

Seniors Living Well

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‘Bingo!’

Inside Tri-Valley game hall that serves as ongoing fundraiser for local nonprofits

By JUDE STRZEMP

Hunched over cards with daubers in hand, folks await a number-letter pairing from their nests of food and drink at cafeteria-style tables.

A ball is announced and the relative silence is cut with chatter as a player yells “BINGO!” and wins hundreds of dollars.

It was a Friday night in early September inside a charitable Bingo hall at the Livermore Town Center, a locus of routine and thrills for its multi-generational clientele every month.

Dubbed Bingo4CHEF, the game hall is the main fundraising arm for nonprofit organization Community Health & Education Foundation. As such, it has supported CHEF programming that has amassed over \$8 million for over 50 local nonprofit organizations since 2018.

But given the shopping center’s planned demolition for a housing project, Bingo4CHEF faces an uncertain future with the need to relocate by late next year.

“The purpose was never simply to run or to operate a Bingo hall,” CHEF co-founder Maria Mancini told the Pleasanton Weekly. “Bingo was a way to create a sustainable source of charitable funding ... at the same time, we’re providing a place of entertainment, a place of community.”

Inside the building with “The Bingo Ranch” marquee, regulars Patty Ambur and Todd Ambur sit diagonally at a table, per their typical orientation.

“My son sits here and my daughter sits here,” Patty Ambur of Fremont said, pointing to the empty seats usually filled on Saturdays. “Dad sits there.”

Every weekend, they are drawn to Bingo4CHEF for the thrill of winning and relaxation, albeit with different spending strategies.

“I try to manage my money,” Todd Ambur said. “I don’t like spending money, so winning makes me happy.”

Patty Ambur added, “I play like it’s my last day on Earth.”

Meanwhile, both players were stamping Bingo cards.

Regardless of who buys more games, Todd Ambur said he gets a thrill out of gameplay.

“I can’t even think after I’ve won \$1,500. I’m all jittery,” he said. “Even now, the adrenaline is there.”

The Amburs are among the nearly 2,500 players who pass through Bingo4CHEF monthly throughout the four games it hosts every week.

At the adults-only game hall, a buy-in ranges from \$40 to \$55 with main games winning



between \$1,000 to \$1,500, depending on the day, Mancini said.

Side games cost extra, she added.

For-profit Bingo is a form of banned gambling in California, but it is permitted for nonprofit purposes.

Last year, CHEF amassed an average of about \$115,000 monthly in net gaming income, according to Mancini.

The funds support CHEF’s matching program, where it runs fundraising campaigns for other local nonprofit organizations and supplies a 50% match of donations. The dollars also support its volunteer program in which CHEF grants local organizations funding in exchange for volunteer hours at the bingo hall. CHEF has clocked 20,000 volunteer hours in-house since 2018, Mancini said.

“It’s a pretty well-oiled machine at this point,” Mancini said with a laugh.

She and her husband John Di Simone began operating Bingo4CHEF in 2018, one year after



Bingo4CHEF, located within Livermore Town Center, draws scores of eager players for every game. JUDE STRZEMP

See **BINGO** on Page 14

Turn, turn, turn – the season I’m in

‘As I grow wiser with age, I realize that perspective, optimism and connecting with similar-minded people make aging a pleasure’

BY NANCY LEWIS

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”

Some people think of Ecclesiastes when they read this proverb, others think of The Byrds’ 1965 hit song, “Turn, Turn, Turn”. I fall into the latter category.

Many view this Bible verse as an acknowledgment of God’s Will — that our lives are in God’s hands, and that everything happens for a reason, in its own time, in accordance with God’s Plan. In other words, as my mother, Of Blessed Memory, often said, either in English or Yiddish, “Man plans and God laughs.”

I respectfully disagree. I believe each season of life is shaped by our attitude and the choices we make, and that we do have tremendous control over our destinies. To me, the phrase simply observes that life comes in phases and stages, and no one gets to stay in any one phase forever.

Life keeps moving forward, time marches on, and we get older every single day, whether we want to or not. The challenge is to find a way — by hook or by crook — to put a positive spin on the declines and indignities that come along with aging.

Scaling back opens new doors

Now comfortably in my 60s, and acutely aware that I’m just a few years younger than my mother was when she died, I’ve had to give certain things up because they no longer comport with the season I’m in. My days of running up the down-escalator at the mall are over because the risk of falling and breaking yet another bone is simply too high.

For the same reason, I look longingly at my pogo stick and stilts collecting dust in the garage, waiting for the day I can teach my twin baby grandsons how to use

them. (Grandmothers are expected to have eccentricities. I will not disappoint.)

Although I’ve had to let some things go, I focus on what I can still do relatively safely, like hiking, cycling, racquetball and swimming. All good.

I’ve also aged out of picking up new sports. In my early 40s, for example, a college classmate dared me to try out for the Bay Area’s competitive female roller derby league. I approached it with my usual enthusiasm (if not grace) and I made it into the league. My teammates called me “Madre” because I was nearly 20 years older than all of them.

That season has passed.

I’ve retired my derby name, uniform, helmet, and mouth guard, but not my spirit. Never my spirit.

And letting go of the intense, injury-provoking sports has opened up space for new interests, like “Cardio Drumming” classes.

As a highly competitive person, I never imagined I could enjoy a form of exercise that doesn’t involve trying to win, by scoring more points, goals, baskets or runs. But I love this weekly class, even though nothing about it involves “winning”. The goal is simply to maintain fitness/heart healthiness, and enjoy spending time being active with others.

In that respect, everyone who shows up is a winner — even if we no longer get the participation ribbons we would have received in earlier seasons. No big. We’re so over that.

I also move more slowly now to avoid falling, but I see so much more because I’m no longer rushing. The “always rushing” seasons — and there were so many — are blissfully behind me.

Rushing is not conducive to risk avoidance or self-preservation. And moving more slowly in the season I’m in lets me notice and appreciate small joys: a neighbor’s flowers, a

charitable dollars into our community and then reinvesting them,” she explained.

On that Friday night in September, Central Valley residents Monica Cambosa and Rene Smith were among the game players contributing to the nonprofit coffers.

But Livermore locals, like Jennifer Kuhnke, also visit the hall.

As a weekly player, Kuhnke said she has been going to Bingo4CHEF for about a year, the same place her mom used to play prior to her death.

“It’s addicting in a way,” Kuhnke said of gameplay.

Kuhnke said she is also reminded



CHUCK DECKERT

Nancy Lewis rides her bicycle on Main Street sidewalk ahead of husband Jeff in front of McKay’s Taphouse and Beer Garden, where they often conduct interviews for their Streetwise column in the Pleasanton Weekly.

cat in a window, the way the sunlight hits our pool, creating what looks like a majestic impressionist painting on the water’s surface.

Perspective, self-awareness and approach

In this season, I no longer worry that someone might notice I’m not as thin as I once was. It’s so liberating to walk around these days thinking, “No one’s looking at me. I’m just an old lady.” I finally sparkle with a sense of self-awareness that eluded me until I became a sexagenarian.

I’ve earned the liberty to acknowledge my weaknesses and play to my strengths; I don’t have to be good at everything anymore. I can just be really good at the few things that truly matter to me.

And you know what? That’s fine.

Aging is a privilege and a blessing — not a disease, illness or curse. The choice to embrace aging rather than chase youth with fillers, lotions, potions and procedures is personal.

My own choice, every morning, is to embrace whatever season I’m in. I’m thrilled to celebrate another

trip around the sun each year — an opportunity denied to so many.

I love that behind every wrinkle, scar, and titanium plate, screw, and pin holding my battered body together, there is a story. A slice of a life lived fully, pain and all.

As I grow wiser with age, I realize that perspective, optimism and connecting with similar-minded people make aging a pleasure.

Chronological age becomes irrelevant as I gravitate toward those who reflect thoughtfully on, and learn from their pasts, consider their futures, and search for silver linings rather than dark gray clouds looming overhead. These are the people who understand that each day, regardless of the season, is a day we will never get back, and that time is not something to “kill”.

My purpose under heaven in this season

I’ve also come to appreciate as I age, that a meaningful life can be lived in every season, even one where your (my) daily earworm is often, “The Old Gray Mare She Ain’t What She Used To Be”. Because there is a time for every purpose under

heaven, I’ve been spending this later season doing whatever good I can to leave my little corner of the Earth better off than I found it.

That is now my purpose under heaven.

So wherever I can, and with whatever I have, I joyfully go, do, produce, create, accomplish and help — all for the benefit of my local community. I expect no acknowledgment or reward.

Using the time I have left to help heal our fractured world, one good deed at a time, keeps me feeling my best physically, cognitively and emotionally.

And as I wind down each day with my magnificent, similar-minded husband Jeff beside me, I feel gratified and fulfilled. I can’t imagine a better reward than that. Turn, turn, turn.

Editor’s note: A longtime Pleasanton resident and lawyer, Nancy Lewis has been preparing the weekly Streetwise column for Page 4 of the Pleasanton Weekly print edition for over 15 years. She offered this personal essay on her experience with aging into her 60s, nearing retirement and becoming a grandmother. ■

BINGO

Continued from Page 13

founding CHEF and learning that the game hall’s operator intended to close the joint.

Prior to that, it was operated by Buenas Vidas Youth Ranch before the nonprofit shuttered in 2012, according to Mancini. Buenas Vidas was a group home for “troubled” children that shut down due to lack of funds, according to reporting in 2013 by the East Bay Times.

Under CHEF, players travel from across the region to play Bingo.

“We’re essentially bringing those

of her mother, especially when the number 57 is called.

“That was the year she was born. She always liked 57,” Kuhnke said.

Among the nonprofit organizations benefiting from CHEF’s fundraising is Tri-Valley Haven, which offers services to those affected by domestic violence and sexual assault.

With the help of CHEF’s matching program, Tri-Valley Haven has raised over \$285,000 since 2021, according to Executive Director Christine Dillman.

“These funds have provided essential, life-changing services to survivors of interpersonal violence and

their children,” she told the Weekly in an email interview.

The Tri-Valley Nonprofit Alliance is another beneficiary of CHEF’s matching program, which it has used for purposes such as issuing grants totaling at least \$100,000 annually to local nonprofits and its launch of the CommonPoint Nonprofit Center.

“There really is nothing else quite like CHEF in our region,” TVNPA President and CEO Kathy Young told the Weekly. “At a time when government funding is increasingly uncertain, relatively few major foundations fund extensively in the Tri-Valley, and corporate giving is becoming

tighter, having CHEF here as another avenue for nonprofits to raise money is invaluable.”

Looking toward the future, Mancini said Bingo4CHEF is expected to move out of the building by the last quarter of 2027.

She is currently searching for a new location for the hall.

“Bingo4CHEF is what makes this fundraising model possible, so finding a new home—It’s not just about preserving a Bingo game in town, but it’s about preserving the ability for us to continue providing this funding to the nonprofits throughout the Tri-Valley,” she said. ■

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Home sweet home: Seniors are staying put

Modern seniors have more flexibility than ever to design a next chapter that fits their life

BY DEVIN DAVIS

For many senior homeowners in Pleasanton, there's a simple reason to stay put: they already live where they want to be.

With a strong sense of community, familiar neighborhoods and easy access to the people, places and services that are part of their daily lives, longtime residents are increasingly choosing to remain in their homes and invest in making them even better.

Years of home price appreciation have also given many senior homeowners substantial equity and the financial flexibility to make that choice. Instead of selling and moving elsewhere, they can use some of that equity to improve accessibility and make other renovations designed for the way they want to live today and in the years ahead.

For these homeowners, remodeling isn't necessarily about preparing a property for sale. It can be about reinvesting in a home, a neighborhood and a Pleasanton lifestyle they already know and value.

According to the National Association of Realtors' "2026 Home Buyers and Sellers Generational Trends"

report, baby boomers remain the largest share of both buyers (at 42%) and sellers (at 55%) of the housing market. That's a powerful reminder that seniors are a major part of the real estate market.

"I would definitely say that seniors are a quiet majority of the market," said Tracey Esling, 2025 president of the Bay East Association of Realtors. "The one thing that hasn't changed for older generations is the question of, 'Where do I go?'"

For many, the answer is simply, "I'm not going anywhere." Staying put often means keeping a low mortgage payment, or none at all, along with the equity, the memories, and the community they've built over decades.

NAR found that consumers feel the most important results from remodeling are livability and functionality, durable and long-lasting results, and beauty and aesthetics. Home improvement projects with the highest return on investment are garage door replacement, entry door replacement, minor kitchen remodel and bathroom remodel.

When it comes to smaller things that can make all the difference,

Esling said painting and even replacing the flooring are generally the easiest and most affordable changes to make.

"When people want to truly remodel their home, the kitchen or bathrooms are usually the first things clients gravitate to and it's a great place to start," Esling explained.

NAR noted in its "2025 Remodeling Impact" report that while housing affordability and rising mortgage rates can be considered potential motivators for home remodeling, most homeowners reported that was not a deciding factor in their decisions to remodel.

"A lot of homeowners, especially in the Tri-Valley, love where they live. Not just their home specifically, but the surrounding community too," Esling said. "Seniors who've lived here for even just a short time don't always feel it's necessary to leave when everything they need is so close and so familiar."

And for those craving a change of scenery, Esling said they have new options.

"We are starting to see a trend on the horizon with baby boomers selling their homes and renting in



COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

either a beach community or the city, then purchasing somewhere close to friends or family," Esling added.

Whether the plan is to stay, relocate or downsize, seniors today have more flexibility than ever to design a next chapter that fits their life.

"The complex nature of selling, more than buying, can create difficulties in a transaction for all parties," Esling said. "So the suggestion of bringing in a Realtor you trust to help provide guidance is still great advice. Just because you may have gone through it once or twice before

doesn't mean it'll work out the same way."

As Esling put it, having someone trustworthy in your corner — whether the goal is staying, selling or somewhere in between — can make all the difference.

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



Devin Davis

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Powering possibilities

How Tri-Valley senior centers help older adults thrive

BY CHRISTIAN TRUJANO

With September being National Senior Center Month, the Pleasanton Senior Center has been using the opportunity to remind older residents that finding fun, engaging activities and a sense of belonging doesn't have to be challenging as they age.

"Whether someone is interested in fitness, lifelong learning, creative arts, technology, travel, volunteering, or simply meeting new friends, there's truly something for everyone," Nicole Thomas, recreation supervisor for the city of Pleasanton, stated in a recent press release. "National Senior Center Month is the perfect opportunity to visit, explore, and see firsthand how today's senior centers are helping older adults thrive."

Every day, roughly 11,000 Americans turn 65 years old, according to the National Council on Aging, an organization that supports and advocates for older adults.

But, just as there are thousands of aging adults, there are also more than 10,000 senior centers across the country that "help older adults

improve their health, reduce social isolation, discover new passions, and access services that enhance quality of life."

"Visit your local senior center, and you will instantly find community and joy," Dianne Stone, the council's associate director of community partnerships and network activation, said in an Aug. 27 press release.

The Pleasanton Senior Center still has a couple of events lined up for National Senior Center Month, which is sponsored by the national council, that are meant to emphasize the "important role senior centers play in helping older adults remain healthy, connected, independent, and engaged".

"This is a perfect place for them to come meet new friends," Agnes Sowul, a program assistant for the city's library and recreation department, told the Pleasanton Weekly. "Some of them live alone, they do not have friends ... so this is a great place they can take activities, classes, arts and crafts, they can lunch and just be here."

See **POWERING** on Page 20



CHRISTIAN TRUJANO

Tri-Valley organizations gather in the main lobby at the Pleasanton Senior Center to talk to seniors during an open house event on Sept. 10.

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POWERING

Continued from Page 18

The theme for this year's National Senior Center Month is "Powering Possibilities: Flip the Script", which encourages community members to "challenge outdated stereotypes about aging and recognize today's senior centers as vibrant hubs for lifelong learning, health, creativity, friendship, and purpose", according to Pleasanton officials.

This year's celebrations began in Pleasanton on Sept. 1 with a social event that featured ice cream, games and a visit from Valley Humane Society's Canine Comfort dogs.

Last week, seniors were able to visit the center during an open house all day and learn about other community organizations, programs available at the Pleasanton Senior Center and all of the services offered.

The center will also be hosting a presentation, titled "Living Your Best Life", next Tuesday (Sept. 22) which will explore the "eight dimensions of wellness, healthy nutrition, and practical strategies for aging well", according to Pleasanton officials.

Finally, the center is hosting a "Taste of Chocolate" event on Sept. 28, which has sold out. The event, which is being sponsored by the Friends of the Pleasanton Senior

Center organization, will feature artisan chocolates from around the world that seniors can sample.

Other senior centers across the Tri-Valley that aren't tied to the National Council on Aging will also be hosting several events this month.

The Dublin Senior Center will be organizing an "End of Summer Social" on Sept. 24 starting at 1 p.m. as part of its National Senior Center Month celebrations.

The Livermore Area Recreation and Park District is also offering a wide variety of programs and events for seniors this month. According to its website, some of those events include a movie night at the Robert Livermore Community Center on Sept. 21, a senior trip to Sausalito on Sept. 24 and several crafting classes.

But Pleasanton's senior center isn't just limited to this month's events. There's a wide array of fitness classes, social activities, tutoring, wellness programs, congregate lunches and travel opportunities that the center offers.

One of those additional amenities is the Peddler Shoppe, a small gift shop located at the very entrance of the center that sells handmade, unique items made by seniors in the Tri-Valley.

Joanne Lombardi, a 50-year resident of Pleasanton, said she has been volunteering at the center for more



CHRISTIAN TRUJANO

Joanne Lombardi, a longtime Pleasanton resident who volunteers at the Pleasanton Peddler Shoppe, stands inside the shop, which is located inside the Pleasanton Senior Center.

than 10 years and that working at the small shop has shown her just how important it is to have accessible places for seniors to commune.

She said she frequently talks to

people at the center and that sometimes, having even a quick and simple conversation can mean the world to seniors.

"I think of it as being a community

where everybody gets to know something or gets to come in and talk to somebody during the day," she said.

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Seniors Calendar

Day Trips

VIP TRAVEL: FLEET WEEK Cruise across the Bay Bridge to Pier 3 and board the San Francisco Belle. Brunch with bottomless Mimosas included. Watch the Fleet Week Air Show featuring the United Airlines 777 and the Blue Angels. 11:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., Oct. 10. Cost \$185R/\$195NR. Sign up at the Pleasanton Senior Center VIP Travel desk.

Hobbies

AUDITIONS FOR VALLEY CONCERT CHORALE Valley Concert Chorale, the Tri-Valley, premier chorus, is seeking new singers for its upcoming 2026-2027 concert season. 7-9 p.m., Sept. 21. First Presbyterian Church, 2020 Fifth St., Livermore. Call 925-866-4003 to schedule an audition.

GAME TIME Game Time at the Pleasanton Senior Center is 1-3 p.m., Mondays. Drop-in fees apply.

BINGO AT PLEASANTON SENIOR CENTER Join for Bingo at the Pleasanton Senior Center, 1-3 p.m., Wednesdays. Drop-in fees apply.

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

KNITTING & CROCHET Knitting & Crochet at the Pleasanton Senior Center. 9-11:30 a.m., Fridays. Drop-in fees apply.

FIBER FRIENDS Fiber Friends is geared towards adults for chatting with fellow crafters while working on craft projects, knitting, sewing, crochet, cross-stitch, etc. 7-9 p.m., Sept. 21. Livermore Civic Center Library.

Farmers Markets

PLEASANTON FARMERS MARKET The Pleasanton Farmers Market is year-round, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturdays. 46 W. Angela St.

LIVERMORE THURSDAY FARMERS MARKET Featuring over 50 vendors, join to explore, taste and shop fresh produce. 4-8 p.m., Thursdays. Carnegie Park.

LIVERMORE FARMERS MARKET The Livermore Farmers Market is

Sunday, year-round. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 206 South J St.

Talks

AUTHOR VISIT WITH AIDA SALAZAR Author Aida Salazar is visiting the Livermore Civic Center Library to celebrate Latine Heritage Month where she will share about her latest books and her writing journey. There will be an audience Q&A following her presentation. 2-3 p.m., Sept. 19.

SAN FRANCISCO DURING THE GILDED AGE Explore the fascinating history of San Francisco during the Gilded Age at this presentation by Valarie Huff, an historian and longtime docent, known for bringing the city's past to life through engaging storytelling and in-depth historical research. 2 p.m., Sept. 20. Livermore Civic Center Library.

LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE Learn about the 8 dimensions of wellness, nutrition and practical steps to achieve these goals, presented by City Serve of the Tri-Valley. 10:30-11:30 a.m., Sept. 22. Pleasanton Senior Center.

CHARLES HUFF FREE WALKING TOUR SERIES A Storied Past: Exploring the Buildings in

Downtown Pleasanton. 9 a.m., Sept. 26. Register at museumonmain.org.

Entertainment

SAN FRANCISCO COMEDY COMPETITION The legendary San Francisco Comedy Competition returns to The Bankhead as a semi-finals venue, bringing the best up-and-coming comedians to the stage. 8 p.m., Sept. 18. Tickets \$30-\$60. Visit livermorearts.org.

VALERIE: A TRIBUTE TO AMY WINEHOUSE Relive the passion, power, and timeless sound of an artist whose music continues to inspire audiences around the world, fronted by powerhouse vocalist Elsa Cedeno. 7:30 p.m., Sept. 18. Tickets \$38-\$48. Visit firehousearts.org.

FOREVER MOTOWN Celebrate the timeless classics of Berry Gordy, legendary hit factory in this electrifying show which promises a night of pure soul and unforgettable memories. 8 p.m., Sept. 19. Tickets \$55-\$85. Visit livermorearts.org.

PLEASANTON COMMUNITY BAND The Pleasanton Community Band

will be at the Pleasanton Farmers Market, 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Sept. 19.

PACIFIC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA Opening its 37th season with Songs of the Heart, a program exploring music that is personal, intimate and deeply human. 3 p.m., Sept. 20. Tickets \$25-\$85. Visit livermorearts.org.

MENOPAUSE THE MUSICAL This hilarious musical parody set to classic tunes from the 1960s, '70s and '80s will have you cheering and dancing in the aisles. 7:30 p.m., Sept. 23. Tickets \$60-\$90. Visit livermorearts.org.

AN AFTERNOON OR EVENING WITH AUDREY HEPBURN It's 1989 and Audrey Hepburn has just returned to her home in Switzerland for an interview about her work as a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF. Portrayed by Leslie Goddard, she shares stories of childhood and success in Hollywood. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., Oct. 1. Firehouse Arts Center. Visit museumonmain.org.

GARRATT WILKIN & THE PARROTHEADS Escape to a tropical paradise with Garratt Wilkin & The Parrotheads, the nation, premier celebration of the music of Jimmy Buffett. 7:30 p.m., Oct. 9. Tickets \$35-\$43. Visit firehousearts.org.



COMING SOON NEW MANUFACTURED HOME

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Jan Morrison

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