



Senior CONNECTIONS

A local guide
to valuable
resources,
services and
advice for
today's seniors



A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT OF JENNINGS DAILY NEWS

COA offers critical resources for seniors

Jeff Davis Council on Aging (COA) offers critical resources and currently is partially reopened for seniors in the parish.

COA was closed last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and four local seniors said they missed the fellowship, coffee and critical resources provided by the agency.

Merella LaFleur, 78, of Jennings said when the COA was closed last year, she was ready to call the governor's office to protest.

"I said I want his phone number if it stays closed," she said. "I missed the exercise and the fellowship. It gives me something to do besides stay at home by myself."

LaFleur said she has been going to the COA for the last 20 years.

"I was very disappointed when they closed last year," she said. "Seniors really need the COA. We

know we can call them if we need something and that we are not alone.”

Marjorie Broussard, 91, of Jennings said she has been going to the COA since Christmas of 1998.

"I missed the fellowship and getting all the good gossip," she said. "I live alone, so I come here for the company."

Helen Vital, 71, of Lacassine has been going to the COA three days a week over the last nine years.

"I miss the crawfish boils, Thanksgiving dinner and bingo the most," she said. "They really know how to spoil us."

Vital currently lives with her sister in Lacassine because her house was destroyed during Hurricane Laura.

"Coming here really helps with everything," she said. "We are like one big family and we support each other."

Seniors Elvena Dugas (from left) and, Kay Prudhomme, both of Lacassine, and Marjorie Broussard, Merella LaFleur, Director Helen Langley and Helen Vital, all of Jennings, gather for coffee and fellowship at Jeff Davis Council on Aging each week.

Submitted photo

Vital's sister, Kay Prudhomme, 67, of Lacassine said seniors need more support from local government.

"We need contributions from the city, individuals and the police jury to offer more services for seniors here," she said. "There are still a lot of seniors that need help in the parish."

COA Executive Director Helen Langley said the greatest challenges seniors face today are financial hardships, lack of transportation and malnutrition.

"Many of them were on edge when we were closed," she said. "The

COA is a lifeline for so many seniors."

She said with more funding from taxes and local entities, COA could do so much more for seniors in the parish.

"We have been trying

to pass a tax for 36 years and the police jury always turns us down," she said. "The city can afford to do more. We keep trying though. We are not giving up."

With more funding,

Langley said the agency could purchase new exercise equipment, more transportation and more critical services to seniors.

Even with limited

See **COA** Page **3**



File photo

Linda Roy, Marie Fuselier, Geraldine Segura and Dorquin Glover, all of Jennings, participate in the aerobics class held in the Wellness Center, Monday - Thursday from 8 - 9 a.m.



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File photos

Elvenia Dugas (above) and Kay Prudhomme (below), both of Lacassine, opt to use the resistance exercise machines to get their blood flowing for their morning exercise routine.

COA from page 1

hours, the COA sees about 50 people a day for the exercise program alone.

"They do stay six feet apart and wear masks when necessary," she said. "They also come at different times during the day so that there are not too many people coming at one time."

COA is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to noon and is following the current COVID-19 regulations.

"We are checking everyone's temperature at the door and providing a copy of the rules set by the state," Langley said.

Anyone who has received both rounds of the COVID-19 vaccine can come in, and those who have not received the vaccine must wear a mask and follow the social distancing requirements.



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Simple ways to maintain memory as you age

Adults confront various age-related side effects as they transition from middle age to their golden years. Skin may begin to wrinkle and hair may turn gray, but those are just the visible side effects of aging. Many additional effects are unseen, but those changes can have a profound effect on adults' quality of life.

According to the Mayo Clinic, various parts of the body are affected by aging. For example, the cardiovascular system changes as people grow older. Blood vessels and arteries stiffen as adults age, forcing the heart to work harder to pump blood through them.

Though many changes are linked to aging, other changes commonly associated with aging, such as a decline in memory, reasoning and other thinking skills, are not natural. The Alzheimer's Association® notes that dementia is not a normal part of aging. There are many different types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, and these are the result of damage to brain cells that affect a person's ability to communicate.



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Memory loss is not an inevitable side effect of aging, especially for adults who take steps to maintain their memories as they age.

That damage is not inevitable, even if it's commonly associated with aging.

The Harvard Medical School notes that fleeting memory problems experienced with aging often reflect normal changes in the structure and function of the brain. But it's

important that those changes not be mistaken for dementia, and it's equally important that adults recognize there are many ways they can protect and sharpen their minds as they age.

- **Continue learning.** HMS notes that a higher level of education is as-

sociated with improved mental functioning in old age. The reasons for that are unknown, but experts theorize that advanced education compels people to remain mentally active, which in turn helps them maintain a strong memory. Even aging men and women who

are still working in challenging fields can benefit from pursuing a new hobby or learning a new skill.

- **Use the tools at your disposal.** It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that organizational tools like planners, maps and lists can help people maintain their memories. However, HMS notes that expending mental energy on finding car keys or trying to remember what to buy at the store makes it harder to learn new and important things.

- **Let all your senses play a role.** HMS reports that the more senses a person uses to learn something, the more his or her brain is involved in retaining a memory. HMS cites one study in which adults were shown a series of emotionally neutral images that were each presented along with a smell. Participants were not asked to recall what they saw, but were later shown a set of images and asked to indicate which they had previously seen. The participants had excellent recall for the odor-paired images, and researchers believe

that's because additional parts of the brain were activated when participants were asked to use more than one sense.

Memory loss is not an inevitable side effect of aging, especially for adults who take steps to maintain their memories as they age.

Did you know?

Leisure activities may be widely viewed as fun ways to fill up free time, but the benefits of leisure activities extend beyond beating boredom. A 2011 analysis published in the journal *BBA Molecular Basis of Disease* found that leisure activities have a positive impact on cognitive function and dementia. The analysis, conducted by researchers with the Aging Research Center in Stockholm who examined various studies regarding the relationship between certain activities and cognitive function, defined leisure activity as the voluntary use of free time for activities outside the home. After retirement, leisure time constitutes a large part of many retirees' lives, and finding ways to fill that time is more beneficial than merely avoiding boredom.

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Landry: Key to staying healthy is staying active

Mary Landry, of Hathaway, believes being active is the key to staying healthy as you age.

"I think it is very important to stay active because it helps maintain a positive attitude," she said. "It also helps you from becoming complacent and lonely."

Landry, 81, is a valued and active member of several local organizations including Catholic Daughters in Hathaway, Volunteers for Family and Community and Vice President of Jeff Davis Republican Women. Landry said she enjoys being amongst fellow senior citizens who are active in community efforts to bring people together and help those in need.

"I always try to stay productive and do for others," she said. "God has been very

good to me in keeping me healthy and active. I've had a few setbacks over the years, but overall my health is very good."

It is not only her love of volunteering that keeps her healthy, it is also the activities she participates in with her friends.

"I spend as much time with my friends as I can," she said. "We have a rosary group that meets once a week and I am also a member of the Red Hat Society in Hathaway. We get together once a month, dressed in our best purple and red outfits and spend the day having lunch and shopping. It's good to be able to do that every now and then, especially because COVID has put a damper on many of our regularly scheduled meetings."



Mary Landry

Landry has five children, 19 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren that keep her heart full and her feet busy.

"My children took me dancing for the

first time in a while recently," she said. "My only complaint was I didn't get to dance enough, but we had a great time and I look forward to doing it again. Staying close to family is very important."

Landry also spends time in her beautiful yard, full of 40-year-old oak trees, flower beds and an enormous barbecue pit she and her family use often for cookouts.

"We really enjoy our time together as a family," she said. "They are my world and I don't know what I would do without them."

Despite the risks she and people in her age group face due to the pandemic, Landry says she does her best to stay active.

"I realize I am in the high risk category, so I was vaccinated as soon as it was available to me," she said. "It gives me peace of mind and makes me feel safe knowing that I'm vaccinated and protecting myself and my loved ones. I encourage everyone, not only senior citizens, to put their political views aside and look at the vaccine as a means of protecting ourselves and the people we come in contact with."

What to know before claiming Social Security benefits

Hardworking adults spend years striving to achieve their professional goals. Along the way, planning for retirement is a way to ensure all that hard work pays off when the time comes to call it a career.

In the United States, men and women nearing retirement age may be thinking about when they should begin collecting their Social Security retirement benefits. Social Security is a social insurance program instituted by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935. The program consists of retirement, disability and survivor benefits, and workers in the United States contribute to Social Security each week.

The decision about when to claim Social Security retirement benefits is one all those who have contributed to the program must eventually make. In recognition of the difficulty of that decision, the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau offers the following tips to people wondering when they should begin collecting their Social Security benefits.

- **Confirm your full retirement age.** Full retirement age refers to the age at which people can begin collecting their full benefits. Depending on the year you were born, you can begin collecting your full benefit at age 66 or 67. Claiming your benefit before you reach full retirement age will lead to a permanent decrease in your monthly benefits. Conversely, claiming after you reach full retirement age will lead to a permanent increase in your monthly benefits.

- **Delay claiming if you can.** The CFPB notes that you can expect to get an additional 5 to 8 percent in monthly benefits for every year you wait to claim your Social Security benefits after age 62, maxing out at age 70.

- **Budget for retirement.**

Short- and long-term budgeting for retirement can help you assess how much money you will need to cover your expenses when you stop working. This step can help you understand how much a reduced or increased Social Security benefit will affect your bottom line in retirement.

- **Continue working.** Remaining in the workforce full-time or even part-time can have a considerable impact on the size of your Social Security benefit. The CFPB notes that continuing to work for one or two additional years can replace low- or no-income earnings from your earnings record, thereby increasing your benefit.

- **Consider the long-term needs of your spouse.** Surviving spouses receive the higher of the two spouses' benefits. So it makes sense for the higher earning spouse to wait to collect his or her benefit until he or she reaches full retirement age.

EYE EXAM!

Doctors recommend that seniors get an eye exam every year after age 60. That's because seniors are at greater risk for eye diseases that can cause vision loss if undetected. Don't delay.



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How to build friendships in your golden years



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Making friends as a child or even as a parent to school-aged children is relatively easy. Classrooms and school functions facilitate the building of friendships. Even as one gets older and enters the workforce, it's not uncommon for people to become friends with their coworkers.

As people near retirement age, their situations may have changed considerably. Children have moved out, careers are coming to an end and friendships may be hard to maintain due to people relocating or traveling. Older adults may aspire to make new friends, but they may not know how.

According to Irene S Levine, Ph.D., The Friendship Doctor and contributor to Psychology Today, it is not unique for seniors to want to make new friends. Age can be a barrier because there are stereotypes that pigeonhole people of certain ages. But Levine notes that state of mind and physical ability is not directly tied to chronological age. Making friends is possible at any age. These guidelines can

Making friends is possible at any age. These guidelines can help along the way.

help along the way.

- **Explore online connections.** A 2016 study published in the Journal of Gerontology found seniors (even those in their 80s) who stay connected with friends and family using social media report feeling less lonely and better overall. Connected seniors also demonstrated higher executive reasoning skills. There are plenty of ways to meet new people online by joining social media groups that cater to your interests. In person meetings in particular cities or regions of the country also can make for great ways to make new friends. Exercise caution when meeting people in person after contacting them online. Bring another person along, whether it's a spouse or an adult child, to ensure that you are safe.

- **Volunteer your time.** One way to meet new people is to get involved with causes or activities you love. This serves the double

benefit of getting you outside and active and puts you in touch with people who share your passions and interests.

- **Attend alumni events.** If you have an interest getting in touch with someone from your past and reconnecting, make the time to attend school reunions and other alumni activities. It can be fun to reconnect with friends from high school or college.

- **Join a gym.** The local gym isn't just a great place to get physically fit. Group exercise classes also can be ideal places to meet other people who enjoy working out. Strike up a conversation with another class participant you see on a regular basis. Once you develop a rapport, schedule lunch dates so your friendship grows outside of the gym.

Making friends is not just for the young. Men and women over 50 also can find ways to build new friendships.

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As people age, many expect their health to begin to deteriorate at least a little bit. While science has made many advancements and people are now living longer and healthier lives, there are still some signs people recognize as a sign of aging.

* Roughly half of the 4 million Americans who have glaucoma are unaware they have it.
* Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness. It's important to get routine eye examinations.
* There are not necessarily symptoms of glaucoma. The importance of eye examinations are further emphasized by the very real likelihood there will be no discernible symptoms of glaucoma, as doctors often diagnose the disease before patients know they even have a vision problem. When vision loss begins, it does so with diminished peripheral vision. Many people subconsciously compensate by turning their head to the side.

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The advantages of RV travel

Individuals who are approaching retirement or those who already have said goodbye to the working world may find they are ready to make some life changes. Travel is something many older adults enjoy when they have much more free time to see the sights.

Recreational vehicles are great ways for people to get out and about. An RV is more than just a way to get around; for many people it becomes a lifestyle. According to the RV Industry Association, about 10 million American households own RVs.

There have been more RVs on the road in recent years, and there are now more facilities to accommodate them. RVIA says there are now roughly 18,000 campgrounds around the country, and certain facilities are pushing to improve and upgrade campgrounds in national parks and on federal lands.

Individuals considering if the RV lifestyle is for them can refer to this list of RVing benefits.

- **Inexpensive travel (or living):** RVers may be at-



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The RV lifestyle may attract soon-to-be retirees. There are various advantages to getting on board.

tracted by the idea of low-cost travel that doesn't involve hotels and airfare and greatly reduces their reliance on restaurants while traveling. RVs can be rented for roughly \$100 to \$500 per day, and RV parks usually run between \$35 and \$50 per

night, according to Allianz Travel Insurance. To keep the costs down even more, certain truck stops, big box retailers, churches, hotels, movie theaters, casinos, rest stops and other roadside locations will allow free overnight parking. Just verify before

staying to avoid being ticketed.

- **Freedom to come and go:** When traveling in an RV, there are no set check-in-/check-out times to follow or boarding times to meet. RV travel can be strictly on your schedule.

- **Plenty of help:** Others who have embraced the RV lifestyle tend to be very friendly and ready to make new acquaintances at campgrounds and other stops. Those with more experience may be willing to share their expertise and pitch in to offer tips for better excursions.

- **Creature comforts:** People who vacation or choose to live in their RVs tend to keep famil-

iar items and essentials on hand. Those can include preferred linens, clothing, toiletries, books, games, and more. When taking such items along, there's no need to pack and unpack much for any trip.

- **Follow the weather:** If desired, RVers can pick up and follow the jet stream. If 70-degree days are your thing, then follow those temperatures coast-to-coast. If you like skiing or snowboarding, you can head to colder climates.

- **Downsize:** The RVIA says that RVs are available across a wide range of price points. So if the idea is to trade in a stationary house for an RV, you may be able to do so for as little as \$6,000 to as much as \$500,000.

Did you know?

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the number of licensed drivers who are 70 and older increased by 65 percent between 1997 and 2018. Older drivers are often considered less safe than their fellow motorists, but statistics from the IIHS indicate that might be a misconception.

While the number of drivers age 70 and older has increased considerably in recent decades, older drivers are now involved in fewer fatal collisions than they were in the past. Collision-related fatalities among drivers ages 70 and older declined by 15 percent between 1997 and 2018.

Though such statistics are encouraging, it's vital that aging drivers recognize that certain physical, cognitive and visual abilities may decline with advancing age, and that such impairment has been linked to an increased risk of being involved in a crash. As a result, it's important that older drivers self-police themselves and pay particular attention to any changes in their abilities that may compromise their ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.



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Effective exercises for seniors

Losing interest in an exercise regimen is a situation many fitness enthusiasts have confronted at one point or another. Overcoming a stale workout routine can be simple for young athletes, whose bodies can typically handle a wide range of physical activities. That flexibility allows younger athletes the chance to pursue any number of physical activities when their existing fitness regimens grow stale. But what about seniors who have grown tired of their workouts?

Even seniors who have lived active lifestyles since they were youngsters are likely to encounter certain physical limitations associated with aging. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the likelihood of dealing with one or more physical limitations increases with age. CDC data indicates that 8 percent of adults between the ages of 50 and 59 have three or more physical limitations. That figure rises to 27 percent among adults age 80 and over.

Physical limitations may be a part of aging for many people, but such obstacles need not limit seniors looking to banish boredom from their workout routines. In fact, many seniors can successfully engage in a variety of exercises that benefit their bodies and are unlikely to grow stale.

- **Water aerobics:** Sometimes referred to as “aqua aerobics,” water aerobics may involve jog-



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Seniors can successfully engage in a variety of exercises that benefit their bodies and are unlikely to grow stale.

ging in the water, leg lifts, arm curls, and other activities that can safely be performed in a pool. The YMCA notes that water aerobics exercises are low impact, which can make them ideal for seniors with bone and joint issues like arthritis.

- **Resistance band workouts:** Resistance band workouts can be especially useful for seniors who spend a lot of time at home. Resistance bands are inexpensive and don't take up a lot of space, making them ideal for people who like to exercise at home but don't have much space. Resistance bands can be used to strengthen muscles in various parts of the body, including the legs, arms and back. Resistance bands can be pulled or pushed in any direction, which allows for more versatility in a workout

than weight machines and dumbbells. That versatility allows seniors to spice up their workout regimens when things get a little stale.

- **Pilates:** Pilates is another low-impact exercise that can be ideal for seniors with bone and joint issues. According to SilverSneakers®, a community fitness program for seniors that promotes living through physical and social engagement, Pilates can help seniors build overall strength, stability and coordination. SilverSneakers® even notes that seniors can experience improvements in strength and stability by committing to as little as 10 to 15 minutes of daily Pilates exercises.

- **Strength training:** Seniors on the lookout for something more challenging than a daily walk

around the neighborhood should not overlook the benefits of strength training. The CDC notes that seniors who participate in strength training can stimulate the growth of muscle and bone, thereby reducing their risk for osteoporosis and frailty. In fact, the CDC notes that people with health concerns like arthritis or heart disease often benefit the most from exercise regimens that include lifting weights a few times each week.

Physical limitations are a part of aging. But seniors need not let such limitations relegate them to repetitive, boring workouts.



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