

Stronger in the second half of life

regeneration

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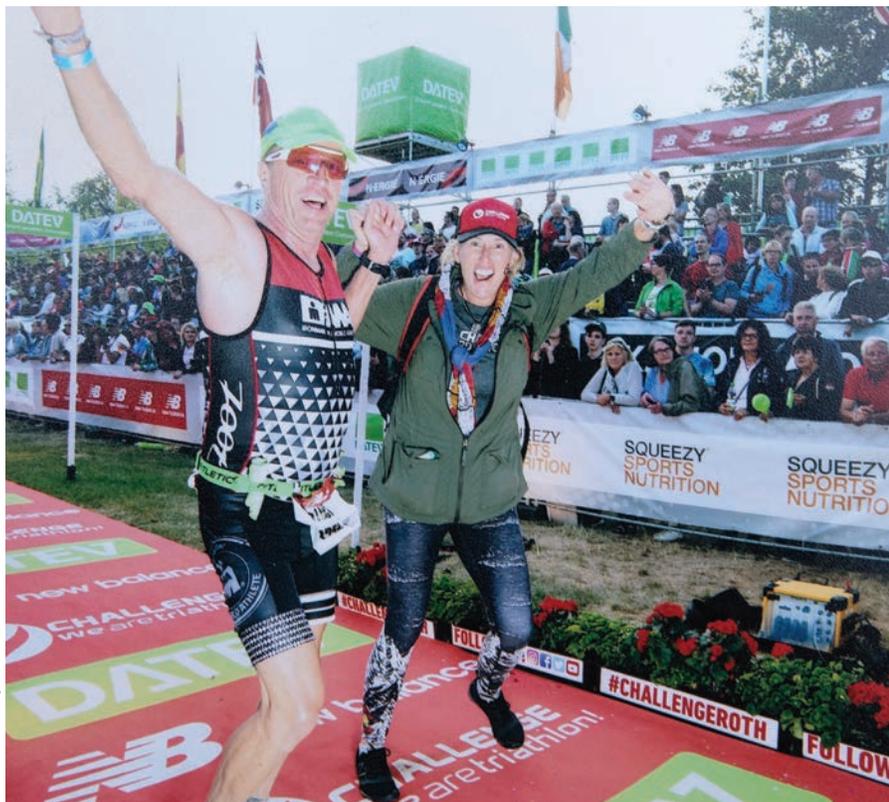
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Photos courtesy Steve O'Connor

Steve O'Connor p. 8

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regeneration

Winter 2020

regeneration is the magazine for active and energetic grownups, looking for a strong second half. We reject the notion that older is weaker or about finished. This is the re-generation. Resilient. Rehabilitated. Remarkable.

Editor and CEO
Fletcher Farrar
ffarrar@illinoistimes.com

Publisher
Michelle Ownbey
mownbey@illinoistimes.com

Associate publisher
James Bengfort
jbengfort@illinoistimes.com

Calendar editor
Stacie Lewis
calendar@illinoistimes.com

Editorial/advertising design
Joe Copley
jcopley@illinoistimes.com

Brandon Turley
bturley@illinoistimes.com

Advertising sales
Beth Parkes-Irwin
birwin@illinoistimes.com

Ron Young
ryoung@illinoistimes.com

Yolanda Bell
ybell@illinoistimes.com

Business/Circulation
Brenda Matheis
bmatheis@illinoistimes.com

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WHAT'S OLD IS New AGAIN

The hat makes the outfit



There are many great women's and men's vintage hat styles for winter. Felt fedoras, cloche, pillbox, turban and berets are all standout choices for this year.

Warm and elegant

This look never goes out of style

Shopping vintage is becoming more popular every year, and it's easy to see why. Not only is it good for the environment, but it's good for your bank account as well. Vintage shops are also great for when you're looking for stylish outerwear or a one-of-a-kind gift for the holidays. "In a coat you just need something to keep you warm," says Linda Renehan of Springfield Vintage in downtown Springfield, "and each decade has its own little preference." From long wool coats to 50s swing coats, vintage styles will keep you warm and make you stand out.

CPO jackets – originally issued to U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officers – have always been a popular choice. This is a timeless rugged jacket that is easy to find in your favorite vintage shop. It's a winter classic made from thick wool, designed for officers on cold-weather work duty in the 1930s. "Just a nice warm 'cover-your-butt' coat. Something that's been in every generation," says Renehan. "A lot of the vintage coats are going to be wool. They were more functional than fashionable."

The 80s puffy down vest has seen a big resurgence in popularity over the last decade. The solid-hued down vest is perfect for the cold winter months. "Everything always comes back. Vests were gone, then puffer vests came back, says Renehan. "You couldn't get rid of them 10 years ago and now you can sell them all year long." Complete the look with the perfect oversized ski sunglasses and you're ready for the winter. –Joseph Copley



Cass Crawford and Vertrell Yates showing off some vintage winter wear at Springfield Vintage.

Photo by Joseph Copley. Clothing and style by Linda Renehan.

GET THE LOOK

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Experts in our community

What they know that you should

Professional Santa

Santa Ray, from Springfield, has been seeing kids of all ages for 15 years and is a real-beard and real-belly Santa. He also has a Mrs. Claus who comes with him on visits.

Never promise a specific gift.

One of the worst things a Santa can do is promise children they'll get what they want for Christmas. "A good Santa never promises a child a specific gift," says Santa Ray. "Sometimes you just don't know their situation or if the gift is going to appear. We always ask what they want but never promise." As a rule Santas usually don't promise pets either. "Personally I tell them I can't deliver pets on the sleigh," said Santa Ray. "I make such high-speed turns the animals might get hurt."

It's a very physical job. In a typical year Santa Ray will do dozens of home visits delivering presents to full households. "Sometimes we pick up packages and go up to the door with a big 'Ho Ho Ho' and jingling sleigh bells," said Santa Ray. "It can be tiring. It's a very physical job. Some families may have 20 to 30 people with gifts for everyone." Santa Ray says the parents get just as excited about the visit as the kids. "They will often let the kids open the door to greet us," said Santa Ray. "Sometimes the children get so excited they forget to open the door."

It's all about being a good listener.

The most important part of a Santa's job, according to Santa Ray, is to lend a kind ear to kids who might be feeling lost. Some kids might ask for the return of a deceased family member or for their divorced parents to reconcile. "I've had



Santa Ray with Mrs. Claus.

children ask for their daddy back. They were killed in Afghanistan or some other part of the world where they were serving," said Santa Ray. "I can't bring Daddy back, but I can hug you and pray for you. Sometimes that helps."

Santa makes virtual visits too.

This will be Santa Ray's first year doing virtual visits. "Due to COVID and social distancing, we've had to adapt," said Santa Ray. "We use various platforms like Zoom, Facetime and Facebook rooms." With virtual visits Santa can connect with kids anywhere with the click of a mouse. This year Santa Ray has virtual visits planned as close as Chatham and as far away as Arizona.

Snooky the clown

Over 20 years with the Springfield Ansar Shriners

Being a clown is not a job. It's love.

The Shriner clowns are committed to community service and bringing joy to people's lives. "It's not a job. We make no money. It's all volunteer," says Snooky. "It's love. We love people and we love everything about being a clown." Being a clown is more than squirting flowers and big shoes. There are a lot of responsibilities to the title. "You're being a clown for all of the other clowns out in the world," says Snooky. "You're trying to set an example. You don't want kids going back home and having a terrible experience."

Things can get very emotional.

Clowns feel and express powerful and intense emotions. Snooky has been volunteering since 1999 and recounts many standout moments as a clown. "I did a funeral once when one of our clowns passed away," said Snooky. "I walked up to pay my respects holding a heart. I looked up at the ceiling and I waved goodbye to Harold. Then I turned to the widow and gave her the heart. That was one of the most emotional moments."

Clowns want to help. "As Shriner clowns, we have a purpose. To take care of our kids," said Snooky. "I love doing what I'm doing but at the same time we're out there promoting our hospitals." This year has taken a toll on clowndom, but the Shriner clowns are doing what they can to raise spirits. "The last eight months have been very low," said Snooky. "We have gone to nursing homes, outside of course. Waving through the windows."—Joseph Copley



Photo by Rich Saat



Relentless forward motion

Triathlete Steve O'Connor

by Karen Ackerman Witter

Getting older, getting better. That is how Steve O'Connor, 57, of Petersburg approaches life and his passion for triathlon competitions. Triathlons vary in length, but all include swimming, biking and running, in that order. The Ironman is a grueling 2.4-mile swim followed by biking 112 miles and then running a marathon (26.2 miles). O'Connor has entered 11 Ironman events, completing 10 2/3, setting personal records in his last two.

“I have finishing times that prove to me that a middle-aged, middle-of-the-pack triathlete can get faster with age by continuing to learn, train, ask questions and try harder and smarter.”

At the July 2018 European Championship in Frankfurt, Germany, O'Connor knocked an astonishing 1½ hours off his previous best time, finishing in 12 hours, 34 minutes. This was five months after breaking his leg in an accident unrelated to his sport. One year later he shaved more minutes off his time at the Challenge Roth Ironman in Germany. There “you get to race with over 4,000 of your closest friends, all trying to get to the same place fast...while 250,000 line the streets cheering you on,” says O'Connor.

His non-triathlete friends think he is crazy. His triathlete friends love that he keeps competing and hosting local races. He describes his passion as a socially acceptable addiction.

Growing up, O'Connor played a variety of traditional youth sports and



Photo by Ritch Saal

Above:
Steve O'Connor,
TriHarder Productions

raced bicycle motocross and motorcycle motocross. He competed all over the U.S., claiming the title of first president of the Springfield BMX club at the ripe old age of 13.

At the age of 40, O'Connor began long-distance competitions, running several marathons in 2003. His first foray into triathlons was the "Try the Tri" in 2004. He swam a hundred yards in a pool, biked five miles and ran 3.1 miles. He was totally spent – but hooked. In 2006 he pursued longer and longer distances, competing in Sprint, Olympic and half-Ironman triathlons – all in one summer.

At his first half-Ironman, he won an entry to the sold-out Florida Ironman taking place a few months later by raising his hand first when an announcer asked who breathes on

the left side while swimming. He self-trained, and at the age of 43 barely finished in the cutoff time of 17 hours. Then, he was one of only 20,000 to finish a triathlon. Thirteen years later, he is about 4½ hours faster, and approximately 500,000 men and women finish an Ironman annually. The growth in the sport propelled his desire to continue competing and to grow Springfield's triathlon scene.

His second Ironman at Lake Placid, New York, "didn't go well." That's an understatement. He had a mechanical problem with his bike, no experience biking in mountains and his body was under distress. While transitioning to the run, the medical director intervened and sent him to the medical tent. O'Connor required multiple IVs. After recovering, he learned he was one of 12

GUIDE TO TRIATHLON DISTANCES

Sprint: 300-yard swim, 12-mile bike, 3.1-mile run

Olympic Distance: .9-mile swim, 24.8-mile bike, 6.2-mile run

Half Ironman (70.3): 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run

Ironman (140.6): 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, 26.2-mile run

who didn't finish. He vowed that would never happen again. It hasn't.

He returned to Lake Placid the following year to finish what he had started. He completed an Ironman every year from 2006-2016 and competed in the World Half Distance Triathlon in Austria in 2017.

O'Connor wanted to improve and needed a coach. He tried unsuccessfully to recruit Mark Allen, the most decorated Ironman World Champion. Ironically, his determination to compete in Frankfurt in 2018, five months after breaking his leg, was the impetus for Allen to agree to be his coach. O'Connor had his best race ever in Frankfurt. In 2019 he was fortunate to land an entry in the highly coveted Challenge Roth in Germany, the world's largest Ironman.

Now he is focusing on half-Ironman distances – a mere 70.3 miles instead of 140.6 total miles. He plans to compete in the North American 70.3 Championship in June 2021 with a goal to qualify for the Ironman 70.3 World Championship in New Zealand in 2022.

Why does someone choose to undergo week after week of grueling training, jump off a boat a hundred yards from Alcatraz to swim over a mile in the freezing San Francisco Bay, and spend large sums of money for entry fees, travel and training? All to put your body through tremendous stress for 12 or more consecutive hours?

He is inspired and rewarded by the sense of accomplishment and knowing he has completed what some consider the world's toughest one-day endurance event. "There is no other feeling in the world like standing on the beach about to embark on a journey few will ever contemplate, let alone complete, and knowing it will be a long day and no matter the planning, something will go wrong and you must and will prevail," says O'Connor.

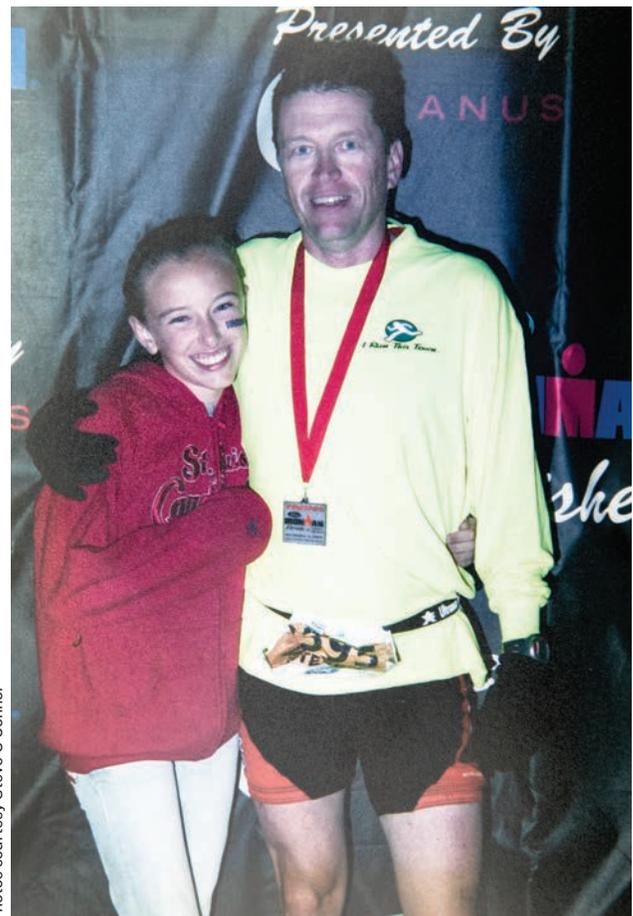
He says it is inspiring to help others reach their goals. O'Connor points out that triathlons are a rare sport where men and women compete at the exact same time on the exact same course. Triathlons are a great equalizer – no one usually excels in all three events.

Below:
Steve O'Connor with his daughter, Sierra, in 2006 after completing his first triathlon in Panama City, Florida.

Family and friends help make dreams possible

Many people have helped O'Connor along his journey. Chris Martin from the Springfield Running Center and Dr. Diane Hillard-Sembell encouraged him to Try the Tri. He consulted with local Ironman finishers Dan Dungan, Patty Shafer and the late Dr. Dan Adair while training for his first Ironman. Mark Allen, the medical team at PhysioTherapy Professionals and Dr. Diane Hillard-Sembell helped him get to the finish line in Frankfurt five months after breaking his leg. Amateurs, experts, Olympian triathletes and several Ironman World Champions all contributed to his interest and success.

O'Connor's wife, Carol, has always been there for him, spending countless hours waiting for him, volunteering and cheering him on. So has his daughter, Sierra. Through injuries, challenges, the expense and more, they have supported him. O'Connor cites the joy of his daughter crossing the finish line with him at his first Ironman, and his wife crossing the finish line with him at his last.



Photos courtesy Steve O'Connor

Below:
Steve O'Connor
crosses the finish
line at the DATEV
Challenge Roth
2019 triathlon in
Roth, Germany, in
July 2019, joined by
his wife, Carol.

O'Connor is also a race director and organizes local triathlons. He is one of a few nationwide who are race directors certified by both USA Triathlon and Road Runners Club of America. Springfield has a 30-plus-year tradition of hosting triathlons, and early on hosted one of only three qualifying races for the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii. Now, Springfield hosts mini, Sprint, Olympic and half-Ironman distances, with O'Connor directing many of these.

O'Connor competes, trains and directs while also working a full-time job. He's been a construction project manager for the state of Illinois for 32 years. Previously he was project manager overseeing construction of mental health hospitals. Now he is a capital construction project manager for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. O'Connor has a master's degree in project

management from George Washington University.

O'Connor plans to retire from the state in September 2021 and retire from race directing in November 2021. Afterwards he intends to race around the world for pleasure.

O'Connor says his competitions are a microcosm of life – the more you put in, the more you get. Although triathlons involve grueling physical training, on race day it is all mental. O'Connor demonstrates that it's possible to get better while growing older – with commitment, determination, passion and hard work. □

Karen Ackerman Witter ran two marathons, 12 half-marathons and now participates in CrossFit. She cannot imagine doing an Ironman and has tremendous admiration for Steve O'Connor.



Photos courtesy Steve O'Connor



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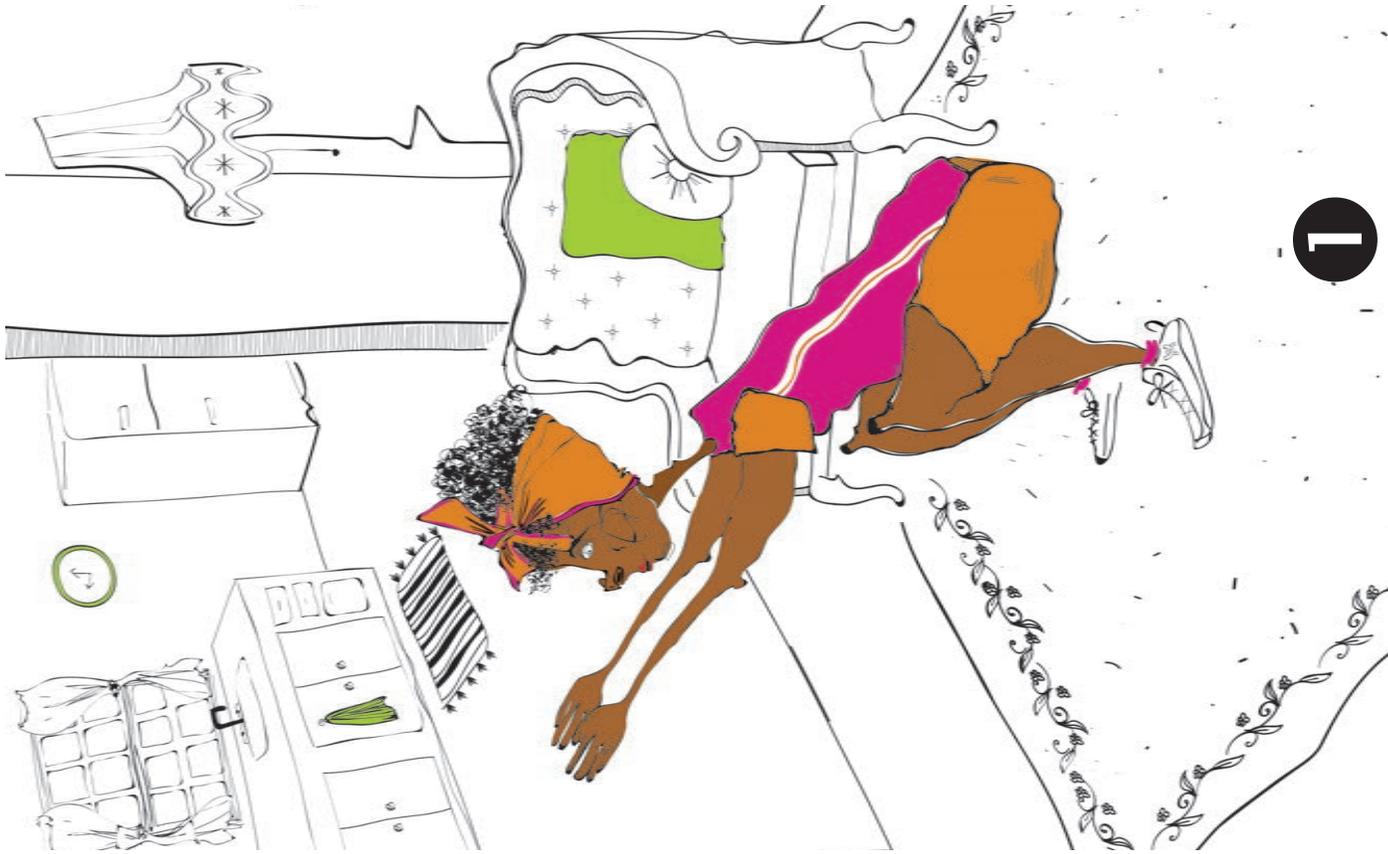
It's time to learn this simple exercise, to keep you strong and independent

by Joni Colle

Squat! What a funny-sounding word used to describe an even funnier-looking position. The mere thought of squatting is sure to elicit a giggle or a cringe depending upon your age. Children naturally assume this playful position, while many adults avoid squatting due to painful knees or the fear of not being able to get back up. To squat is to live. Strengthening the muscle groups engaged in squatting allows you to maintain independence in performing activities of daily living like getting up and down off the toilet. And who does not want to maintain that independence?

Every time you sit down onto a chair and then stand up, you are doing a squat. The problem is, we spend too much time sitting. Learn to squat correctly. Begin by doing a few squats per day. No equipment is needed. Increase the number of reps or stay down in the bottom position a few seconds longer each session. Squatting improves your hip and knee function, while strengthening butt, back, leg and core muscles. Squatting engages your entire body and is the foundation for performing many other movements well. Messages sent from your brain to your muscles enhances your mental ability, boosts physical confidence and contributes to longevity.

Squatting should be a fluid movement – down, then up. Follow these guidelines for the squat. Then use the same movements in reverse, returning to a tall standing position.

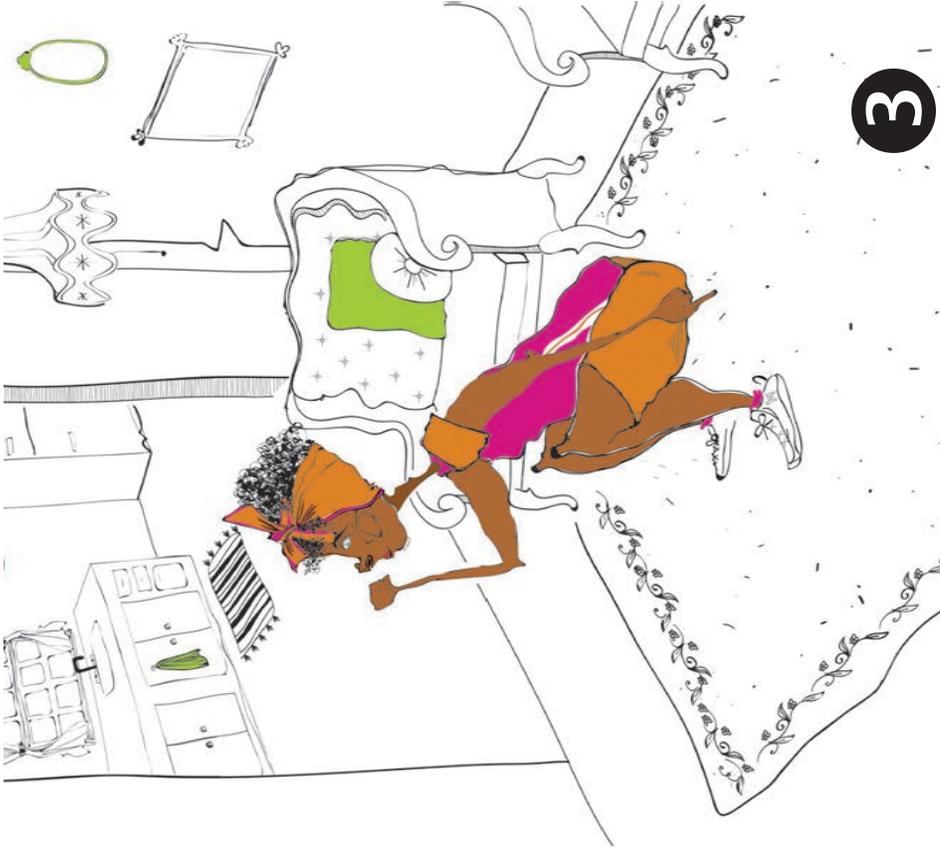




2

1 Arms up: Raise your arms. Keep your chest up. Look straight ahead. Do not look down. Keep your feet shoulder-distance apart. Feet may be slightly toed out. Performing these cues properly places your back in the correct position, allowing a normal arch of the lumbar curve while tightening your abs(core).

2 Knees out: Push your knees out. Drive your hips back and down while keeping your weight on your heels. Your knees should track with your toes. Do not allow your knees to cave inward.



3

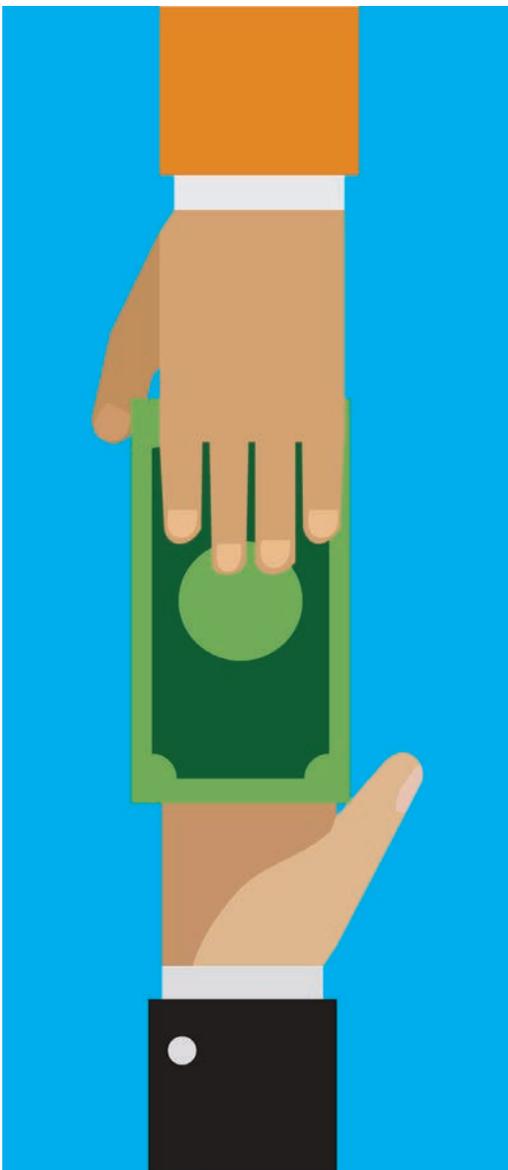
3 Butt down: Breathe, relax, and pull your butt down low. The fold of your hip should be below your knees – breaking parallel with the thigh. To rise, exert pressure on the outside of your feet as though you were trying to separate the ground beneath you. Stand straight up, opening your hips.



Joni Colle has over 38 years of experience in health care as a registered nurse and respiratory therapist. Learning to squat at CrossFit and healed meniscus tears in her left knee. Happily, she did not need to install a high-rise toilet during a recent bathroom renovation.

Are you the family bank?

When to say yes – and how to say no – if family members turn to you for financial support By Sarah Goleman



Almost every family has one: the person family members call on when money is tight and they need a helping hand. The more financially responsible you are, the more likely you are to be considered “the family bank,” according to a 2016 study conducted by Merrill in partnership with Age Wave. The study, “Finances in Retirement: New Challenges, New Solutions,” found that 62% of people over age 50 provide financial support to family members, with the overwhelming majority (80%) doing so because, “It’s the right thing to do.”

Still, if you’re that person, haven’t you sometimes wished you could just say no? Maybe you have other priorities to deal with or you doubt the money will be used wisely. Or you’re convinced that your kids will learn more by saving for that desired purchase – whether it’s a house, a car or a vacation – on their own.

Naturally, you’ll always want to be there for your family members when they need you, but there are times when it does make sense to politely say no, even to those closest to you. If you’re considered “the bank” in your family, here are four useful tips.

Four rules of the family bank

1. Start talking about money with your children when they are young. “Set up regular family meetings to discuss life skills, including the earning, saving, spending, investing and sharing of money. What role does money play in your family’s life? How do your financial decisions express your family’s values?” says Stacy Allred, head of the Merrill Center for Family Wealth™. “From a young age, encourage children to ask questions about the decisions you’re making so that they can begin to understand the reasoning behind them and develop sound money management habits of their own.” With that background, they may have more realistic expectations if they do someday find themselves in a financial bind and consider asking you for help.

2. Create a budget for giving. Even if you pass on your own sound money management habits, there are bound to be times when relatives will need your help, and you’ll want to be in a position to provide it. Yet the “Finances in Retirement” survey found that few respondents had budgeted to be able to help family members financially, despite giving an average of \$6,500 annually to family. “We create budgets for such things as travel or shopping, so why not for family giving?” asks Bill Hunter, retirement client experience director at Bank of America.

3. Set firm guidelines for saying yes. Decide in advance under what circumstances you would feel comfortable giving or lending money. “If you’re

going to make a gift of the money, think about using the occasion as a teaching moment,” suggests Hunter. Without sounding preachy or judgmental, try to explain to your relative how you’ve put yourself in a position to provide this assistance. Have you kept your debt under control, for instance, or lived within your means or avoided high-interest credit cards?

“If you expect to be paid back, create a loan document,” recommends Joe C. Schmieder, principal consultant of the Family Business Consulting Group. This may include details on how frequently repayments will be made and whether interest will be charged. If the family member has asked you to invest in a business, request a business plan or other formal details on how the money will be used. “It’s important that the recipient understands your terms,” Hunter says.

4. *When you must say no, avoid making it personal.* Instead of blaming family members for their financial troubles or questioning their plans, develop a basic philosophy that applies to everyone. Explain that this philosophy helped your family build its wealth and that any loan or gift decisions will be made based on your core values, such as a strong work ethic, pride and self-sufficiency. If you’re dreading the prospect of refusing a request, prepare your reasons beforehand so that you can explain them unemotionally. When you can’t afford to give, outline the reasons for your decision.

As you consider each request, it’s always important to remember that gifts or loans to family members will have a direct impact on your retirement planning. There might be an unwritten fifth rule, says Hunter: “Beware of being overly generous, or you could end up needing financial help yourself.” □

With eight years in the financial services industry, Sarah Goleman joined Merrill in 2018. Her practice incorporates environmental and socially conscious investing as well as more traditional approaches. She has a master’s degree from the University of Dundee and a passion for community service.

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Getting high in Illinois

The tallest things hereabouts

By Mary Bohlen



Photo courtesy of the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau

Visitors from mountainous regions often marvel at the flatness of our prairie state, but they need to look up. Illinois is full of things that soar into the sky, and a trip around the state will yield plenty of sore necks, from tall buildings to natural wonders to quirky structures.

Here are some examples worthy of lifting eyes off the endless horizon.

Buildings

Most Illinoisans know the Willis Tower in Chicago, built as the Sears Tower in 1973, is king among skyscrapers at 1,450 feet and 110 stories. It is the tallest building in Illinois and the second tallest in the Western Hemisphere behind the new One World Trade Center in New York City.

Willis' sky deck attracts more than 1.7 million visitors a year, with many eager to view the city from the Ledge, a glass-bottomed extension 103 stories up. On a clear day, visitors supposedly can see 50 miles and into parts of Wisconsin and Michigan.

The view isn't good enough, however, to check out likely the tallest outhouse in Illinois, in downstate Gays, a tiny community in Moultrie County. The outhouse has two stories – yes, two stories – and stems from its connection to a store on the first floor and rental rooms on the second of an 1869 building that no longer stands. The village decided to keep the double decker privy as a tourist attraction but you cannot “go” inside. Signage assures visitors that a false wall protected a downstairs sitter from an upstairs one.

A more cultural experience may be visiting a carillon. In 2000 Naperville dedicated the 160-foot Moser Tower and Millennium Carillon, surpassing Springfield's 132-foot Rees Memorial Carillon. The Naperville tower houses 72 bells, claims to be the world's fourth largest and offers a climb of

Photo courtesy of the Skydeck at Willis Tower



253 steps for glimpses of downtown Chicago. If you want to eat among the clouds, you can do so at Illinois' highest restaurant on the 95th floor of the John Hancock Building in Chicago. The Signature Room, opened in 1993, commands a view across the state's largest city.

To feed your spirit you can gaze up at Illinois' tallest church and what some claim to be the tallest in the world, the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple Building, 77 West Washington Street. The building is 568 feet high, based on the distance from the street-level entrance to the top of the steeple. The church rents some floors for commercial use but houses three sanctuaries, including the small "Sky Chapel" at the base of the steeple. A 530-foot Lutheran church in Ulm, Germany, also claims to be the world's tallest because its building is used solely for religious purposes.

Natural wonders

Most of Illinois was leveled by glaciers but the northwestern corner and parts of southern Illinois escaped the onslaught. Charles Mound on private property in northern Jo Daviess County stands 1,236 feet above sea level to rank as the state's highest natural point, according to the Prairie Research Institute, part of the Illinois Water Survey.

Southern Illinois' highest point is Williams Hill

Above:
The view from Willis Tower, the state's tallest building, takes in Chicago, Lake Michigan and surrounding areas. The 110-story tower stands 1,450 feet.

Left:
A life-size statue of Robert Wadlow, the world's tallest person, stands in a park in Alton, his hometown. At 8'11", the "Gentle Giant" suffered from an anomaly of his pituitary gland, causing his abnormal growth. He died of an infection at age 22.



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Photo by Brent Bohlen

Illinois' tallest outhouse, a two-story structure, is in Gays, a Moultrie County village. The privy has a false wall to protect the downstairs user from an upstairs one.

in Pope County at 1,065 feet, the fifth highest in the state. The region also boasts the better-known Bald Knob near Alto Pass, which stands 1,020 feet in the air and has an 111-foot cross on top.

Sangamon County's highest spot is the Bettis Benchmark, southeast of Waverly, a lowly 716 feet above sea level.

The state's tallest tree is likely a yellow poplar that soars 140 feet at Beall Woods State Park in Wabash County, according to Jay Hayek, an extension forest specialist at the University of Illinois. He says the tree with the largest girth and one of the oldest in Illinois is a state champion bald cypress in the swamps of southern Illinois. It has a circumference of 34.5 feet and may be more than 1,000 years old.

Unusual structures

Joining Bald Knob in the religious category is the Cross at the Crossroads, looming 198 feet next to I-57 at Effingham. Not far away is Casey with its plethora of world's largest oddities, including a golf tee, mailbox, wind chimes and rocking chair, all requiring a look up.

Collinsville sports a 70-foot Brooks Catsup bottle atop a 100-foot base that once served as the plant's water tower, making it undoubtedly the state's highest catsup bottle. Nearby Alton celebrates the world's tallest man, Robert Wadlow, with an imposing life-size 8-foot-11-inches statue.

The honor of the state's official tallest (and accessible) statue falls to "The Eternal Indian," a 48-foot likeness of Black Hawk, sculpted by Lorado Taft in 1911. Located near Oregon, Illinois, the statue is the 22nd tallest in the United States, just behind the Jolly Green Giant in Minnesota and Paul Bunyan in California.

All of them tower over Superman in Metropolis, a 15-foot statue completed in 1993, but they can't compete with the "world's largest Lincoln statue" at an abandoned park near Charleston. The 72-foot rendition also earned recognition as the "world's ugliest Lincoln statue" because of its out-of-proportion head and skinny body, according to Atlas Obscura. Dedicated in 1969, the statue can't be seen up close but area visitors may spot a glimpse of Abe peeking over a nearby hill, according to the Charleston Chamber of Commerce.

A more accessible Lincoln is "The Rail Splitter" near the Main Gate at the Illinois State Fairgrounds. The 1967 structure stands a proud 30 feet tall and might yield a sore neck if you gaze at it too long.

If you want to find the highest natural spot in your county, go to <https://clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu>. □

Mary Bohlen, a Springfield travel writer and retired journalism professor, urges readers stuck close to home during the pandemic to aim high.

Not your father's hearing aids

They don't make 'em like they used to. That's a good thing.

by DiAnne Crown

The clunky, screeching, analog hearing aids with replaceable batteries and tiny controls of years past are now inconspicuous, digital, smartphone friendly, rechargeable models with high-fidelity sound. But, although hearing aids are smaller, better and easier to manage than ever, the World Health Organization estimated last spring that only 17 percent of persons who would benefit from hearing aids actually use them. Two local hearing specialists would like to see this change, and not just for Springfield seniors.

Tyler Wilsman is a state-licensed hearing instrument specialist at Sam's Club in Springfield. "We are starting to see a shift to lower ages," says Wilsman. "I just fit a 25-year-old for hearing aids a month ago."

Christine Bitzer, Springfield Clinic audiologist, agrees. "Young people in their early thirties are noticing that hearing loss, sometimes from exposure to loud farm work or military noise, for example, is affecting their jobs and communication. Others had severe ear infections as children."

Bitzer sees a benefit in going to a clinic for a hearing exam. There, she says, staff is available if there is a need for ear wax cleaning prior to testing, and to address other medical concerns.

For others, a medical exam isn't a necessary first step. Wilsman conducts a thorough hearing test in a sound booth, selects and programs hearing aids based on the results of the test and the goals of the patient, refines the tuning, and often sends patients home with new hearing aids to try for several weeks. The exam is free and patients are allowed to come back locally or to any Sam's Club that has a hearing center as often as they like for adjustments.

After the Sam's Club sound and word recognition tests, Springfield resident Noel Dalbey purchased a set of small 94-channel behind-the-ear hearing aids about a year ago.

"I noticed I was saying 'what?' in



conversations more, asking the grandkids to repeat themselves, and turning up the TV. Tyler did the tests and, on the one- and two-syllable word test, I found out I was missing more than 50 percent of the words. That was the real turning point. When you are missing that many words in a conversation, it makes a big difference." Wilsman programmed a set of hearing aids for Dalbey and let him try them during a conversation in the store. "I could hear him and understand the conversation better than when I went in," says Dalbey. "They make everything a lot clearer."

Bitzer understands that patients are often reluctant to commit to the expense of hearing aids on a first visit. But the extended time spent at home during the COVID pandemic has shown more people the need for amplification. "People are home with their families and realize they can't hear them. If your family starts complaining, come in for a baseline exam. See where your hearing loss is and get some listening suggestions." People seem to be more at ease with that before jumping in to make a decision, she says. "I let them know they're never obligated. It's a lot of information, and it's a big expense to put out right there and then."

"Before you even consider amplification," Bitzer continues, "check with your insurance company first. A lot of insurers are starting to pay. And if you checked some time ago, check again." Even as recently as two years ago, she says, some of the policies were changing. "And if you have a good benefit, use it now before they take it away. Benefits change from year to year."

Something else people don't know, Bitzer says, is this: "Sertoma can help provide reconditioned hearing aids, with an audiologist's referral. There is a short application for financial qualification. And veterans can contact Veterans Administration hospitals about benefits."

Once you get hearing aids, give yourself time to adjust. Dalbey went back to Sam's a few times to have some of the frequencies adjusted. And, he says, it does take a few months to get used to hearing the full range of sounds again. "It was three or four months before I finally quit being startled by common noises." He says he heard doors shutting, and new noises and squeaks in the house and car that he either hadn't heard or had been hearing differently for years. "Running water sounded like dumping marbles into the sink." But that's all fine now, the TV is easier to hear, and "music sounds better now, too."

He offers this advice. "If you're having any hearing issues, go in and have your hearing tested. Put a set on and see how much better you hear. You don't have to worry about wearing hearing aids any more. Everybody in the world is wearing headphones or earbuds or headsets. They're smaller and better now, more of a natural thing, like glasses. It's a normal thing now." □

DiAnne Crown is an almost-retired feature writer who, if the need for watching PBS programs with the subtitles on is any indication, will be wearing new hearing aids any minute now. For more, visit www.seasonsofparenting.com.

Aging in place

How and where to live in the years ahead

By Iris Van Rynbach, Tribune News Service

As of 2018, 52 million Baby Boomers were in their golden years, 65 or older. As they age, the question of how and where to live as a senior becomes more real. That gracious three-story home with a large garden is no longer seen as an asset but as a hindrance for an older adult who can't manage the stairs anymore and certainly doesn't want to shovel the driveway.

So the question arises. Assisted living or a nursing home, or even apartment living are all possibilities, depending on one's finances and health. But another answer appeals to many aging adults: staying right where they are.

Aging in place, as this is called, can involve building a new home or buying a condo specifically to make one's older self comfortable, or remodeling an existing home.

Karen Iluliano, a real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty in Glastonbury, Connecticut, and in Naples, Florida, who works extensively with Baby Boomers, said she's noticed certain styles gaining traction.

"Ranch houses or capes with a first-floor master are suddenly popular again," Iluliano said. "All first-floor living is good for aging in place. Why go up stairs if you don't have to?" Anything open-concept is big, too. And the old adage of "location, location, location" takes on new meaning: "Living closer to services like medical care, an airport and shops becomes important when driving everywhere isn't as easy as it once was."

David Ostrowski of Above & Beyond Home Improvements has worked with clients renovating houses to adapt to the aging process.

"For Baby Boomer clients who are remodeling their houses, we have put in



Photo by Brad Horrigan/Hartford Courant/TNS

pocket doors that slide into the walls for better access from one room to another. For aging-in-place clients we have also put in new kitchens and bathrooms, with comfort-height toilets. Walk-in showers with grab bars and a bench seat in the shower are a must. We have also redone entrances to houses to make them wider, added a ramp, an electronic door and even constructed a covered concrete patio for a client needing wheelchair access." Having a generator that goes on automatically in case of power loss is also important.

Don't forget the exterior: Scaling back gardens for less care and maintenance is another thought for homeowners who want to stay put.

Sue and Jeffrey Pitler, both 66 and formerly of Marlborough, Connecticut, mulled different options for a house to live in for the rest of their lives.

"We thought about Florida," Sue Pitler said, "but I don't like the heat." They also didn't like the age isolation

of 55-and-older housing complexes, because they like living with people of all different ages. So the couple bought an older home on a flat lot near downtown Glastonbury, Connecticut, tore that old house down and built a new one with numerous features to make it their forever home.

"We worked with architects to put in options like wider doorways and a walk-in shower; even the doorways have levers and not handles, which are easier for an older person to manage," Sue Pitler said. "The kitchen has an island, and next to that is a table space in the same quartz countertop, which is easier to sit at than stools."

The house is accessibility-adaptable, which means they can tweak it later on if they need to use a wheelchair. "Our yard is manageable and flat, and we love being able to walk to town."

All their living space is on the ground floor, but the house has two stories.

“The upstairs has a bedroom and a sitting room as well as a bathroom for guests or, someday, a caregiver.”

A few years ago Francie and Jack Bergquist, both in their early 70s, moved from their home to a more manageable condo. “Of course we thought about this condo as aging in place,” said Francie Bergquist. “Our condo is comfortable and quite well designed for us today. We just updated our kitchen. We like living here without the concerns of maintenance when we travel. It’s large enough to be a real home on one level to meet our needs but has the room to invite our growing family of grandchildren to join us for longer visits from out-of-state. It has a lower level for my husband’s office and my studio, which we enjoy today.”

Aging at home is something that architects grapple with, too. Mark Aldieri, 66, a project manager for Kronenberger & Sons Restoration, has focused over his 20-year career on residential, historic preservation and health care projects. He’s renovated everything from a lighthouse to the steeple of St. Joseph’s Cathedral in Hartford, Connecticut, but lately, his most interesting projects have been homes for older people – for a relative, and now for himself and his wife.

“I look at my parents’ generation, and I can see them struggling with architectural barriers,” Aldieri said. “I’m also a first responder with a volunteer fire department and have seen seniors in need of medical attention in their various living situations.”

For his family and in his personal life, he didn’t want structural details that could be fixed to cause mishaps, so he’s taken it upon himself to fix them.

Designing for elder care requires empathy, to see how someone with less mobility or diminishing eyesight might view things. “Elements of designing an aging-in-place home include common-sense things like removing thresholds between rooms, having a washer and dryer on the ground floor, wider doors, oversize bathrooms with

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a curbless shower, grab bars as needed in bathrooms, a lower sink and prep counter area, handrails at stairs, and to eliminate outside steps as much as you can,” Aldieri said.

When he designed a house for a relative without mobility, he put in a ramp from the garage for easier access from the car to the house. “The new house design was life-changing for this relative. He had access to all the rooms he needed and it made all the difference for his well-being and quality of life.”

The Aldieris have lived in a lovingly self-restored mid-19th century Greek revival style home for the past 35 years. As time went by, he and his wife realized that house wasn't going to work as they



Photo by Brad Horrigan/Hartford Courant/TNS

aged. Aldieri put his architectural skills to use designing the perfect home for their later years. In this next home he has planned a downstairs master bedroom with two upstairs bedrooms for guests or a caregiver. All essentials are on the first floor.

That's no reason to leave good design behind. “A house like this doesn't have to look institutional; it can be gracious,” Aldieri said. “I'm building my new house closer to the ground, so that way we will need fewer steps, with the idea that someday if a ramp needs to be put in, it can be. The bathrooms are designed for a worst-case scenario, wheelchair access. We looked for and found a flat lot to build on. All these ideas have helped guide my path and journey for my wife and I as we age.” □

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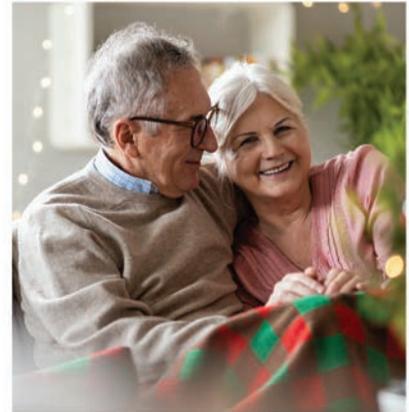
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Second Saturday Open Studio

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Brown Bag Concert

Wed., Dec. 16, 12-12:30 p.m. Featuring violinist Chenoa Alamu who first picked up the instrument at the age of three and went on to perform at venues worldwide. Hosted by the First Presbyterian Church via Zoom. Free. 217-528-4311.

Eva Carroll Monroe and the Lincoln Colored Home

Wed., Dec. 16, 7 p.m. Mary Frances will discuss her documentary about Monroe's parents, husbands and daughter, and highlight events during their lives including Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws. Visit the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum website for more information. spiaahm.org. 217-391-6323.

Old Capitol Holiday Walk

Sat., Dec. 19, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. The last holiday walk before Christmas. A great chance to grab some last-minute gifts. Downtown Springfield. 217-544-1723.

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Sunday at Six Recital Series

Sun., Dec. 20, 6 p.m. Hosted by the Illinois Symphony Orchestra. Featuring Acting Principal Viola Erin Rafferty and followed by a Coda Conversation with music director Ken Lam and the evening's musicians. Watch on the YouTube channel or Facebook page. ilsymphony.org. 522-2838.

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Wed., Dec. 23, 12-12:30 p.m. Featuring local concert organist Paula Pugh Romanaux who holds a doctorate degree in organ performance from the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, Austria. Hosted by the First Presbyterian Church via Zoom. Free. 217-528-4311.

Lost Songs of the Civil War

Wed., Jan. 20, 7 p.m. Award-winning folk musician and folklorist Chris Vallillo takes us deep into the journals and letters of the Civil War troops, bringing these rare and unheard gems back to life. Find it on the Looking for Lincoln Facebook page. 217-782-6817.

Virtual Policy Breakfast

Fri., Jan. 22, 8 a.m. Looking at 2020 (and, it's not over). With Jim Leach, Bruce Rushton and Bernie Schoenberg. Live on Comcast Cable TV Channel 18, the City of Springfield's website and the Citizens Club of Springfield Facebook page.

A Conversation with Frederick Douglass

Wed., Jan. 27, 7 p.m. Bob Davis, portraying Frederick Douglass, will discuss advocating for the creation of the U.S. Colored Troops to fight in the Civil War for the abolishment of slavery. The program will conclude with a question and answer session. Find the event on the Looking for Lincoln Facebook page. 217-782-6817.

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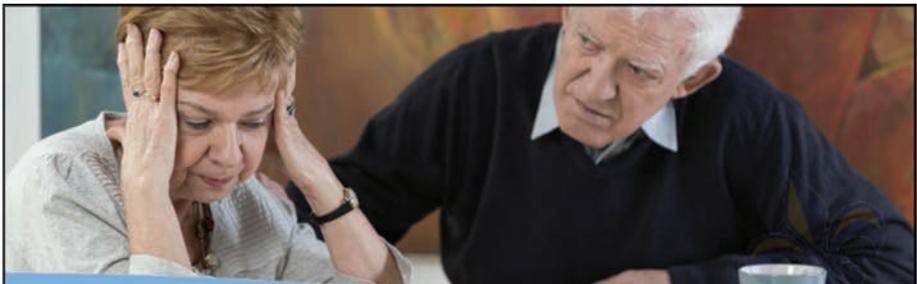
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