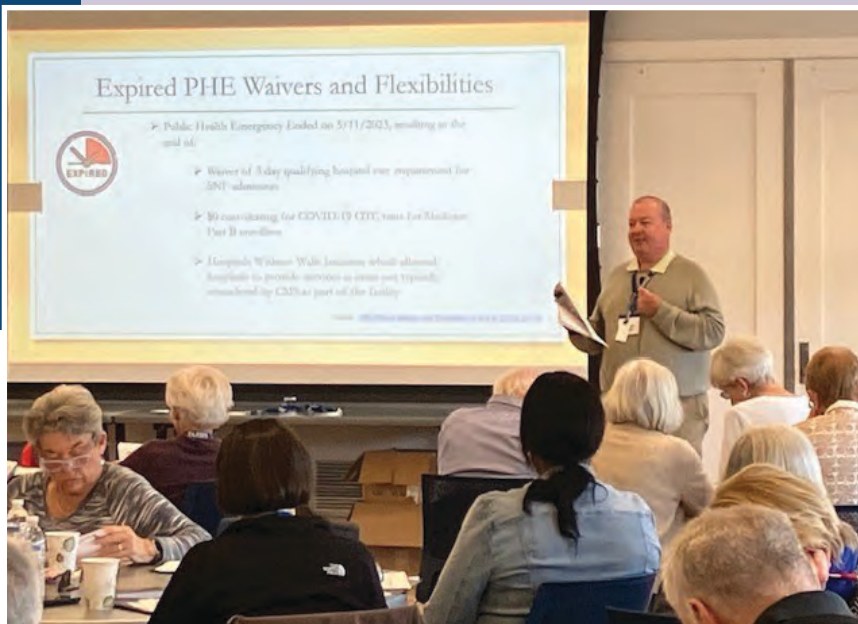
The information gathered through these interviews goes into a master database, Whiton-O’Brien said. That information is evaluated by Congress, which decides annually whether or not to keep funding the program on the Cape, she said.

“Congress always wants us to prove our efficacy and how we’re working with folks,” she said. “So they do look at that data in terms of the number of people that we help and the amount of money that we save people through our services. Because really the goal is to help people save money.”

For the uninitiated, Medicare is challenging to understand. The first thing many people learn is how different it is from corporate healthcare, Rhone said.

“I think that’s the biggest thing,” she said. “People just assume they move from one system right into Medicare and it all works out. But that’s not true. Certain things

Continued on Page 11



The Cape and Islands SHINE program hosts open enrollment training sessions each October. COURTESY PHOTO



— Kim Sterling, Lynn, Drusie and Rick Jenkins

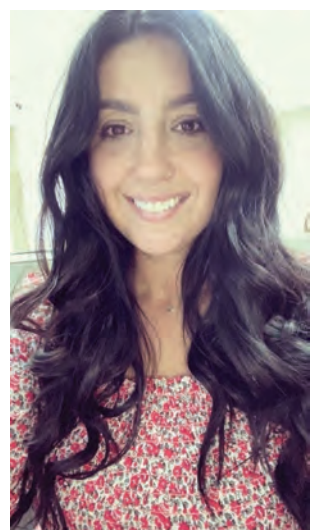
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Retiree Arun Taneja Finds Inspiration In Teaching, Mentoring



A retired tech executive, Arun Taneja is now a volunteer business mentor and math tutor.
JOY JORDAN PHOTO

by Joy Jordan

For Arun Taneja, retirement was a daunting prospect. After a long and successful career as a busy technology executive, the idea of empty, unscheduled days was a bit frightening.

“When I retired a few years ago, my biggest fear was that I would die of boredom,” said Taneja. “Not being happy with that possible outcome, I asked myself, ‘What is it that you always wanted to do but had no time for?’ Growing up in India I had seen what havoc poverty wreaked on people, especially those without education. I knew even then that education was by far the biggest determinant of success in life. My mom also used to say that every child should get a childhood, because once gone you never get it back. So, could I use my experience to help a child enjoy a childhood and have a shot at life? The answer for me was educating a child, any child really, but especially one who was ‘disadvantaged.’”

Luckily for Taneja, and for the many people he has helped along the way, he found a variety of volunteer opportunities that allowed him to use his professional

educational background to give back.

Taneja grew up in India, and earned his bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi. When it came to his graduate degrees, he moved to the United States to attend the University of New Hampshire in Durham, where he earned a master’s degree in electrical engineering and a master’s of business administration.

Following his time at UNH, his career was entirely in the high-tech field, both on the technical side and in marketing.

“I had the good fortune of working for companies like IBM, Data General, Sun Microsystems and several startups,” he noted. “My executive roles were in engineering and marketing and as CEO. For the last 18 years of my career, I founded and ran a boutique high-tech industry analyst/consulting group.”

The Cape has been in the Taneja family’s DNA for a very long time. He and his wife used to vacation in Harwich Port before buying a small cottage in West Dennis in 1982. “Our kids grew up catching hermit crabs on Bass River every summer while I worked and traveled for business,” he said. “We always had plans to spend more

Continued on Next Page

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Arun Taneja

Continued from **Previous Page**

time on the Cape when the time was right. Eventually, we built our home in West Dennis and have been living in it year-round since 2010.”

Upon his retirement three years ago, Taneja focused on his widespread volunteer work, impacting young people both here and abroad. His initial research into ways to give back led him to discover BlinkNow, an American nonprofit run by a woman named Maggie Doyne. The organization provides schooling for hundreds of children in rural Nepal, many of them orphans. Many of these children live in housing on campus where all their needs are provided for; a majority of these children would be subject to human trafficking if not taken in by BlinkNow. Taneja volunteered for BlinkNow in the company’s early stages when it was creating various programs for children, and now mostly supports the organizations through donations.

Closer to home, Taneja has worked with a number of students in the Monomoy Regional School District. “On the Cape, my volunteering includes tutoring math to two children in the eighth grade

and one child in the seventh grade,” he said. “I have been tutoring other children over the past four years or so. I partnered with Monomoy Regional on all of these, with one exception. One child I tutored finished eighth grade in Monomoy but then moved to Hingham. His dad asked me if I would give him another year of tutoring, which I did.”

Taneja also works with the Cape Cod chapter of EforAll, an organization that provides business training and mentoring to fresh entrepreneurs who start a business on Cape Cod. All the training and mentoring is provided by industry experts on a volunteer basis.

“I started with EforAll by simply helping review and evaluate business plans for new ventures, then helped to interview the candidates and provide input for the final selection. The final phase is that of providing mentoring to one selected organization for one year.”

This has allowed him to support a variety of fledgling businesses.

“My first mentoring job was with Colorful Kidz, a nonprofit that does room makeovers for children in need on Cape Cod. These kids all come from disadvantaged circumstances and have suffered some trauma: medical, physical, or mental. I have been amazed at the transformation in these children through

the simple act of someone providing a personal space with a nice, clean bed, good lighting, a desk to do homework on, freshly painted walls with artwork designed by volunteers to match the tastes of the child.”

Taneja’s role is to provide business guidance to the founder, Caren Berry, and he also helps write grants to enable her to do what she does best: design and implement amazing room makeovers. All work on these projects is done by volunteers.

His second business mentoring role is helping a local artist, Mike Palmer, who specializes in ocean art. “Mike is a marine scientist by profession but he realized his passion was creating scientifically accurate fish art,” Taneja said. “My job is to help him make this transition so he can convert his passion into a viable business.”

When asked why he volunteers, Taneja acknowledges the deep satisfaction he gets from helping others, in large part because he received similar help as a child.

“Take a child who is struggling in math — to see the transformation as their eyes light up when they ‘get it’ and then watch them aim for an A (and get it) is beyond my ability to describe,” Taneja said. “A tutor did that for me when I was

a child in India and I am only paying it forward.”

On the entrepreneurial front, he wasn’t sure if his high-tech experience would translate to a nonprofit or to an artist’s business, but since the work with Colorful Kidz supported children in need, he went for it.

“I can say without the slightest hesitation that the experience brings immeasurable joy to me,” he adds. “To see the founder go from zero to 10 room makeovers in 2022 and 20 in 2023 has been a beautiful journey.”

Working directly with students is incredibly rewarding for Taneja, and brings some surprises along the way.

“The most surprising part of working with students is to discover how their whole attitude changes when they realize their own potential,” he said. “The transformation is visible. One day they are struggling and think they will never understand something and then the ‘aha’ moment arrives, unexpectedly. From that point on, everything changes. In my view, not just in math but for learning in general. Individual attention can be an amazing thing.”

Joy Jordan is the community engagement coordinator for the Monomoy Regional School District.

SHINE

Continued from **Page 8**

that are covered under corporate healthcare aren’t covered under Medicare. And then Medicare has many different parts to it. In order to get full health coverage, you have to understand what all the different parts are.”

The plans also vary, both in terms of cost and quality of coverage. Some allow out of network coverage in cities such as Boston or New York, while others require that patients stay within their network. The key, Rhone said, is pairing people with a plan that best meets their specific medical needs at the best cost.

But on Cape Cod, where there are fewer providers than over the bridge, finding a good fit can be difficult, Rhone said.

“You see those ads on TV, and a lot of those plans aren’t even available on the Cape,” she said. “Because it’s all determined by the county you live in, and as one of the leaders of the SHINE program says, a lot of these programs don’t swim.”

And if you do find a plan that meets your needs and your budget, it’s not set in stone. Every year, there are changes in coverage and costs, so what you pay for this year might not necessarily be what you pay for the next.

Those year-to-year changes particularly apply to the cost of medications, Whiton-O’Brien noted.

“The drug companies change their premium prices

and their formularies every year,” she said. “So a lot of times people will get mail [telling them about the changes in cost], but they don’t read the mail. Then they’ll get a bill and be surprised that the premium has gone up 20 percent.”

But a sit down with a SHINE counselor can help people find significant savings in their Medicare coverage. Rhone said in some cases, people save as much as \$7,000 a year. The program can even help people identify the best pharmacy to use, with Whiton-O’Brien noting that the cost of prescription can vary dramatically from one pharmacy to the next.

SHINE is a free service, and it’s an easy one to take advantage of. All you have to do is call your local senior center or council on aging to set up an appointment. And for those looking to volunteer, Whiton-O’Brien said the county is already looking to bring on new volunteer counselors to be trained in time for the fall.

“It’s a commitment, but this is the time of year where we’re already thinking about the fall and open enrollment next year,” she said. “So we want to recruit new volunteers right now and get people in the door so we can get them ready for that time.”

Need Help Preparing Your Taxes?

Many local councils on aging provide free tax preparation and filing for seniors, providing a savings of up to \$300, and one less headache to start the new year.

In Orleans, COA tax program Local Coordinator Sue Lynch encouraged residents to reach out for help.

“Last year we handled over 100 clients in Orleans with the other COAs just as busy, but we always welcome more clients,” she said.

For more information, call your town’s council on aging.



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ADVERTISERS INDEX

Dana Bennett, LICSW	10
Cape Cod 5	2
Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History	10
CC Regional Transit Authority	back flap
Chatham Works	3
Creative Arts Center	7
Great Gatsby Estate	10
Harwich Council on Aging	7
Mr. Grab Bar	4
Mr. Handyman	5
Nickerson Funeral Home	9
David Nunheimer, Attorney	4
Seaside Home Care, LLC	7
Second Glance Thrift Boutique	6
Serenity Apartments at Brewster	11
Sullivan Group/Nauset Insurance	10
The Terraces	12
The Victorian	8
The Woodlands	2

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