

Never too late World War II veteran married at Normandy

By LOIS K. SOLOMON
South Florida Sun Sentinel
Tribune News Service

He may be 100, but Harold Terens still smooches like a teenager.

It's one of the many reasons his fiancée, Jeanne Swerlin, 96, married him this month.

"He's such a good kisser," Swerlin said.

The pair loves to snuggle, hold hands and make each other laugh. They also had a historic wedding trip. Terens, a Lake Worth Beach resident, and Swerlin, of Boca Raton, Florida, tied the knot June 8 in France, the place where Terens faced some of the most formative experiences of his life as he helped the Allies fight the Nazis as a soldier during World War II.

Terens and other World War II vets went to France for the 80th anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944, when Allied forces landed on the Normandy coast to begin the liberation of Europe from Nazi terror. France honored the former soldiers at several ceremonies this year, including a commemoration with President Joe Biden in Cherbourg on June 7.

This 80th anniversary marks Terens' fourth D-Day celebration in France. There are not many veterans like him left: Only 119,550 of the 16.4 million Americans who served in World War II were alive as of 2023, according to the National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

Terens, a native of the Bronx, did not land in France on D-Day but arrived 12 days later to help ferry captured German soldiers and freed American troops to England. He became an expert in Morse code and participated in war missions in Iran, Ukraine and England before his service



Tribune News Service/South Florida Sun Sentinel/Mike Stocker

Harold Terens and Jeanne Swerlin at her Boca Raton home. 100-year-old veteran from Lake Worth Beach Harold Terens married his 96-year-old girlfriend, Jeanne Swerlin of Boca Raton, this month in a French town near where he served as a soldier during World War II. He was honored by the French as part of the 80th anniversary of the country's liberation from the Nazis.

ended in 1945. He had been deployed for three years.

He married his wife Thelma, who became a professor at Hofstra University in New York, in 1948; she died in 2018 after 70 years of marriage. They had two

daughters and a son and moved to Florida from New York in 2006.

Terens, a former vice president of a British conglomerate that distributed beer, cigarettes and other items, has eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

Swerlin, a Brooklyn native, also has two daughters and a son and has been married twice before. She has four grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Swerlin had lived with Boca

Raton resident Sol Katz for 25 years until his death in 2019. Katz's daughter, Joanne Schosheim of Boca Raton, introduced Swerlin to Terens in 2021.

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Tribune News Service/Los Angeles Times/Michael Blackshire

Ray Emmons gets in some morning stretches. "Let's lean to the left. You should feel a nice stretch through this whole right side of your body now," Paige Velasquez of Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center instructed another group of veterans. "You guys feeling that today?"

Caretaker stuck around to the end

By **STEVE LOPEZ**
Los Angeles Times
Tribune News Service

Steve Lopez



The oldest male in the United States was a man of many appetites, even at 110, and his live-in caretaker did her best to feed them.

Rosario Reyes would make banana pancakes for Morrie Markoff, and he would plead for more syrup. She'd bring him a corned beef sandwich, followed by a piece of lemon meringue pie, and reluctantly give in when he insisted on washing that down with a cup of hot chocolate.

Markoff wanted to read the paper, watch the news and get in some exercise every day, and Reyes helped make it happen. He made clear that on his 111th birthday in January, he fully expected an exotic dancer to perform in the living room of his Bunker Hill apartment, for the third straight year. Reyes already had the balloons in storage.

In their normal daily routine, they'd listen to classical music together or watch, yet again, two of Markoff's favorite movies: "Midway" or "Guns of Navarone." Markoff also liked "The Notebook," which Reyes hadn't seen. He bet her that if they watched it together, she would cry. And she did.

He called her by her nickname, Charito. She called him Mr. Morrie.

"It was kind of a remarkable relationship," said Judith Hansen, Markoff's daughter, who called Reyes an angel and one of countless unsung heroes in the elder-care ranks. "Dad would not have lived as long as he did without Charito. She's an incredibly wise woman, and she knew what would keep him going. She knew that he was a man who wanted to accomplish something each day."

And he usually did, until his body began giving out in April. Markoff was briefly hospitalized a few weeks ago and died at home June 3, with Charito holding Mr. Morrie's hands in hers.

"He died in peace," she said.

I was lucky to have met Markoff when he responded to a 2012 column I wrote about having been resuscitated after going into cardiac arrest following knee replacement surgery. He'd been a goner, too, Markoff said, just shy of his 99th birthday, and we ought to have a cup of coffee and "hang around" together as full-fledged members of the Back From the Dead Club.

Markoff grew up in a

New York City tenement, dropped out of school after eighth grade, went to a trade school, married his beloved Betty in 1938 and moved west, where he sometimes drove her crazy with his manic energy and argumentative nature. As he aged and mellowed, Markoff swooned over his beloved "Betsy," as he called her, and after she died in 2019, he couldn't stop singing a song he wrote about pinning to be with her again.

I had the pleasure of being at Markoff's 100th birthday party (there was cake, but no exotic dancers), Betty's 100th and their 75th wedding anniversary. He once said to me that he couldn't recall being bored a day in his life, and that was his gift to all of us: the reminder that if you stay plugged into the world around you and open yourself to new experiences, the aging process can slow to a crawl.

"If I had to put my finger on one thing that helped his longevity, I would say it was his innate curiosity about everything," said his son, Steven, who, like his sister, is in his 80s.

That and, of course, the luck of good genes.

"You could bring him a sow bug," Steven said, "and he would say, 'Look, it rolled into a little ball. How did it do that?' Or he would say, 'I just met the most interesting person in the world on a bus.'"

In fact, Morrie and Betty loved exploring Los Angeles by bus, and one day they met Tracy Huston, the owner of a Chinatown gallery. Markoff, who was trained as a machinist but held a variety of jobs, mentioned that while servicing and repairing gadgets and appliances, he'd noticed that a toilet tank float looked like the skirt of a ballerina. So he began welding scrap metal parts together, fashioning dozens of sculptures, including a ballerina.

Huston was intrigued, and in 2014, I attended Markoff's first-ever art exhibit, in her gallery. It was yet another high point in a life that had just hit the century mark, and one of my most prized possessions — a gift from Markoff — is his sculpture of his daughter reading a book.

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VA seeking to impact high suicide rates for older men

By **EMILY ALPERT REYES**
Los Angeles Times
Tribune News Service

LOS ANGELES — It was a Friday morning and George McCune had roused himself to make the 2.4-mile trip from his Northridge home to the Veterans Affairs campus in North Hills.

The 77-year-old was greeted there that March day by the usual crew training for the Golden Age Games: There was Roger, 82, who had piled up medals in javelin, discus and shot put. Bob, who had just gotten his cochlear implant. Becky, 71, bent on defeating her "nemesis" — a guy just six days her junior — in pingpong.

McCune can be reclusive, he said. He has grappled with post-traumatic stress disorder, he said, although he was never able to get formally diagnosed. Silent meditation is more of his usual speed than socializing.

Yet McCune routinely joins his teammates in the gym and on the track. He has yet to attend the Golden Age Games, a national competition for veterans 55 and older, but trains five days a week with the Greater Los Angeles team. That Friday, he had circled the track for 46 minutes, a goal he chose for the year of his birth.

And "more than the physical stuff is the mental stuff," he said, "of getting me to interact with people."

This might not be what you envision as "mental health" care, let alone "suicide prevention." But at the VA, getting older veterans such as McCune together to hit the track is part of a broader push to improve their lives — and possibly even to save them.

Older men in the United States have been at growing risk. When suicides reached a historic high for the country in 2022, the sobering numbers were being driven up by their deaths. The starkest statistics were for men past their 75th birthdays, who were dying by suicide at more than twice the rate of men younger than 25.

The problem is "not new but it is overlooked — regularly overlooked," said Thomas Joiner, a Florida State University psychologist who studies suicide and has written about the mental health of older men.

The grim pattern has persisted for years and is totally different from that among U.S. women, for whom suicide rates rise in middle age and then fall. Across the lifespan, men are much more likely than women to die by suicide, even

though depression is much more common among women.

In Los Angeles County, the medical examiner tallied more than 300 such deaths in five years among men 75 and older — more than six times the number among women of the same ages, according to a Times analysis of the county figures.

Researchers have faulted a host of forces for the steeper rate of suicide as men reach their 70s and 80s. Joiner said men tend to suffer from worsening loneliness over the course of their lives in a way that differs from women, with "friendship networks falling apart over the decades." Women seem to be better at maintaining ties after school or work stop giving them a source of peers, he said.

That isolation both whittles down the chances that someone will recognize men are in trouble before a suicide attempt, and makes it less likely that they will be quickly rescued if they attempt to end their lives, said Dr. Yeates Conwell, professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Their physical frailty as older adults also jeopardizes their chances of recovering from a suicide attempt.

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Fulfilling his promise

72-year-old Philadelphia man earned his diploma

By KRISTEN A. GRAHAM
The Philadelphia Inquirer
Tribune News Service

PHILADELPHIA — Call him the Rip van Winkle of Benjamin Franklin High: Joseph Bond dropped out of high school at age 17, as war raged in Vietnam, leaving without a diploma.

Over 55 years, he served his country, built a career, a family, a life. But as he hit his 70s, Bond remembered the promise he made to his mother before she died: He vowed he'd earn his diploma someday.

On June 13, Bond, a 72-year-old great-grandfather, graduated from Ben Franklin's Educational Options Program, a night school that allows adult students who disengaged as youth to finish what they started.

"I wake up all these years later, and I'm the one with the gray beard," said Bond. "It was one of my goals before I pass, to get that high school diploma."

'The furthest thing from my mind'

Bond was born in South Philadelphia, then moved to North Philadelphia with his parents, four brothers and a sister. He liked Ben Franklin fine as a student in the 1960s, but got into trouble for fighting as he passed through tough neighborhoods, and a judge gave him a choice.

"He said, 'Either wear pinstripes, or wear green,'" Bond remembered. Service to his country felt like a better option than jail, so Bond enlisted in the Marines, and it was off to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

It was a sea change, difficult in many ways.

"At first, I was kind of rebellious, and the instructors were tough.

See **Promise** page 7B



Tribune News Service/The Philadelphia Inquirer/Monica Herndon

Joseph Bond in a classroom at Ben Franklin High School in Philadelphia last month. Bond recently returned to high school to finish his studies and get his diploma. On June 13, Bond, a 72-year-old great-grandfather, graduated from Ben Franklin's Educational Options Program, a night school that allows adult students who disengaged as youth to finish what they started.

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Rates ...

Continued from page 2B

Diseases and other ailments such as hearing loss can also worsen mental health as men age. And then there are the dangers of guns, which older men are more likely to own — and which make suicide attempts more deadly. In L.A. County, roughly two-thirds of suicide deaths among elderly men in recent years involved guns, far more than among older women, according to a Times analysis of county medical examiner data.

Despite the troubling pattern, “we don’t screen for suicide risk very well, and we especially don’t do it with older adults,” said Richard Frank, director of the Center on Health Policy at the Brookings Institution. Suicide risk screenings in emergency rooms are done less often with seniors, he said, with “a big drop-off after age 60.”

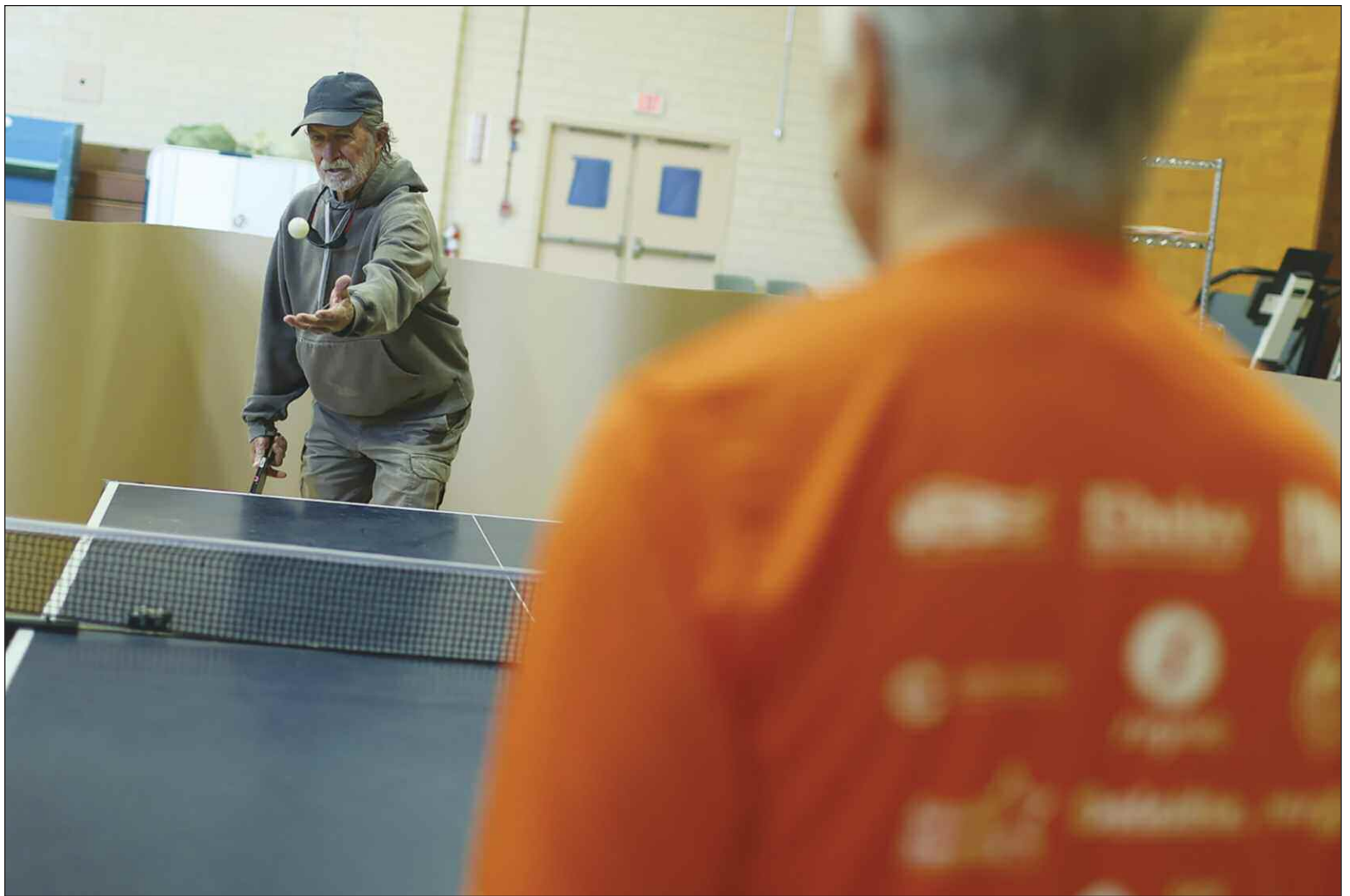
And for older adults, the criteria for a mental health diagnosis often miss people in need, Frank said. “They are hurting psychologically in ways that are not cleanly captured by our diagnostic approach to mental illness.”

In general, “our understanding of how to intervene is just emerging” in the last decade and a half, said Mike Hogan, a former New York state commissioner of mental health. Many suicide prevention theories revolve around “if we can protect people against the vulnerabilities that lead to it — so-called ‘upstream’ prevention.”

“That turns out to be very hard to do,” Hogan said. Suicide prevention strategies have also focused on limiting access to “lethal means,” such as installing barriers on tall structures, but Hogan said that has also been difficult when it comes to guns. Then there are targeted efforts to ask people whether they are at risk.

An effective approach is “basically asking people if they’re having those thoughts and — if they are — to then helping them” take steps to ensure safety, Hogan said. Yet such methods are “not yet in widespread use.”

Too often, medical providers “feel very uncomfortable asking” whether people have sui-



Tribune News Service/Los Angeles Times/Michael Blackshire

Ray Emmons, 76, left, plays pingpong with Conrad Amers, 71. The men were training for the Golden Age Games, a fitness competition put on by the Veterans Affairs Department. Emmons said that when he first went last year — and won a bronze medal in pingpong — he was enthralled to watch blind veterans playing bocce ball. “I just said, ‘This is for me,’” Emmons said.

dal thoughts, said Julie Goldstein Grumet, director of the Zero Suicide Institute at the Education Development Center, which helps health systems adopt practices to prevent suicide. With older patients, physicians may think “this is just sort of a natural consequence of aging. ... It doesn’t have to be. You don’t have to feel more sad as you age.”

Among the health systems that have grappled with the crisis is the Veterans Health Administration, which falls under the VA. Suicide has been an urgent issue for the health system in light of the alarming numbers among U.S. veterans,

who have lost their lives to suicide at higher rates than the broader population.

Yet that isn’t the case for the oldest male veterans, according to Veterans Affairs figures. In 2021, elderly male veterans had lower rates of suicide, as calculated by the veterans system, than the figures reported by the National Center for Health Statistics for men ages 75 and older. And there was a promising downturn in their suicide rate between 2020 and 2021, especially among those who had recently used the health system.

Matthew Miller, director of the VA’s national suicide prevention program, said the

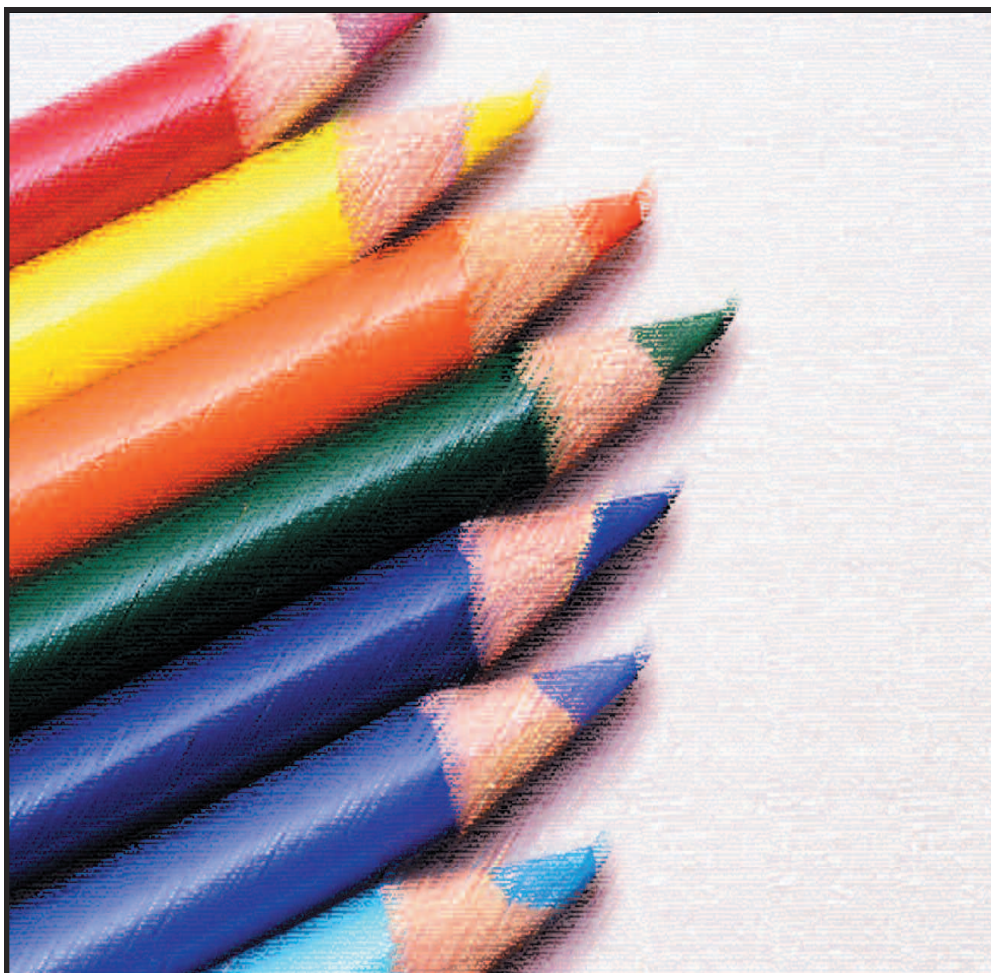
agency has worked to weave risk assessment for suicide into its pain, sleep and oncology clinics, mindful that older patients may be at higher risk after getting troubling news about their health, especially if a gun is in reach. It has also done media outreach to urge older veterans to securely store firearms and medications.

The VA has also placed mental health professionals in the same facilities where veterans get day-to-day care. Roughly three-fourths of older adults who die by suicide have seen a primary care physician in the year before their death, researchers have

found — a much higher percentage than had received mental health care — which has led to an increased focus on routine care as a route to thwart suicide.

At the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center, Dr. Lucinda Leung said a patient might come in complaining of sleep problems. “Most of my patients don’t say, ‘I’m depressed. Please refer me to a psychiatrist,’” she said. (Older men are less likely than older women to state that they are lonely when asked directly, even in cases when indirect questions suggest similar levels of loneliness, researchers in Britain have found.)

See Rates page 6B



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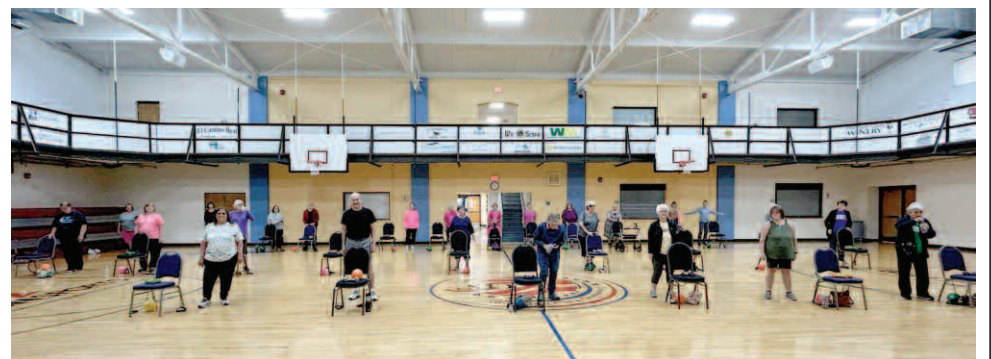
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Rates ...

Continued from page 5B
But careful questioning might make clear that PTSD and nightmares are keeping that patient awake, Leung said. If that happens, she can walk the person down the hall to meet Dr. Suzie S. Chen, a clinical psychologist who can assess that patient the same day.

"Many of my patients are reluctant to speak to a mental health specialist or even admit to having psychological symptoms," Leung said. Being able to immediately connect someone to mental health care on the same site helps it become "normalized."

Chen agreed. "We're not scary people — and mental health treatment doesn't have to be a scary thing."

Then there are programs that might not look, at first glance, like mental health care. Inside her office on the Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center campus, Paige Velasquez turned to the camera on her computer, greeted the familiar faces signing on, and guided a virtual group through a series of exercises.

"Let's lean to the left. You should feel a nice stretch through this whole right side of your body now," Velasquez instructed from behind her desk. "You guys feeling that today?"

As the group took a break from the exercises, she asked, "It's Friday — anybody have plans for the weekend?"

"Yeah — to make it to Monday," one veteran quipped.

The virtual groups meet Monday through Friday, connecting seniors who might be unable to make it to the San Fernando Valley campus for an exercise class. Velasquez, a recreation therapist, said that beyond the physical benefits, the regular meetings can ease isolation for older veterans.

Behind the computer screen or in person, recreation is a kind of "back door therapy," Velasquez said. People think, "I'm golfing. That's not therapy. Horseback riding — that's not therapy. We're just having fun."



Tribune News Service/Los Angeles Times/Michael Blackshire

Arnie Ossen, 92, prepares to leave the VA's North Hills facility after a day of pingpong. Pasqual Ramirez, 77, explained that he had anger issues after serving in Vietnam. What helped ease that anger was "this," he said, gesturing around an echoing gym where his teammates were playing pingpong. "The camaraderie with people that went through similar situations."

"You are! But fun is therapeutic."

Hogan said the "surprising power" of such interventions is that "if people feel like they have meaning and purpose, and they're connected to other people, it is extraordinarily less likely that they'll die by suicide."

When Roger Reitan retired, he found himself asking, "What am I going to do with myself?" The Granada Hills resident had served in the Navy, then worked as an accountant for more than two decades, commuting to downtown Los Angeles. Friendships seemed to wither after his

accounting career ended, he said.

"I lost track of everybody," Reitan said.

But now, "some of my best friends are right here." The 82-year-old said he had competed for more than two decades in the Golden Age Games, proudly rattling off the many sports he had mastered.

The Los Angeles team has been preparing for the August games, which will be held this year in Salt Lake City. Nearly two dozen of its athletes are planning to attend. Ray Emmons, 76, said in March that when he first went last year — and won a bronze medal in ping-

pong — he was enthralled to watch blind veterans playing bocce ball.

"I just said, 'This is for me,'" Emmons said.

But Velasquez said that for the veterans she coaches, the Golden Age Games is not just "something to look forward to once a year. It's every week — training, seeing your friends, and making that connection."

"That impacts mental health tremendously," she said. "I've seen it."

Pasqual Ramirez, 77, said in March that training with the team had helped him lose weight. He stopped relying on insulin. Beyond the physical

changes, joining the group "made me realize that maybe I could live longer."

"I used to be angry at the world," Ramirez said. "In a way I felt let down."

There were times in his life when he didn't admit to having served in Vietnam, after protests broke out over the war, he said. His wife tells him he still has nightmares, although he doesn't remember them.

What helped ease that anger was "this," he said, gesturing around an echoing gym where his teammates were playing pingpong. "The camaraderie with people that went through similar situations."

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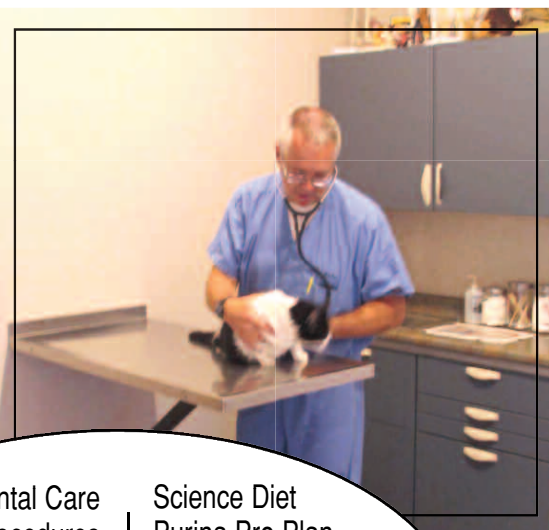


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Never ...

Continued from page 1
Schosheim's children attended camp with Terens' grandchildren.

The couple said their first date did not go well, as Terens was shy and failed to make eye contact.

"I had been married for 70 years and my wife died," Terens said. "For three and a half years, I saw no one."

But at the urging of a friend, he called her for a second date, at Seasons 52 in Boca Raton, and they clicked.

"We ordered, but I couldn't eat," he said. "I felt like I was exploding inside. It was the most romantic, exciting, exhilarating time in my life."

Swerlin said she also fell in love on that date.

"Never have I felt this way about anyone," she said. "We laugh all the time. At 96, to have this, I mean, come on."

Terens, who is participating in a longevity study at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said his life has been deeply influenced by the work of the late Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the 1952 best-seller, "The Power of Positive Thinking." The centenarian believes the upbeat attitude he learned from Peale, who became his friend, as well as efforts to minimize stress, good genetics (his mother

lived to 100) and luck have been the primary drivers of his longevity.

Terens and Swerlin were married not far from the French beaches where Terens served, in the town of Carentan-les-Marais. The town was the site of an intense battle with the German Wehrmacht after U.S. troops landed in Normandy.

The mayor of Carentan-les-Marais officiated the wedding at City Hall. Employees of the French consulate in Miami, whom Terens has gotten to know from his anniversary visits to Normandy, arranged many of the wedding details for the couple.

Besides the 38 friends and family members who attended the wedding, the couple was accompanied by a 24-piece band of bagpipers led by retired Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue Capt. John Fischer of Boca Raton. The band played at several D-Day beaches and World War II commemorative sites, including Pointe-du-Hoc, Utah, Sword, Omaha and Juno beaches in France, where the Allies began their World War II journey inland through Europe.

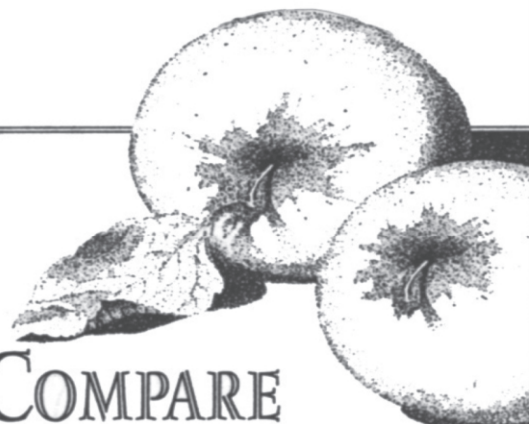
After their trip to France, Terens and Swerlin said they will continue to travel and attend ballet performances and local clubs (they like The Funky Biscuit music venue in Boca Raton).

Terens said not much is going to change in his life after the wedding. He and Swerlin plan to maintain their own residences. And he said he will continue to start his mornings the same way each day. He gave a demonstration.

"Hey Alexa," he said to the interactive voice assistant, "Play 'Oh What a Beautiful Mornin'.'"

Alexa obeyed, and the uplifting ode to happiness from the Broadway classic "Oklahoma!" filled Swerlin's home with exultation in honor of two lives well-lived.

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Lopez ...

Continued from page 2B

I once visited the Markoffs with the late Times photographer Gary Friedman, who adored them. When Markoff mentioned that he'd taken thousands of black-and-white photographs on his world travels, Friedman was astonished by the quality of the work in Markoff's neatly archived albums and told him they ought to be in a museum.

Markoff frequently talked to me about his years-in-the-making memoir, and the working title was his answer to a question he fielded often: "What is the secret to a long life?" Markoff was 103 when he sold copies of "Keep Breathing" from his very own booth at the L.A. Times Festival of Books.

When I wrote about attending his 109th birthday party last year, I noted that Markoff's live-in care was a luxury many people won't be able to afford, given longer lifespans. He'd saved and invested well, Steven told me at the time, but the cost of 24-hour care can easily run \$10,000-\$15,000 monthly, and the shortage of home healthcare workers is a massive unaddressed challenge.

"The real lesson learned from this is how unprepared our gov-

In Markoff's final hours, Reyes told him he was going to be with Betty again. It was the saddest moment of her life ...

ernment is to deal with end of life for people," Steven told me the other day. "It seems to me a tragedy, with all the money that's spent in other ways."

When Markoff was nearing the end, Judith got the idea that with so many millions of people experiencing dementia in old age, her father's extraordinary brain might be useful to researchers. She went to the National Institutes of Health website and was linked to Tish Hevel of the non-profit Brain Donor Project, who gladly accepted the donation.

"Lots of studies are being done on super-agers, and he may be the super-est of super-agers," Hevel

told me. "Some people in brain banking think this could be the oldest cognitively intact brain that is now preserved."

Hevel said 16,000 brains are in the bank, helping researchers study mental illness, Parkinson's disease, cognitive loss and other neurological disorders. Having a healthy brain like Markoff's can be invaluable, Hevel said, for comparative analysis.

"I think Dad would be tickled to death to know that someone was interested enough to analyze his brain," said Steven, who had lunch with his father weekly and was struck by how sharp he remained until several weeks

ago, when he began to fade and the family decided to begin hospice care.

Reyes, who has a daughter in college, met the Markoffs about 20 years ago, when she worked as their housekeeper. It was only in the last few years that the native of Peru became Markoff's full-time caregiver. When I met with her Saturday morning at Markoff's apartment, she shared a packet of handwritten notes he'd written to me but hadn't yet mailed.

"With all the young people being killed in fruitless wars," he wrote in one, using cursive on lined paper, "the undertakers don't need me. They are busy enough."

He was a lifelong progressive, and Reyes said he told her he had lived through many of the world's miseries, including the Spanish flu and COVID-19 pandemics, two world wars and the death of civil discourse over the last several years.

"This was always his favorite place," Reyes said, showing me the sunroom from which Markoff would take in the view of downtown L.A. high-rises.

He was like the Energizer bunny, she said, in a hurry to

drag out the trash bins or head out for a brisk walk. She said she had to hustle to keep him busy, so each day, on a legal pad, she wrote a list of things for Markoff to do, including read the paper, exercise, play cards, watch the evening news, reach out to family and work on his blog (he billed himself as the world's oldest blogger).

"Always make a plan," she recalled him saying on many occasions. "Never stop. Next. Next. Next."

She showed me a video she took of Markoff watching news of the solar eclipse in April.

"I'm a lucky man," he said. "It's wonderful to sit here in comfort and watch the eclipse happen."

In Markoff's final hours, Reyes told him he was going to be with Betty again. It was the saddest moment of her life, she told me, but knowing Markoff wouldn't want to go on living if he couldn't keep moving, keep discovering, keep making plans, she told him he would be better off.

His color changed at the moment of his death, Reyes said, and she told him to reach for Betty's hand.

"He died in peace," Reyes said. "And he's where he wants to be."

Retirement bliss is hit and miss

By LORI BORGMAN
Tribune News Service

Our youngest was the ripe age of 9 when she tacked a brochure, which she had pulled off a display rack at our neighborhood pharmacy, to her bulletin board. It pictured a smiling white-haired couple beside a headline that read: "Retirement: The Golden Years."

When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, for months and months, possibly years, perhaps even on her college applications, she would answer, "Retired."

Naturally, this was disconcerting not to mention somewhat embarrassing. Silly us, we had numerous ideas for her immediate future, none of which included walking hand-in-hand on the beach at sunset with an elderly white-haired man in need of a hip replacement.

The brochure painted a rosy — extremely rosy — picture of retirement that focused heavily on the social aspects, primarily the togetherness of a couple enjoying one another's company, traveling together, playing golf together, sailing together, bicycling



Lori Borgman

together, dining in vineyards together, climbing Mt. Everest together, sitting on a dock dangling their feet in the water together and enjoying hot air balloon rides together.

Clearly, the couple on the brochure had invested well.

There was no mention of doctor appointments, cholesterol levels, blood pressure diaries, reading glasses, hair loss, joint pain, fallen arches, cardiac stress tests or how navigating health insurance, finances and taxes all become tantamount to an extremely frustrating part-time job.

In part, the brochure was correct: The upside of retirement is that couples can spend more time together. What the brochure neglected to say was that the upside can also have a downside.

Several years ago, a

friend called and said, "I'm at the grocery store. Alone."

"So?" I said.

"So?" she snapped. "It's the first time I've been to the grocery alone in six months since my husband retired."

Another woman said her recently retired husband was driving her nuts. Asked how, she said, "With all that clicking he does on his computer keyboard."

Some have a lower tolerance for pain than others. The old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" may have been written by a retiree.

Years ago, an older gentleman who was retired told me that he was a night owl who slept in every morning and that his wife was a morning person awake at the crack of dawn. "It's the secret to our happy marriage in retirement," he said.

How much togetherness is too much togetherness?

I couldn't tell you. Every couple must figure that out for themselves.

What I can tell you is that it is 10 a.m. and my better half is still sleeping.

Promise ...

Continued from page 3B

"Their whole job is to break you down and build you back up. But I realized if I rebelled, I wouldn't graduate," Bond said.

Once he settled into Marine life, Bond thoroughly enjoyed the physical part of the job. He had never shot a pistol before, and found he excelled at it.

Bond hadn't visited much beyond Philadelphia, but the military took him to Vietnam and Japan. He worked as a range coach, helping other Marines with their rifle skills.

He returned to Philadelphia in the mid-1970s. At first, civilian life was a struggle, particularly because of post-traumatic stress disorder, but Bond eventually got a city job, working as an equipment operator with the Philadelphia Water Department.

Life was busy, with Bond building a family, and there was no time for school. But in 1977, his mother, Elizabeth Bond, was in her final days.

"When she died, I made a promise to her — that I would get my diploma, because her whole thing was for all of her kids to get an education," Bond said. The promise felt elusive at times — he had three children and a lot of responsibilities. In 1995, he joined the Army National Guard, and in 2002, he was called up to active duty, deploying to Iraq for Operation Enduring Freedom.

"I was focused on my family duties, making sure that my kids would have a chance to get a good education," Bond said. "To be honest, school for me was the furthest thing from my mind. I just wanted to take care of my family."

Back to school

After 35 years as a city employee, Bond retired in 2013.

At this point, he had 10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, and he had more time on his hands, his family let him know.

"They kept getting on me about going back to school," he said. Finally, in 2023, he was ready to show his grandchildren — the youngest of whom is in seventh grade — and great-grands that it's never too late to learn.

"You can't tell somebody to do some-

thing you're not going to do," he said. "Sometimes in life, you have voids that need to be filled. This was one of the voids I needed to fill."

Returning to high school 50-plus years after last leaving was daunting, but Bond was determined to stick the landing this time, and was astonished at what he could push himself to do, even after a decades-long gap.

"I never did like English or art, and those are two of my best subjects now," said Bond. "I enjoyed school more now than I did when I was coming here before."

Yvonna Walls, Bond's art teacher, said he was reserved and quiet when he first entered her class.

"He thought he wasn't going to be able to accomplish the things that we were going to ask of him in class," Walls said. He was a little fuzzy on technology, and had never really been asked to draw.

"He would always say, 'I have never done this before,' or 'I haven't done this in so long,'" said Walls. "But he was willing to try and to persevere through any assignment he was given. Sometimes he would say, 'Hey can I take this home and bring it back to you tomorrow?' And he always did."

'Dream come true'

Walls was a little astonished at the social side of things — after worrying what it would be like returning to school with people who were his grandchildren's age, he found he fit in really well.

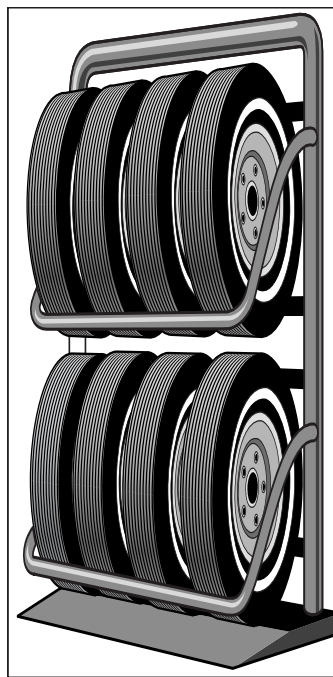
"Nobody never disrespected me," he said. "I was a little surprised about that. Sometimes the younger people can be a little disrespectful. I'm like a grandfather to just about everybody in here. I look up to them, they look up to me, we sit down and we talk."

He had an unexpected thrill, too — he attended his high school prom, and was crowned prom king.

"It was a dream come true," said Bond.

He didn't want a graduation party — he's a low-key kind of guy. But he has big plans for his long-delayed diploma.

"I'm going to blow it up, get it 20 by 30," Bond said. "As soon as you come in the living room, it's going to be right there looking in your face."



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