

AGING IN ATLANTA

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JOIN US AS WE EXPLORE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HAPPY AND HEALTHY BEYOND 55



Jeff Gray is the founder of Care Card and organizer of Age Tech Atlanta. COURTESY

BABY BOOM BUSINESSES

Innovation sparked memory loss product

Alzheimer's patients' caregivers use app to disseminate information.

By Elizabeth Crumbly
For The AJC

Communication is paramount in Jeff Gray's goal to help seniors have what they need to live fuller lives; that's an objective he's accomplishing in two ways.

Care Card

The Care Card is a free app that assists memory patient caregivers in communicating with other care team members.

"We're essentially serving the needs of family caregiving teams that have a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia," Gray said.

App users, he told the AJC recently, create profiles about loved ones that they can share with care teams. The experience, he said, should be as organic as opening a social media app.

"Think about things that are as easy to use as opening up Facebook or Instagram where you tap on the app and a caregiver that's maybe never met mom or dad can scroll through and see who they are, where they're from, what they like, what they don't like, what helps calm them down, what are their favorite foods," he said.

The app also supplies information about mobility issues and needs such as glasses and hearing aids, bringing users up to speed quickly and uniformly.

Gray continued on S2



Cypress trees tower above a kayaker on George L. Smith State Park's black water. The park offers beautiful scenery and an abundance of wildlife for campers to see.

TRAVEL

Get back to Georgia's great outdoors

Local sites offer ample camping chances for metro Atlanta seniors

By Severo Avila
For the AJC

If you need to find Laine Kirby Wood, don't even try her house. You'd have a better chance on a river somewhere or in the woods.

The 70-year-old Canton resident and Dunwoody native is more comfortable outdoors than anywhere else. She's the executive director of the Upper Etowah River Alliance, which means her passion and play are off the beaten path.

"When you start aging – I don't say maturing I say aging – you start realizing that you only get one turn," she said. "I'm making the most of my turn."

Five weeks ago she was paddling on the Satilla River with a couple of gal pals, one 65 and one 75.

"We paddled on the river and then set up camp where we felt like it," she said. "Screw the alligators. This is our river too."

Camping continued on S2



John Durden and his fiancée Amy Lynch recently camped at Lake Winfield Scott in Union County and said they enjoyed the tranquil setting and spectacular views.



Columbus is a river town with lots of history to unpack and modern adventures to discover. COURTESY OF VISIT COLUMBUS

TRAVEL

Columbus a wealth of entertainment – only 90 minutes down the road

Be active, relax, enjoy the arts – with or without grandkids.

By Karon Warren
For the AJC

Close to Atlanta, Columbus offers quite a mix to fill out any visitor's itinerary. This ranges from a wealth of history to an abundance of arts and culture to plenty of options for outdoor

recreation.

"Nowhere in Georgia can you raft the longest urban whitewater course in the world, zip line over the Chattahoochee River to Alabama and back, cycle on miles of bike trails, and when you're finished you're just steps away from your hotel," said Shelby Guest, executive vice president at Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Plus, Columbus is well-positioned for older adult travel-

ers with or without grandkids.

"Columbus is a great place for seniors traveling by themselves," Guest says. "Many Columbus attractions and events offer discounts, so the destination has positioned itself to make those experiences not just unique and authentic but also affordable. If traveling with grandkids, everyone can expect to have a great time."

Columbus continued on S2

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AGING IN ATLANTA

Camping

continued from S1

In June, she'll camp on the Savannah River with Georgia River Network. And she wants other metro Atlanta older adults to know that those trips are fantastic opportunities to get outdoors and camp with others.

These trips are supported by GRN. Meals are provided and participants can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors while reassured by the relative safety of the group.

The big adventures are called Paddle Georgia and the next one will allow participants to explore more than 70 miles on the Savannah River as well as shorter distances on Brier Creek in Screven County, Ebenezer Creek in Effingham County and Abercorn Creek. The trip will last seven days.

"We love doing these supported trips with Georgia River Network," Kirby Wood said. "Your meals are prepared so you don't have to cook. A shuttle takes you to and from the put-in where you've left your kayak, and you just set up your tent and have dinner with friends."

She said at her age and being five feet tall, there are some instances when in the outdoors that she needs a little help. And having the support of the GNR means there are always people around to help in a camping or paddling setting.

"These are amazing trips," she said. "You see raccoons, deer, wading birds, otters, and sometimes even bears."

Laine's picks

Here are a couple of camp-



Two senior campers enjoy roasted marshmallows at George L. Smith State Park in Twin City. The secluded park is known for lakeside camping and cozy cottages.

ing locations Laine suggests for other senior metro-Atlanta residents.

Along the Conasauga River in Northwest Georgia: "There are so many places to camp near the river which is so clear and beautiful in places," she said. "You can do a day trip or an overnight camp."

Len Foote Hike Inn, Dawsonville: An ecotourism facility near the peak of Frosty Mountain in the Chattahoochee National Forest in Dawson County. The lodge is open year-round and is only accessible via hiking trails.

"You have to have a reservation," she said. "You park at the top of Amicalola Falls, you leave your car, and hike to the lodge. It's a 5-mile hike carrying everything you need. It's a moderate hike. There are benches along the way and amazing

views. When you get to the inn they have snacks and muffins and tea and hot chocolate. That hike is one of the most beautiful walks in the woods. It's very doable for a moderately healthy senior."

John Durden's last camping trip was to Lake Winfield Scott, a mountain lake 10 miles south of Blairsville. He was there in the fall and the colors were spectacular. But he also enjoys camping at Indian Springs State Park south of Atlanta and anywhere in the Cohuttas.

"When I camp I like to take my road bike and ride the back roads around where I camp," he said. "But my absolute favorite thing to do when camping is cooking. Camping's just a great activity for the family. I try to take my daughters and their friends. The last camping trip was with my fiancé

and her daughter."

The 52-year-old said one of the best resources for metro-Atlanta residents to find out about camping locations is the georgiastateparks.org/camping, which details camping information at state parks all around Georgia and lists each park's fees and amenities.

John's picks

Dahlonega: "Atlanta folks who camp anywhere near Dahlonega will have a great time," he said. "You've got the mountains, waterfalls, the small mountain town atmosphere, and the Georgia gold rush history."

Unicoi State Park in Helen: "This place has some really great hikes and easy access to Helen if you'd like to do something in the town," Durden said. "The camping is wonderful, and in the sum-

mer you can also go tubing."

Fifty-six-year-old Kim Hatcher knows camping and great places to do it. She's the public affairs coordinator for Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites and has worked with the parks system for 30 years.

You could say she's somewhat of an expert.

Many of Georgia's state parks have amenities that suit campers of all ages and particularly older adults.

Fort Yargo State Park in Winder is a good choice, she said. It offers sites for tents as well as RVs and even yurts.

"So if someone doesn't have the gear to camp or maybe they're by themselves, yurts are a great option."

Don Carter State Park in Gainsville is on Lake Lanier and is a fairly new park, she said. It's on the northern end of the lake, so it's a little quieter and many older campers might enjoy that.

Another park she likes to recommend is Sweetwater Creek in Lithia Springs.

"This would be closer to metro Atlanta residents but there's no camper accessibility," she said. "It's tent camping only. They do have yurts too."

With any state park, she recommends making reservations in advance. Some of the more popular parks and campsites are booked out up to a year in advance. If folks can get away during the week they have a better chance of getting their favorite spot.

And for those who camp in an RV, Hatcher said they've upgraded many parks with full hookup including sewage and a higher amp. Those

are at locations such as Red Top Mountain State Park on Lake Allatoona, Vogel State Park in Blairsville, and Cloudland Canyon State Park in Rising Fawn.

"Senior adult campers may want to look for sites that are 'pull through' meaning you don't have to back up the camper," she said. "And we have camp hosts in all our campgrounds. Quite often those are senior adults who you can get advice from about that particular site."

One of the advantages of Georgia state park camping, she added, is that most parks have ADA-accessible facilities such as campsites, bathrooms, yurts, cabins, and even some trails.

When asked where she herself enjoys camping, she said she's drawn to sites in southern Georgia with its beautiful backwater lakes filled with towering cypress trees and easy kayaking as well as easy hiking trails.

Kim's picks

Stephen C. Foster State Park in South Georgia: The primary entrance to the Okefenokee Swamp. It's known for black swamp waters, trees dripping with Spanish moss, towering cypress trees, and an abundance of wildlife including turtles, alligators, black bears, raccoons and herons. It also has especially dark skies, which stargazers can appreciate.

George L. Smith State Park in Twin City: Cottages and lakeside camping are among the attractions here. The refurbished Parrish Mill and Pond, a gristmill, sawmill-covered bridge, and dam that was built in 1880, is what it's most known for.

Columbus

continued from S1

Revisiting history

Columbus features many museums that spotlight the area's history. One of the most popular is the National Infantry Museum, which documents the legacy of the U.S. Army Infantryman. Visitors start their journey through the "Last 100 Yards Ramp," which showcases their on-the-ground fight, and move into the main galleries, which are divided by time periods. Additional exhibits are found inside and outside the museum.

Another popular stop is the Columbus Collective Museums, which are actually several museums in one. These include The Lunchbox Museum (look for your favorite childhood metal lunchbox), The Royal Crown Cola Museum, The Chero-Cola Museum, The Nehi Drink Museum, The Tom Huston Peanut Museum, The Georgia Radio Museum, and The Car Museum. A stop here will have you reminiscing for days to come.

■ **National Infantry Museum.** 1775 Legacy Way, 706-685-5800, nationalinfantrymuseum.org

■ **Columbus Collective Museums.** 3218 Hamilton Rd., 706-332-6378 or 706-330-7806, columbuscollectivemuseums.com

Exploring arts and culture

Columbus also overflows with arts & culture, including The Springer Opera House, the state theater of Georgia. Now through May 2024, you can catch a Broadway musical such as "Cabaret," see a Disney

favorite like "The Little Mermaid," or share some childhood memories with your grandchildren with "The Itsy Bitsy Spider."

At The Bo Bartlett Center, peruse permanent and traveling exhibits that showcase artists ranging from local students at Columbus State University to international artists from around the globe.

Also, one of the largest art and history museums in the Southeast, The Columbus Museum spotlights American art and history through permanent and temporary exhibits.

■ **The Springer Opera House.** 103 10th St., 706-327-3688, springeropera-house.org

■ **The Bo Bartlett Center.** 921 Front Ave., 706-507-8432, bartlettcenter.columbusstate.edu

■ **The Columbus Museum.** 1327 Wynnton Rd., 706-748-2562, columbusmuseum.com

But wait! There's more!

There are tons of outdoor recreation opportunities, including the aforementioned urban whitewater rafting through downtown, biking, geocaching and more. And did we mention the food?

"Don't even get us started about the food," Guest says. "From classic Southern cooking to an epicurean experience at the area's only Four Diamond restaurant, Epic, there's something for everyone."

■ **Visit Columbus GA.** 118 W. 11th St., 800-999-1613, visitcolumbusga.com

■ **Epic Restaurant.** 1201 Front Ave., Suite E, 706-507-9909, epiccuisine.com

Gray

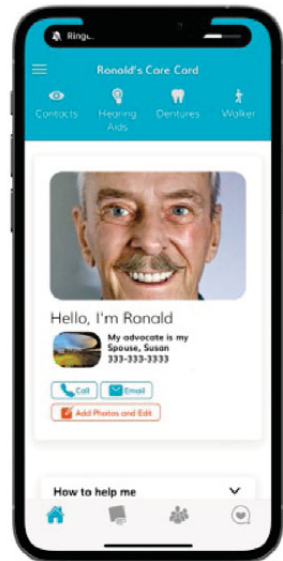
continued from S1

"All things that take, in other settings, a long time, you can essentially acclimate someone and educate them as to the need of your loved one," he said.

A shared timeline has a care notes feature, and those who pay a physical visit can post a photo there. Anything posted in the app, Gray said, goes out as an alert to a care circle, which could include children or other family members, along with third-party temporary caregivers like occupational or physical therapists. There's also a care chat for family only.

Families can add professional caregivers to the larger care circle and delete them later, he said.

"One of the things we built the product around was the idea that things regarding care ought not probably live inside of standard text," he said. "When (caregivers) leave, as the owner of the app, you just swipe them, literally, with a leftward swipe on their account, and they just disappear from the Care Card app. So, what that means is any communication that they were a party to is gone forever, and this is an important thing because so much caregiving communication today is residing on ... people's phones on a text screen that they



A screenshot is shown of the mobile Care Card app that allows caregivers of memory care patients to create profiles about loved ones that they can share with the care team. COURTESY

probably don't need to have or maybe shouldn't have because they're not a member of your family."

Memory Kit

Gray's time in the aging space has shown him there's still a need for tangible, written products. And so, later this year, he's overseeing the rerelease of the Memory Kit, a long-form, custom-made, hardbound book designed to hold a life biography.

The relaunching, he said,

is "by popular demand because it's asked by so many people if we can provide that product again, so we'll be offering that in the fall of this year."

Like its app counterpart, the Memory Kit lets care teams get to know people in memory care, and it also serves as a memento for family. Gray said he's excited about adding back the physical book.

"What we found is that's maybe more of a need than we realized at first," he said. "In a world that is increasingly digital, I think the tangible becomes more and more important. All these digital things are great, and they're wonderful. But you can't sit with them after your mom is gone and open them up and touch them."

Growth and challenges

One of the challenges Gray said he's faced in growing the Care Card user network has been distribution. The app is now available in a licensed model for organizations that want to use Care Card technology to customize the experience for their own users, but that effort, he said, had to wait while COVID-19 was at its height. The fact that the app was published just before the pandemic began meant a delayed ability to make business calls to senior living home operators, he said,

but the timing brought with it a silver lining: The team had extra space for testing and adjustments.

"It did give us the time to spend that time to enhance the app and make features better, test the feasibility and improve the product," he said.

'Ask yourself the hard questions'

As the organizer of Age Tech Atlanta, a community of entrepreneurs serving the aging space in innovative ways, Gray is in contact with numerous other entrepreneurs. He encourages contemporaries to examine the viability of business ideas from a usability standpoint.

"I often tell people ... 'Your story is not your business model,'" he said.

Often, he sees people beginning businesses to address problems they've experienced. Accolades from family, friends and investors can buoy an idea, he said, but he encourages entrepreneurs to delve beyond personal motivations.

"Don't forget to work on the business end and ask yourself the hard questions like, 'Can I get anyone to download my app? When they download it, are there features in there that solve a huge problem so they'll use it regularly?'" he said.

Care Card is available as a web app and for download from the Apple Store.

HEALTH

3 things you can do to improve knee pain

By Anagha Ramakrishnan
For the AJC

Knee pain does not have to be a part of aging. In fact, the more you pay attention to your knee health, the better it'll be in the long run.

Did you know that your knee absorbs shock that is 1.5 times your body weight with every step you take? According to WebMD, this constant shock to your knees can wear them down. Additionally, if you are prone to osteoarthritis, overweight, or have a previous history of knee injuries, this may exacerbate knee pain, according to Harvard Health.

This does not mean that wearing down your knee should be expected.

Here are some things you can do to prevent knee pain.



Exercising a knee that's injured or arthritic is better than staying sedentary, according to Healthline. FILE

Eat anti-inflammatory foods

According to Florida Pain Medicine, sugar, red meat, processed foods, alcohol, and saturated fats can cause inflammation in your joints and increase the pain you may feel in your joints. Healthline recommends these foods that

fight inflammation especially well: berries, fatty fish, broccoli, avocados, green tea, peppers, mushrooms, grapes, turmeric, dark chocolate, tomatoes and cherries.

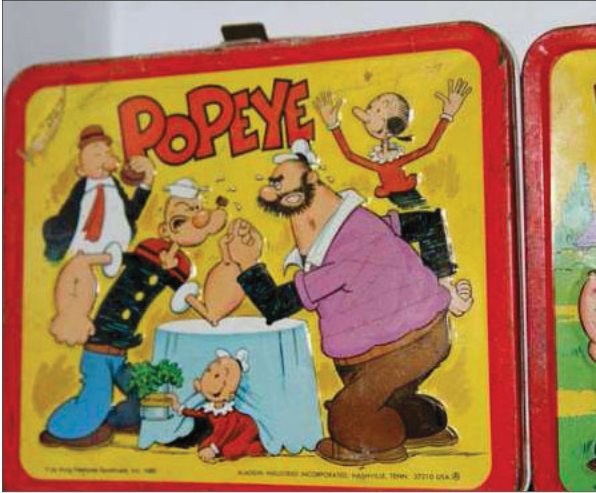
Exercise

Building and strengthening the muscles around the knee

can prevent knee pain and release pressure. In fact, exercising a knee that's injured or arthritic is better than staying sedentary, according to Healthline. Exercises such as leg raises, squats, planks, and leg curls can help strengthen the muscles around your knee, according to AARP.

Wear the right shoes

Maybe you have a balanced diet and exercise on a daily basis, but you still feel pain in your knees. Well, it may just be your shoes that are causing extra stress on your joints. When shoe shopping, WebMD recommends looking for the most comfortable shoes that are flexible with a thinner sole. And make sure to replace your walking shoes every nine months as a rule of thumb.



Look for your favorite childhood lunchbox at the Lunchbox Museum in Columbus. COURTESY

AGING IN ATLANTA



While studies with larger sample sizes are needed to further confirm these results, this study gets us one step closer to understanding longevity. ADOBE STOCK

CENTENARIANS

Strong immune cells may be key to living to 100, study finds

Centenarians had distinct cell composition.

By Anagha Ramakrishnan
For The AJC

A life goal for many is to live to 100. But is it possible? What makes such longevity possible? Researchers found one key element shared between centenarians. A study published in the journal eBioMedicine, Part of the LANCET Discovery Science, found that strong immune health played a huge role in fighting diseases and staying alive past 100. But these centenarians had more than just strong immunity, they had a distinct immune cell type composition that helped them reach exceptional longevity.

“The answer to what makes you live longer is a very complex one,” senior author Stefano Monti, associate professor of medicine, biostatistics, and bioinformatics at Boston University’s School of Medicine, told USA Today. “There’s multiple factors, there’s the genetics - what you inherit from a parent, there’s lifestyle, there’s luck.” The researchers studied analyzed single-cell profiles from seven centenarians who participated in the New England Centenarian Study, one of the largest studies of long-lived individuals in North America. Researchers compared their data with publicly available single-cell datasets from 52 other people between the ages of 20-89. Their study collected the largest single-cell dataset of centenar-

ians, according to a press release. The findings show that this unique immune cell composition in centenarians helped fight age-related diseases, have an increased ability to recover and fend off infections, and showed that they did not follow usual trends that are typically associated with aging. While studies with larger sample sizes are needed to further confirm these results, this study gets us one step closer to understanding longevity. “Centenarians, and their exceptional longevity, provide a ‘blueprint’ for how we might live more productive, healthful lives,” said senior author George J. Murphy, associate professor of medicine at Boston University’s School of Medicine.

RETIREMENT

What age can you realistically retire in Georgia this year?

Age 56. Peach State No. 7 most affordable state to retire in.

By Anagha Ramakrishnan
For The AJC

For Georgians, retiring early may be a realistic goal. According to GoBankingRates, Peach State residents can retire by the age of 56 with at least \$827,246 in their savings. This comes after WalletHub named Georgia the No. 7 most affordable state to retire in. This means, that you can retire at least five years earlier than the average American – according to a 2022 Gallup poll – just by living in Georgia. But what makes Georgia the best place to

enjoy the most out of your retirement? The cost of living and low taxes contribute to what makes Georgia an attractive and affordable place to retire. Across the country, the average price of a house as of the first quarter of 2022 was \$428,700, according to personal finance product review website The Ascent. But in Georgia, that number dropped to \$318,273. Making Georgia just over 25% cheaper than the rest of the country. If you want to look for the most affordable city in Georgia to move to, you have a few options to choose from. According to Livability, the most affordable cities in Georgia are Warner Robins, Duluth, Gainesville, Smyrna,

Marietta and Newnan. In 2022, Bankrate named Georgia as the second-best state to retire in. Comparing categories of affordability, wellness, culture, weather, and crime, Georgia came out on top. Georgia performed strongly in weather and affordability. Yet Georgia ranked lower in categories such as culture and diversity due to the lower percentage of residents over 65 in the state. Last year, WalletHub also ranked Atlanta No.13 best city to retire out of 182 cities. Atlanta performed better than average because of the number of things to do and how affordable it was compared to other cities across the country.

ASK THE EXPERT DEBRA TYLER HORTON

Inclusive aging in the LGBTQ community

According to AARP research, 82% of older adults in the LGBTQ community are concerned about having adequate family and/or social support to rely on as they age. Additionally, 52% feel left out, feel they lack companionship, and feel isolated as caregivers. More than one-half of the LGBTQ participants in a 2022 AARP study, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, said they are socially isolated. The feelings of loneliness and isolation increased over the past three years during the pandemic and contributed to the overall experience of aging. LGBTQ adults who are African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, transgender and nonbinary, and those who are single are less likely to be homeowners, according to the AARP study. AARP research found that gay men and transgender or nonbinary adults are also least likely to report they will need care in the future. Therefore, having a support system is important. What is it like aging as a part of the LGBTQ community? We asked several people in Atlanta to give you some perspective. We wanted to hear from people in Georgia about their personal experiences in the LGBTQ community.



ABOUT THE EXPERT
Debra Tyler Horton brings a wealth of experience to her role as State Director for AARP Georgia. She leads the AARP Georgia staff, hundreds of volunteers from throughout the state and more than one million members. Tyler Horton works to strengthen AARP’s presence in Georgia communities through strategic advocacy efforts, education opportunities and other innovative offerings to enhance the quality of life for Georgians.

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that empowers people to choose how they live as they age.

alignment? Will my care be deprioritized for some cis-het individual’s benefit? The bottom line is, when it’s my time to go, will I have the chance to transition from this earthly life with dignity and honor?” Gabrielle C., 62, said.

Q: How does aging as a Black member of the LGBTQ community impact you?
A: “Aging as a Black lesbian often involves resil-

ience and resourcefulness. Many older LGBTQ adults have spent their lives advocating for acceptance and equality, and they bring that strength and courage with them into older age,” Mary Anne Adams, 68, of East Point said.

Q: What other challenges do you want to see addressed?
A: “Despite our unique challenges, we find great joy and community in our identities. However, there’s still much work to be done, particularly in addressing the unique issues that come with aging. My hope is that by sharing my experiences and concerns, I can contribute to the ongoing dialogue and action to improve the lives of LGBTQ elders,” Adams said.

Q: What would you say to other people in the LGBTQ community about navigating aging?
A: Kipper Jones, 61, of Atlanta highly suggests having an advocate to help navigate organizations and processes that can be sources of support for aging adults in the LGBTQ community. Jones cited some areas of support as AID Atlanta and Positive Impact that focus on mental health resources. “I was assigned a counselor who greatly helped improve my outlook and helped me cope with relocating and introducing myself to a brand-new professional environment,” Jones said.

Q: Where can people go if they need more information about resources?
A: For resources and articles about the LGBTQ community, visit. www.aarp.org/home-family/voices/lgbtq.

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AGING IN ATLANTA

THE DATING GAME

Build a cozy bonfire for a special date

‘A fire is like a beautiful sunset, it changes the mood.’

By **Rose Kennedy**
For The AJC

We call our crushes “flames” and talk about “lighting someone’s fire” all the time, and it’s no wonder so much fiery language is included in our romantic lives.

Fires are ever-so-alluring for date night, whether you’re snuggling on a beach or staring into the leaping flames in your own backyard.

In Georgia, personal open fires are legal, even during Summer Burn Ban, which runs from May 1 to Sept. 30, provided you’re not burning debris cleared from your garden or land. And at no time is it like tires or garbage or household waste.

Recreational fires for mature people attracted to one another are an entirely different prospect than those smoky, smelly, smoldering heaps-or from the frenzy of bonfires omnipresent in ‘60s flicks like *Annette Funicello’s* “Beach Blanket Bingo.”

“A fire is like a beautiful sunset, it changes the mood,” Leroy Hite, founder and CEO of Cutting Edge Firewood, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. “It’s universal, primal, unifying.”

Hite’s company is based in Peachtree Corners and sells kiln-dried firewood via a storefront. It offers same-day local delivery, and mail orders to 48 states.

He said that some adults who think they don’t like hanging out around a fire have probably only experienced a poorly planned bonfire consisting of green or seasoned wood, either of which can smoke you out or never properly catch fire.

Are you interested in the type of bonfire or campfire that will mesmerize and impress your date – whether that’s a lifelong companion or a certain someone you’re hoping to get to know better?

Hite had these tips:

Light your fire in a safe place

“You could use a space on the ground cleared of combustibles and with stones



Try a campfire as a romantic gesture as part of an overnight stay. ADOBE STOCK

placed around it,” Hite said. “But for the first time you try this, it’s easier to opt for a fireplace or a fire pit – you can spend \$100-\$200 non a nice one that will last you for years.”

It’s also a good idea to have a fire extinguisher nearby, according to Hite.

Choose the right wood

Opt for dry oak, cherry, or hickory over green or sea-

soned wood, so you “don’t spend the whole time messing with the fire instead of interacting with each other,” Hite said.

Your date will probably prefer cherry.

“It has a subtle sweet aroma, and if you have a fire during spring or summer it’s not quite as hot,” Hite said. “The advantage of hickory is that it burns hotter. If it’s chilly out or cold and you want to snuggle,

hickory will win the day.”

Allocate a box of firewood

A box will burn for about four hours, giving you plenty of time to sit and talk and sip wine or whiskey or your favorite beverages, Hite said.

Go on, make the s’mores

“Many times, adults on a date avoid s’mores, thinking they’re too childish. Ironi-

cally, that’s what adults like. S’mores make a date playful, and being playful on a date is a good thing.”

When your date is agreeable to camping out for a day or two, you might also want to try this romantic gesture as part of an overnight stay.

It is also permissible to light fires at Georgia State Parks, as long as you follow guidelines prohibiting gathering firewood, and you use only park-provided fire rings to protect the campsite surface from flames.

The park service also requires campers to burn the wood until it becomes ash and ensure it’s cold before departing.

One campfire date setting is Acworth’s Red Top Mountain State Park on 12,000-acre Lake Allatoona. It offers 20 cottages, six yurts, and 93 tents, trailers, and RV campsites to reserve, and also features a sand beach.

Who knows, if this romantic date leads to an engagement or the suggestion to renew your vows, you may want to hold the event at the park with a bonfire for all who attend to enjoy.

REDECORATING

Bedroom upgrades should showcase personal style

Make sure changes will be safe for those living there.

By **Elizabeth Crumbly**
For The AJC

From beds to floor coverings, planning can make all the difference in redecorating a bedroom with a senior occupant in mind. And there’s something to be said for the inclusion of items from different eras of life.

It’s these nods to ease, comfort and aesthetics that make a bedroom a safe haven, and Nicole Flint, owner of Canton-based Nicole Flint Interiors, has some suggestions on getting there.

Thoughtful upgrades

It’s important, she asserted, to go low when making sure a room is going to be safe for occupants with differing levels of movement ability.

“Now, the big thing is LVP (luxury vinyl plank) because you can run that in all wet spaces and bedrooms and kitchen and laundry so that you really aren’t having a transition strip from one type of flooring to the next to help with trip hazards and things like that,” she said.

Smaller details, such as replacing knobs with lever-style door handles, make a difference, too, according to Flint, who does a lot of design work for the Lake Arrowhead community. It’s an area near Waleska she said has a high percentage



Ease, comfort and aesthetics make a bedroom a safe haven, says designer Nicole Flint. COURTESY OF NICOLE FLINT

of senior residents.

“When you have arthritis and things like that, that lever-style door handle is amazing when you’re thinking about switching out hardware,” she said. “Being able to turn that doorknob can be a challenge.”

Window shades users can pull from the bottom are also becoming popular as they allow people to avoid manipulating a chain or twisting mechanism, she said.

“I feel like people are really thinking forward with that kind of stuff,” Flint said.

Jan Britt, owner of Jan Britt Interiors in Marietta, encourages older adults to take a closer look at mattresses when they’re rede-

corating. There are two sizes of box springs, she said, and purchases should factor in a person’s height.

“You have to tell them in advance that you want to have the shorter one,” Britt said. “Also, if you are not going to be able to flip your mattress, then buy the one-sided mattress that you don’t have to flip anyway, and that makes your bed shorter, too, and it helps you to get into it without the stepstool.”

Flippable mattress with a pillow top on both sides can work well for taller people, she said.

“Even if you never flip it, at least it’s a taller section,” Britt said.

Lighting considerations



A Jan Britt bedroom includes an accent wall that adds texture. COURTESY OF JAN BRITT

are also important, both for safety and practicality. Britt encouraged older adults to install LED lighting for brightness with a dimmer switch for a break from full-on illumination.

“You want to be able to have a little bit of extra light when you start to get older,” she said. “They’ll help a lot for vision.”

Plugins, she pointed out, are usually 12 inches from the floor, but they can be installed significantly higher, and placement matters.

“If you’re planning your home, make sure the plugs to the lamps are easy to get to and not behind the bed,” Britt said.

For a sitting area, working with a decorator on chairs and couch dimensions is ideal, she said. Shorter people should be sure they can sit and not fall back.

“You want to sit and relax in your bedroom,” she said. “If you have to put a pillow behind you, your couch, your chair is too big for you. It’s going to hurt your back over time.”

And while you’re at it, leave skirts off couches and chairs when redecorating.

“It’s a fantastic way to trip,” Britt said.

And for those going the demolition route, both Britt and Flint recommend wider doorways to accommodate wheelchairs or walkers – if not for now,



A Jan Britt bedroom design, which features a bench at the end of the bed. COURTESY OF JAN BRITT

then in the future.

Customizing the aesthetic

When you’re just looking to change your aesthetic, consider customizing your walls for an inexpensive but impactful upgrade, Flint said.

“A wall treatment is such a great use of money to give you a big ‘Wow’ factor, whether it’s wallpaper or shiplap or batten on the wall – something that’s artistic, it’s visually pleasing,” she said.

Rugs and bedding layers, too, add to visual impact by bringing out colors and adding texture. And when it comes to layering for the overall room, Flint, recommended using those treasured heirlooms and pieces

curated over a lifetime.

“You want to tell a story. You don’t want it to feel cold. You want to showcase a life – pieces from travel – being able to really layer the textures,” she said. “(It’s) making your room feel like it’s evolved with (you) – not like a box store package but different materials and finishes to make it feel warm and cozy.”

It’s knowledge about the little things that go a long way, both professionals agreed. And education is on Britt’s mind when she interacts with the public.

“This is the most wonderful thing – to make people feel comfortable,” she said. “When they have information, it makes them feel more secure – I’ve learned that.”



A Nicole Flint bedroom design, which includes a footboard. COURTESY OF NICOLE FLINT

AGING IN ATLANTA

ACTIVE AGING

Boxing provides a full body workout and a memory boost

By Elizabeth Crumbly
For the AJC

Boxing workouts amount to so much more than just hitting a bag. They’re good for the core, and the punching sequences require mental engagement that sticks with participants long after class is over.

“To me, the boxing combinations – that’s what makes the class unique – in a way, it’s kind of like a game because as you get better, you get faster and start landing all your shots,” boxing fitness participant Lainie Dahlberg told the AJC recently. “It’s a brain workout, to me, where other things don’t have that ... They’re like small victories when you land them all and get faster ... I do feel like, sometimes, when I come out of that class, ‘OK, now I can go do my banking make my phone calls, do what I need to do, and then, obviously, hitting a punching bag is always a good destresser.”

David Mahaffey, fitness manager at Buckhead retirement community Peachtree Hills Place, supported that feeling.

“It helps you continue to stay focused,” he said of the head-and body-shot sequences.

Mahaffey oversees boxing classes two days a week for PHP residents in conjunction with The Center For Movement Challenges, a nonprofit. The program includes an iteration for those with Parkinson’s disease.

A full-body workout

Boxing, Mahaffey said, provides the full-body experience some other forms of fitness can’t, and it’s also good for people who can’t participate in some other activities.

“Because of the moments, you’re going to work from your core from your back to your stomach and also just for cardiovascular reasons,” he said. “Maybe they might not be able to get on the treadmill or bike, but doing the boxing is just very great cardio intake as well.”

Workouts for PHP participants typically include work with one of eight bags, Mahaffey said, and they sometimes practice punching sequences with instructors wearing pads.

Dahlberg, 57, said she finds boxing fitness classes, which often include specific cardio components and strength training alongside the boxing combinations, more engaging and fun than other forms of exercise.

“Especially, for aging, it’s such a core workout,” she said. “And that’s really the most important thing as we



Peachtree Hills Place in Atlanta offers a boxing-based fitness program for their members in partnership with The Center For Movement Challenges, a nonprofit organization focused on helping those affected by movement challenges.



Corinna Wilson, a Peachtree Hills Place resident who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease about eight years ago, began boxing almost immediately after researching the benefits of the activities for those with Parkinson’s.

COURTESY PHOTOS

age because it affects our balance and everything. It’s a lot more fun to hit a punching bag to work your core.”

She stopped working out during COVID-19 but returned to boxing recently and found it was still a fit.

“I went from working out six days a week to zero days a week for three years, so I knew I had to start slowly, and it had to be something fun,” she said.

Her journey began several years ago in an advanced class.

“Everyone was really nice because I was just, like, a fish out of water,” she said. “I didn’t know what I was doing.”

She participated for six months, and then, someone mentioned an all-women’s class, which she joined. She met instructor Maria Meritt there and followed her eventually to the senior

boxing class at AFighter4Life boxing gym in southeast Atlanta. Joining that age demographic for workouts, Dahlberg said, was an adjustment initially, but it turned out to be the right decision.

“It was a bitter pill when I was like, ‘Oh, senior boxing. Well, I’m over 55. I qualify.’ But it was really where I needed to be,” she said.

Marked improvements

The PHP boxing program, which has been in place since December of last year, also includes a walking warmup – a couple of laps around the facility’s croquet lawn – along with squats and handbag work. Mahaffey is seeing the long-term benefits for participants who range in age from 60 to 75.

“I have one member –

TRY BOXING

What: Punching Parkinson’s with Peachtree Hills Place and the American Parkinson Disease Association — a free boxing class, smoothie bar, and information session for those who have Parkinson’s Disease or other movement challenges
When: June 20 at 1:30 p.m.
Where: The Terraces at Peachtree Hills Place, 229 Peachtree Hills Ave. NE, Atlanta.
How: Register by emailing theterraces@peachtreehillspc.com or calling (678) 619-5600.

What: AFighter4Life senior boxing class
More info: afighter4life.com

before he actually started the boxing – his cognitive issues where he wouldn’t have talked at all, but now, since he’s participating in the boxing for Parkinson’s since December, he now talks,” Mahaffey said. “He actually puts words with sentences ... Before he started, he couldn’t really say my name. Since he’s been in this program, he’s like, ‘Hey, David. How are you doing? It’s great to see you.’”

Another member’s reflexes and movement have improved so much that they’re able to attend other classes.

“They’re able to move around, play croquet, yoga now, strength and balance class – it’s been wonderful,” Mahaffey said.

HEALTH

How a lack of grip strength can impact you

Forearms, hands an indicator of overall muscle power.

By Anagha Ramakrishnan
For the AJC

Did you know there’s an association between your grip strength and aging?

While two people may be the same age, their biological ages may differ. A study conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan found that biological age can be determined through muscle strength. The study of 1,275 participants in the longitudinal Health and Retirement Study found that those with weaker muscle strength had a higher biological age – meaning they aged faster.

“Our findings provide some initial evidence of age acceleration among men and women with lower (normalized grip strength) and loss of strength over time,” researchers concluded. “Future research is needed

to understand the extent to which (DNA methylation) age mediates the association between grip strength and chronic disease, disability and mortality.”

But what does grip strength mean? It’s not just about whether you can open bottles or jars easily. Rather, it’s about how strong the muscles in your hands and forearms are. It’s an indicator of overall muscle strength, according to Very Well Health.

“People with better grip strength age more slowly. Having a good grip strength can slow the process of immunosenescence, or the decline in your immune defense associated with aging,” said Dr. Ardeshtir Hashmi, a geriatric medicine specialist said in an article by Cleveland Clinic. “It can also improve your ability to bounce back from diseases, or homeostasis. Finally, it can prevent frailty.”

So, what can you do to improve your grip strength?

If you started today, would you slow down aging? Well, researchers conclude that it’s not exactly that easy.

“Grip strength is a proxy indicator of overall muscle strength, meaning that it is highly correlated to other measures of strength. Thus, simply increasing grip strength would not render any changes to health or longevity,” lead author of the research Mark D. Peterson, told Medical News Today.

Nevertheless, exercises that improve your grip and overall muscle strength should be added to your daily routine. They can help you move through your daily life with ease whether it helps with carrying the groceries inside or pulling yourself up from the tub easier.

These three exercises recommended by Healthline can help.

Towel wringing

For this exercise, grab a towel near you and drench it in water. Grab the two ends

of the towel with each hand and hold it out in front of you. Twist both ends in opposite directions and repeat until the towel is wrung out. Wet your towel again and repeat the full process at least three times.

Hand clench

You need a tennis ball or stress ball. Place the ball at the center of your palm and squeeze the ball as tight as you can using your fingers and not your thumb. Repeat 50-100 times a day.

Pinch grip transfer

For this exercise, you’ll need weight plates. While standing up straight, grab the edge of the plate using only your index finger and thumb. Then, while continuing to pinch the plate, bring it up to your chest. Take your other hand and pinch the other end of the plate, and let go of your first hand. Bring the plate down to your side. Repeat this transfer 10 times three times a day.

FUN AT 55 KEEPING BUSY IN JUNE

6 activities to kick off summer

By Lesly Gregory
For The AJC

This month is the perfect time to start scheduling some fun. Whether heading out with friends or entertaining the whole family, stay active throughout Atlanta this June. Keep those bellies fed and take in some local culture – you can easily fill up your calendar with these diverse activities.



This year’s Juneteenth Atlanta Black History Parade is June 17. HYOSUB SHIN/AJC 2022

CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth Atlanta Parade & Music Festival

Festivities continue all weekend long in Centennial Olympic Park for Juneteenth. The 11th annual celebration includes a parade, live music and other performances, speakers, food trucks, and an art market. There are competitions to watch and panel discussions to participate in as well. The big event, the parade, begins at noon Saturday, starting in Liberty Plaza, across from the Capitol, and concluding in the park. For a complete schedule of events, you can download the Juneteenth Atlanta App, which will be available on juneteenthatl.com.

Friday-June 18. Free admission. Centennial Olympic Park, 265 Park Avenue W NW, Atlanta. juneteenthatl.com.

Juneteenth at Atlanta History Center

At this event, you’ll find live music, interactive crafts, and tasty food. Powerful storytelling through workshops and talks will educate and provide insights into the history of this important, historical day. Take a bird walk and tour the gardens, walk through exhibits, and even play lawn games before stopping off at the food trucks for a bite.

10 a.m.-4 p.m. June 18. Admission is free. Atlanta History Center, 130 West Paces Ferry Rd. NW, Atlanta. 404-814-4000. atlantahistorycenter.com/event/juneteenth-2023
Bring the whole family together to celebrate Juneteenth

TAKE IN SOME CULTURE

96-hour Opera Project Performances

Experience something completely different in Atlanta with the 96-Hour Opera Project. This composition competition and showcase pairs composers and librettists who spend four days writing 10-minute operas. Participants come from historically underrepresented communities, and the winning opera team not only receives a cash prize but also a commission for a new work to be performed in the upcoming season. See creatives at work in this original experience.

7 p.m. Monday. \$20 for standard tickets, \$10 rate for students. Ray Charles Performing Arts Center at Morehouse College, 900 West End Ave. SW, Atlanta. 404-881-8885. atlantaopera.org/competition

Alpharetta Art in the Park

This monthly artists’ market runs through September, with local artists putting their handcrafted work on display. Check out custom pottery, woodwork, jewelry, metalwork, paintings, photographs, and handmade clothing. Live demonstrations also occur. All booths are set up near the city center, so it’s easy to make a day out of your trip to the park.

9 a.m.-4 p.m. June 24, and noon-4 p.m. June 25. Free admission. Brooke Street Park, 2 Park Plaza, Alpharetta. 678-297-6000. awesomealpharetta.com/alpharetta-art-park

HAVE A COLD ONE

Atlanta Summer Beer Fest

Sample over 150 beers, including offerings from local Atlanta breweries, at Atlanta Summer Beer Fest. This 21+ event also includes live music and a souvenir cup. All your alcohol samples come with the ticket price, along with free bottled water. Any food from the variety of local vendors will cost extra. For those who prefer wine, hard seltzer, or cider, over 25 different options will also be available.

4 p.m.-8 p.m. Saturday. Admission is \$50; \$60 the day of the event. Historic 4th Ward Park, 665 North Ave. NE, Atlanta. atlantasummerbeerfestival.com

20,000 Beers Under the Sea

Spend an evening at the Georgia Aquarium sampling a huge variety of local and national beers, ciders, and hard seltzers. This fundraising event supports education programs at the Aquarium. Tickets include access to all the exhibits, a souvenir tasting glass, and a buffet dinner. Two live DJs infuse the evening with music. This is a 21+ event with unlimited tastings while supplies last. IDs are required at the door.

7 p.m.-10 p.m. June 30. Tickets are \$75 for aquarium members and \$85 for nonmembers. Georgia Aquarium, 225 Baker St. NW, Atlanta. 404-581-4000. georgiaaquarium.org/events/event/20000-beers-under-the-sea-2



Georgia Aquarium visitors in the acrylic tunnel in the Ocean Voyager exhibit watch a hammerhead shark swim by. The tunnel leads to the gigantic viewing window.



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

AGING IN ATLANTA



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution is committed to facilitating conversations on the topics important to aging well in Atlanta and providing you resources to live your best life!

Our events feature local experts speaking on topics that matter most to you:

- ✓ Fun events and attractions around town
- ✓ Protecting your assets and estate planning
- ✓ Aging well in place
- ✓ Managing prescriptions
- ✓ Immunizations

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