

Senior Living

APRIL 2014



PHOTO COURTESY OF ONEAUM YOGA

Potomac

ALMANAC

A 70-year-old yoga student performs a handstand at OneAum Yoga in Potomac. Instructor Sean . FM says he teaches seniors with a wide range of abilities.

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Senior Living

Seniors Rush to Yoga

Yoga teachers, research point to health benefits for seniors.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE ALMANAC

Shortly after 10 a.m. on any given Tuesday or Thursday morning, 84-year-old Lola Wulchin can be found slowly stretching into a downward facing dog pose or lunging into a warrior one posture. The Vienna resident has been a yoga devotee at East Meets West Yoga Center in Vienna for slightly more than two years. In fact, she credits twice-weekly, gentle yoga practice with boosting her health and improving her quality of life.

"I had been bothered by a lot of neck pain from arthritis," said Wulchin. "I had seen a pain management doctor who gave me shots, I had physical therapy, but I still had neck pain and very little range of motion."

A turning point came after she was struck by a passing comment from one of her doctors. "My neurologist mentioned that his wife had been doing yoga for back pain and it had helped. So I decided to try it."

Wulchin embarked on a twice-weekly ritual that she describes as life changing. "My gentle yoga classes have been a God-send," she said. "I have less pain now. I still



PHOTO COURTESY OF EAST MEETS WEST YOGA CENTER

Linda Liberatucci, 67, Colette Ashley, 70+, Ann Mandelbaum, 68, Lola Wulchin, 84 and Frankie Gibson, 74, do a downward facing dog pose during gentle yoga class at East Meets West Yoga Center in Vienna.

have some stiffness, but I have a better range of motion."

She isn't the only senior to reap the benefits of yoga. Researchers at the American

Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine and the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation conducted an eight-week study of 23 adults aged 62 to 83 years old.

They designed a yoga program for that age group with the goals of improving lower-body strength and flexibility. Participants

SEE YOGA, PAGE 6

Keeping up with Neal Gillen

Potomac attorney, open-water swimmer doesn't slow down.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

The fog was thick in San Francisco as waves crashed against the rocks in the Pacific Ocean. It was a cold morning and 73-year-old Neal Gillen found himself fighting against the current, gulps of salt water burning his mouth. Far from his Potomac home, he was heading for Alcatraz.

As he forged through the two-foot swells in the water's 55-degree temperatures, Gillen knew he was in one of the most difficult swims of his life. He was competing in the Orca Alcatraz Challenge Aquathlon & Swim, a 1.5 mile race in the San Francisco Bay.

Gripped by pain in his legs and lower back, Gillen found the mental strength to keep going by focusing on Mary-Margaret Gillen, his wife of 50 years, and their daughters Lauren, of Washington, D.C., and Donnelly, of Oakland, Calif.

During that race, the currents around Alcatraz were the most ferocious in the swim's history. Gillen fought his way to the finish, and when he finally he felt the grit



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL/THE ALMANAC

Dozens of family photos and an array of brightly colored equestrian ribbons fill the bookshelves in the light-filled family room of Mary-Margaret and Neal Gillen's home.

of the sandy shore on his fingertips, he knew he'd made it. In fact, he medaled: Gillen finished first in his age group and was the oldest swimmer to finish the race.

"I was exhausted, disoriented and thirsty," he later wrote of the event. "I tried to smile as I listened to the shouts of congratulations, but what I needed was something to hold onto so that I could steady myself."

For Gillen, the desire to to such a swim is not out of the ordinary. "I've always been a dare-devil, even as a kid," he said. "If there was a challenge, I'd take it."

SEE GILLEN, PAGE 8

**POTOMAC
ALMANAC**

Senior Living

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Aging in Place Gracefully

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE ALMANAC

The AARP reports that nearly 80 percent of adults age 65 and older want to remain in their current homes as long as possible. That population is growing. According to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging, the population 65 years or older numbered 39.6 million in 2009. By 2030, that number will grow to about 72.1 million.

While people are living longer and healthier lives, there are still barriers to aging in place, including medication management, self-care, socialization and transportation. But there are innovative strategies and initiatives to help combat these roadblocks.

"We're showing people how to modify their home so that it is accessible," said Robert C. Eiffert, the Long Term Care Program manager for the Fairfax County Health Department. Fairfax and other local counties are conducting workshops on how to make a home safe for a senior who wants to live alone. "We're talking about things like adding a ramp to your front door, changing your door knobs and cabinet handles for people who have arthritis in their hands."

"There are wonderful emerging technologies that allow adult children to monitor their parents who live alone," he said. "It is not intrusive. There are not cameras involved, but there are motion sensors. For example, if there is no movement in the morning, an adult child might think, 'Hmmm, I need to check.'"

Andrew J. Carle, director of the Senior Housing Administration at George Mason University, recommends First Street for Boomers and Beyond (www.firststreetonline.com) which offers products for seniors and their caregivers. "Products like a nice walk in bathtub for seniors or an alarm that reminds you when to take your medicine are things you can do to change your home and make it safe."



Members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University take an educational field trip. OLLI is also offered at American University and the University of Maryland and other places around the country. See www.osherfoundation.org

A LACK OF SOCIAL interaction and mental stimulation can contribute to depression and mental deterioration, Carle said. Organizations like the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at George Mason University, offer opportunities for intellectual stimulation and cultural experiences for retirees in Northern Virginia.

"OLLI, as we call it, is for people who don't want to sit around and watch television all day," said Carle. "Professors volunteer their time to give lectures on art, history, science and other topics. Listening to professors speak about stimulating topics helps keep their brains sharp."

Jennifer Disano, OLLI's executive director, says the group has 1,200 members, and is funded by an endowment from the Bernard Osher Foundation. The group's main campus is in Fairfax, but other campuses are in Reston and Sterling. It serves the needs of those who might not feel comfortable in traditional college classrooms and don't want the pressure of writing papers and taking tests, but are still interested in learning.

"We have people here who were economists and worked with finance, but in their retired life they want to explore areas ... like art classes or history classes," she said.

One of those members is 76-year-old John Woods. He has attended three to four OLLI events a week for 10 years. "We have a wide variety of professionals and a wide variety of groups that meet," he said. "We have a group that meets to talk about financial investments. Another group meets every Monday morning at 9 a.m. and looks at the past week's headlines from the Washington Post, New York Times and Wall Street Journal. They have insights that are important. The stimulating thing is sharing ideas among ourselves."

VILLAGES ARE community-based organizations designed to help members help each other remain independent and in the communities of their choice.

"Back in 2000, villages started with a group in Boston, and in 2007 there was a big boom," said Barbara Sullivan, executive director of Mount Vernon at Home in Mount Vernon. "It is community-based. Every village is different, but they're there for people who want to age in place."

Eiffert, of George Mason, says village members define the type and scope of services. "A good starting point when creating a village is to survey the community members to determine their needs," he said. "We provide technical assistance to community groups that are interested in putting together a village and encouragement on what models work best for their community."

Fairfax County is working with Montgomery County to rewrite the manual on how to start a village. "There are a few different models, including the 'Concierge Village,' which is a non-profit model that coordinates access to an array of services through vetted providers, including transportation, home repairs, care coordination and computer technicians. Most also include social and educational activities. Members arrange for services by calling a central phone number, and pay annual dues that can range from \$500 to \$800 for an individual and \$700 to \$1,200 for a couple."

The "All Volunteer" model organizes community volunteers to provide services and support to others. There are no paid staff. In some cases, hours donated by volunteers are "banked" and can be used in the future if the volunteer needs services or assistance. The "Neighborhood Network" is also informal. Groups meet on a regular basis to hear speakers on topics of interest selected by members.

Carle agrees that the decision to age in place is complicated. "The first knee-jerk reaction is that when asked, seniors want to stay in their own homes," he said, adding that those surveys can be misleading: "The surveys are not always credible if you're surveying people who are 50-plus. I'm 54 and of course I want to stay in my house, but ask me again in 20 years. I think they should be surveying people who are 75-plus."

In addition, "people don't always understand the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE

Members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at George Mason University play music for their peers.



Organizers of the Potomac Community Village are, from left, Nelly Urbach, Jane Blocher and Shirley Dominitz. "The village concept is a community of neighbors who both give and receive help as needed. Although services are targeted to older people, members of the village can be of all ages. We want to encourage people who represent all segments of the Potomac Community to become involved," said Urbach.

economic, social and safety aspects of it," he added. "You can create all kinds of technology and universal designs to create a house for aging in place, but a

Many local techniques and programs can help seniors stay in their homes longer.

Senior Calendar

THURSDAY/APRIL 3

Discussion. 12:30-2 p.m. at Potomac Library, 10101 Glenolden Drive. The Friends of the Library will discuss "Turkey's Challenges." Free. Visit www.fpa.org or 240-777-0690.

FRIDAY/APRIL 4

Sugarloaf Crafts Festival. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. at Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 16 Chestnut St., Gaithersburg. More than 250 American artisans will show and sell their handcrafted work. Browse pottery, sculpture, glass, fashion, metal, fine art and more. Food, demonstrations, children's activities and live music will also be available. \$8/online or \$10/door for adults; children under 12 are free. Visit www.sugarloafcrafs.com or call 800-210-9900.

SATURDAY/APRIL 5

Sugarloaf Crafts Festival. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. at Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 16 Chestnut St., Gaithersburg. More than 250 American artisans will show and sell their handcrafted work. Browse pottery, sculpture, glass, fashion, metal, fine art and more. Food, demonstrations, children's activities and live music will also be available. \$8/online or \$10/door for adults; children under 12 are free. Visit www.sugarloafcrafs.com or call 800-210-9900.

Artist Roundtable. 2 p.m. at VisArts, 155 Gibbs St., Rockville. Featuring artists, from "Abstraction: Finding the Thread." Free. Visit www.visartscenter.org or call 301-315-8200.

Opening Reception. 3 p.m.-6 p.m. at River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road Bethesda. Opening reception for Group of Four featuring the work of George L. Smyth, Barry Schmitter, D. B. Stovall, and Scott Davis. Call 301-229-0400 before attending. Visit www.rruuc.org for more.

Meet the Artists. 6-10 p.m., meet the artists of "Expressions in Glass" in the Popcorn Gallery at Glen Echo Park, 7300 MacArthur Blvd. Glassworks resident artist Paul Swartwood will exhibit works in blown glass, along with artists Mark Hill, Carol Hurwitz, Allan Jaworski, and Kevin Lurie, with whom he collaborated. Free. Visit www.glencehopark.org or 301-634-2222.

Chamber Music. 7:30 p.m. at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, 6601 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda. The Bradley Hills Presents Concert Series will feature The Thirteen in the final concert of the season. A reception to meet the artists will follow the concert. \$20, \$15/seniors and students, at the door. Visit www.bradleyhillschurch.org/concerts for more.

SUNDAY/APRIL 6

Sugarloaf Crafts Festival. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 16 Chestnut St., Gaithersburg. More than 250 American artisans will show and sell their handcrafted work. Browse pottery, sculpture, glass, fashion, metal, fine art and more. Food, demonstrations, children's activities and live music will also be available. \$8/online or \$10/door for adults; children under 12 are free. Visit www.sugarloafcrafs.com or call 800-210-9900.

College Prep Class for Jews. 7:30 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington, 6125 Montrose Road, Rockville. Learn how to incorporate Jewish lifestyle into your collegiate years. Free admission, contact shoreshhebrewhigh@gmail.com.

MONDAY/APRIL 7

Information Session. 7:30 p.m., at the Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Ave, Rockville. The Literacy Council of Montgomery County will hold an information session for volunteers interested in helping adults learn to read, write, or speak English. Call 301-610-0030, email info@literacycouncilmcmd.org, or visit www.literacycouncilmcmd.org for more.

WEDNESDAY/APRIL 9

Information Session. 10:30 a.m. at Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Ave, Rockville. The Literacy Council of Montgomery County will hold an information session for volunteers interested in helping adults learn to read, write, or speak English. Call 301-610-0030, email info@literacycouncilmcmd.org, or visit www.literacycouncilmcmd.org for more.

THURSDAY/APRIL 10

Spring Fashion Show. 11 a.m. at Norbeck Country Club, 17200 Cassell Road, Rockville. Boutique opens at 11 a.m., lunch at noon and fashion show at 1 p.m. Proceeds benefit BNC Sustaining the Mind: Research for Neurodegenerative Diseases. \$35, reservations required by March 31. Contact Sheila at 301-924-0006 or jaxshe@aol.com.

Final Series Meeting. 6 p.m. at the Park and Planning Montgomery Regional Office Building Auditorium, 8787 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring. The Montgomery County Planning Department is hosting the third and final session of their Winter Speakers Series with a focus on housing. Free. Visit www.montgomeryplanning.org for more.

SUNDAY/APRIL 13

Tiger Trot 5K Run and Walk. 8:30 a.m. at Connelly School of the Holy Child, 9029 Bradley Blvd. Runners and walkers of all abilities can participate. Proceeds benefit Holy Child and Cabin John Park Volunteer Fire Department. Visit www.holychild.org/tigertrot to register, or register day of event.

WEDNESDAY/APRIL 16

Candidates Forum. 6:30 p.m. at Rockville Memorial Library, 21 Maryland Ave, Rockville. The Montgomery County Civic Federation (Civic Fed), the Montgomery County Taxpayers League and the Parents' Coalition of Montgomery County, Maryland announce the County Executive Candidates Forum. All four county executive candidates have agreed to participate. Visit www.montgomerycivic.org.

Divorce Seminar. 7-9 p.m. at Shulman Rogers Bldg. 6th Fl., 12505 Park Potomac, Ave., Potomac. Collaborative Divorce Process Seminar - a little less painful way to divorce. Free, but reservations required. Email jdamico.cdrp@gmail.com.

SUNDAY-TUESDAY/APRIL 27-29

Training. Jewish Social Service Agency is seeking volunteers for its Hospice and Transitions programs. The upcoming 20-hour specialized training for prospective volunteers is from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at JSSA, 6123 Montrose Road, Rockville. Jewish Social Service Agency's Hospice and Transitions programs provide professional care and volunteer support to seriously and terminally ill individuals and their families in our community. They also provide bereavement support for 13 months following a loved one's death. Applications and interviews will be required for those interested in the volunteer training. Volunteers must be over the age of 18. Contact Amy Kaufman Goot at 301-816-2650 or agoott@jssa.org. Visit www.jssa.org for more.

MONDAY/APRIL 28

Winds for Warriors Charity Gala. 7:30 p.m. at the Music Center, 5301 Tucker Lane. The Capital Wind Symphony will hold a gala with proceeds benefiting the Wounded Warrior Project. Visit www.strathmore.org.

SATURDAY/MAY 3

ARTS. 11 a.m.-6 p.m. at Rockville Town Square Plaza, 200 E. Middle Lane. Local, regional and national artists will sell original pieces, there will be music and more. Free. Visit www.arts.org for more.

SUNDAY/MAY 4

ARTS. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. at Rockville Town Square Plaza, 200 E. Middle Lane. Local, regional and national artists will sell original pieces, there will be music and more. Free. Visit www.arts.org for more.

SUNDAY/MAY 18

Run for the Animals. 8-10 a.m. at Wheaton Regional Park, 2000 Shorefield Road, Silver Spring. Hosted by Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary, run a 5K or enjoy a fun 1-mile walk. Proceeds benefit Poplar Spring. There will be food, prizes, raffles and more. Tickets are \$25-\$30. Visit www.animalsanctuary.org or poplarspring.kintera.org for more.

Seniors Rush to Yoga

FROM PAGE 3

attended two 90-minute yoga classes per week, and were asked to complete at least 20 minutes of directed home practice on alternate days.

The study found yoga programs tailored to elderly adults can be a cost-effective way to prevent or reduce age-related changes, specifically an increased risk for falls, dependency and other ailments.

Local yoga teachers agree, saying that while yoga classes designed for the 55 and older crowd are increasing in popularity, myths about the practice keep some seniors out of yoga studios.

“The main thing that I hear is that you have to already be flexible to do yoga,” said Sandy Pradas of Joyful Heart Yoga in Mount Vernon. “People look at pictures in magazines of people wrapping their legs around their necks or doing other advanced poses and they think, ‘If I can’t do that, then I can’t do yoga.’”

Pradas, whose students are mostly between 50 and 75 years old, said, “Everybody can do yoga, but there are a lot of types of yoga and not every type is good for everybody.”

Dawn Curtis, owner of East Meets West Yoga Center, recently completed a course at Duke Integrative Medicine and believes an increasing interest in yoga among seniors will be known as the Silver Tsunami.

“That is baby boomers going into yoga,” she said. “Yoga for seniors is going to be



Arlington seniors take a hatha yoga classes. A recent study showed yoga programs specifically designed for seniors can improve strength and flexibility.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EAST MEETS WEST YOGA CENTER

Seniors Linda Liberatucci, 67, Colette Ashley, 70+, Ann Mandelbaum, 68, Lola Wulchin, 84 and Frankie Gibson, 74, do a downward facing dog pose during gentle yoga class at East Meets West Yoga Center in Vienna.

“Everybody can do yoga, but there are a lot of types of yoga and not every type is good for everybody.”

— Sandy Pradas, Joyful Heart Yoga

the biggest target audience that yoga teachers are going to have because of the number of baby boomers who are looking for alternative ways of exercise because they are not going to be able to keep up with impact exercises like running.”

In fact, she says gentle yoga classes are among the most popular at her studio. “I have students who are as old as 84. We deal with people who can’t get on the floor,” she said. “We use chairs. We work on balance because that is a main concern among seniors. We work on coordination because that is another thing that tends to diminish as we age.”

Jennifer Collins, a countywide program specialist in the Office of Senior Adult Programs in Arlington, said that yoga classes that are specifically tailored for those 55 and

older are among her office’s most popular.

“Some of our [yoga] classes fill up within minutes of opening,” said Collins. “We have people sitting at computers at our senior centers ready to register as soon registration opens because they know the classes are going to fill.”

Sean .FM (yes, that is his name) of OneAum in Potomac, works with seniors with a wide range of abilities. He said it’s important to find a class that is a good fit.

“There are many kinds of seniors,” he said. “There are seniors that are immobile and some who are really active. We have a student who is almost 70 and I just taught him how to do a handstand. We created Yoga Rx for those with mobility issues. We work them in the chairs. We also do a lot of private sessions.”

George Lynch, fitness director at Vinson Hall Retirement Community in McLean, is planning to incorporate yoga classes into the community’s fitness program. The instruction will be tailored to meet the needs of his clients. “We have residents who are in their 80s, 90s and some in their 100s. Everything we do is designed specifically for seniors.”

Andrew J. Carle director of the Senior Housing Administration at George Mason University said an increasing number of retirement communities are offer yoga classes as part of their fitness programs. “The future of senior housing will include science-based wellness activities like yoga,” he said. “Anything that gets us beyond senior activities such as birthdays, Bibles, bingo and bridge is a step up.”

PHOTO COURTESY OF ONEAUM YOGA

A 70-year-old yoga student performs a handstand at OneAum Yoga in Potomac, Md.



Senior Calendar and Volunteer Opportunities

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Jewish Council for the Aging is looking for senior volunteers to **teach and coach computer classes** at on site in Rockville and Gaithersburg. Classes are designed to help seniors refresh or advance computer skills and learn to use social media. Courses being offered are beginner and intermediate Windows 7, Microsoft Excel, creating photo books and videos, iPad and more. Visit www.AccessJCA.org. If interested, contact Robin Blackman at seniortech@accessjca.org or 240-395-0916.

The Montgomery County Board of Elections is seeking **bilingual voters** to work at early voting sites and at polling places on Election Day. Voters with Spanish speaking fluency are especially needed. Bilingual voters are needed for Election Day, which is on Tuesday, June 24, and during Early Voting every day from June 12 to June 19. If interested, contact the Montgomery County Board of Elections at 240-777-8532, download an election judge questionnaire from www.777vote.org, or e-mail Dr. Gilberto Zelaya at gilberto.zelaya@montgomerycountymd.gov.

A local version of the **Peace Corps** has been established in Montgomery County by County Executive Ike Leggett. Called Montgomery Corps., it gives five county residents an opportunity to dedicate one year of service to Montgomery County.

Parks need support from the surrounding communities for volunteers to work at many visitor centers. Volunteers are needed to help visitors, take phone calls, operate the cash register and keep small gift shop stocked, and assist with special events and programming. Hours are flexible and each volunteer will receive an orientation to the Visitor Center and visitor services. Volunteers are needed at Cumberland, Hancock, Williamsport, Ferry Hill, Brunswick, Lander Lockhouse, Great Falls, and Georgetown. For locations between Cumberland and Lander, contact Curt Gaul at 301-582-0813 or curt_gaul@nps.gov. For Great Falls or Georgetown, contact Becca Jameson at 301-767-3709 or rebecca_jameson@nps.gov.

The Bethesda Urban Partnership is looking for volunteers to help assist with various local festivals including Taste of Bethesda in Oct. E-mail info@bethesda.org. BUP is a non-profit organization that handles landscaping and maintenance as well as promotion of the downtown through innovative marketing campaigns and large-scale events to foster an environment in which downtown Bethesda can thrive and prosper. **Call 301-215-6660, or email** info@bethesda.org.

CANTER-Mid Atlantic to open a racehorse rehabilitation program with donations from Delaware Park and the Delaware Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association earmarked to serve Delaware Park trainers and owners. To find an ex-race horse, volunteer, or make a donation, visit www.canterusa.org/midatlantic.

To become a volunteer **Bike Patrol member** on the C&O Canal, contact Norman Liebow at liebow@comcast.net or 301-714-2218.

The Greater Chesapeake and Potomac Blood Services Region of the American Red Cross is seeking volunteers to assist its blood collections staff at blood drives and blood donor centers. Call the American Red Cross Volunteer Office at 1-800-272-0094, ext. 1, or e-mail karlofft@usa.redcross.org.

Volunteers are needed to assist sexual assault victims and their families through the **Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program** of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. To schedule an interview visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vasap or 240-777-1355.

ONGOING

Find information for home care, housing, transportation, or senior lifestyle issues by calling the **Senior Helpline** at 301-255-4200. This free service, offered by the Jewish Council for the Aging, and open to everyone, provides expert referrals to more than 4,000 resources in the greater Washington, D.C. area.

County residents can drop off **bulky rigid plastic items** such as laundry baskets, kiddie pools, chairs, trash cans and pet carriers at the Shady Grove Solid Waste Processing Facility and Transfer Station. All items should be empty, rinsed and free of loose dirt, soil, etc.

Connect-A-Ride offers low-priced transportation to medical appointments, pharmacies, grocery stores and more for low-income, disabled residents 50 and over. Contact the Jewish Council for the Aging at 301-738-3252.

Alzheimer's Association support groups provide a place for people with Alzheimer's, their caregivers, family members, and/or friends to share information, caregiving tips and concerns throughout the Alzheimer's journey. Groups are facilitated by trained group leaders and are ongoing, free and open to the community. Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 800-272-3900 before attending a group for the first time to verify meeting information, obtain directions or other information. A complete list of all groups in the National Capital Area region can be viewed at www.alz.org/nca.

Zumba at Village Yoga. An easy-to-follow, Latin-inspired, calorie-burning dance fitness-party. Classes are offered on Tuesday and Thursday nights from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Saturday mornings at 11:30 a.m., and Sunday afternoon at 5:15. All classes at 10154 River Road. Call 301-299-1948 or visit www.villageyogayogi.com.

Beginner's Yoga Classes at Village Yoga as well as Beginner's Gentle Flow class throughout week. 10154 River Road. For more information call 301-299-1948 or visit www.villageyogayogi.com.

Members Wanted. The Potomac Area Newcomers Club is a group of more than 200 women who have moved to the Potomac area. The club offers bridge, mah jong, book groups, golf, luncheons and museum trips as a way to help newcomers and current residents form new friendships, expand horizons and take advantage of opportunities in the Washington, D.C. area. Visit www.potomacnewcomers.com

English Literacy for Adults. The Literacy Council of Montgomery County offers free literacy classes in reading, writing, listening, speaking, from beginning to advanced levels, including classes that focus on employment skills. The council also offers one-on-one tutoring. Volunteers lead the classes, tutor and act as mentors. The fall class schedule and registration dates are available online. Anyone interested in signing up for a class or volunteering should contact the Literacy Council. Email info@literacycouncilmcmd.org or 301-610-0030.



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Keeping up with Neal Gillen

FROM PAGE 3

Even his friends thought the Alcatraz swim was too much.

“He said to me, ‘Well Tyler, I’m getting ready to swim Alcatraz,’” said Potomac resident Tyler Abell, who has known Gillen since they worked together during the 1960s in the Lyndon Johnson Administration. “I said, ‘That’s crazy. No one has ever swum from Alcatraz to the mainland.’ But he did it. I think Neal is one of the most energetic guys I know. It’s amazing the things he does.”

Gillen has completed the Alcatraz swim four times, and he plans to compete again this year, this time swimming with his daughter Donnelly.

The master swimmer for the Montgomery County Ancient Mariners club has also competed in the Brooklyn Bridge Swim, and has medaled in swimming, as well as basketball, in the Maryland Senior Olympics. He’s qualified for the National Senior Olympics and was recently named to the Maryland Senior Olympics Commission.

Such hard work to maintain his physical well-being has paid off. Dressed in a crisp orange shirt, pressed khaki pants and hiking shoes, Gillen’s fit appearance belies his 76 years.

GILLEN GREW UP in a large Irish Catholic family in Queens, New York, which he credits in part for his drive and predilection for competition.

“I grew up in a house with four Type A women. Even getting to use the bathroom first in my house took determination,” he said of his family, which included his parents, three sisters and one brother. “I get my determination and drive from my mother, who was a very strong woman.”

In addition, “there were a lot of kids” in his apartment complex, “and there was always an opportunity for competition. As kids, everyone was vying for attention, whether it was playing marbles or basketball.”

Gillen graduated with honors from New York University in 1961 and earned his law degree in 1964 from the Georgetown University Law Center. Then he worked on the White House Presidential Advance team for the Lyndon Johnson Administration and served in the U.S. Navy as a member of the Naval Security Group.

Gillen then spent 43 years representing the American Cotton Shippers Association and its federated associations, eventually retiring in 2008 as executive vice president and general counsel. He is currently in private practice and represents a major New York commodity investment firm.

Gillen has found time to write eight novels based on his experiences: “Sugar Time,” “Capitol Punishment,” “Dinner in Bordeaux,” “Kitty’s Rules,” “Slamming the Close,” “The Night Clerks,” “Altar Boy” and “Lonely No More.” He has also written a memoir, “1954 Adventures in New York.” He is currently writing a series of short stories titled “Moments of Truth.”



Although driven and ambitious, Neal Gillen has a gentle side, which he shows when he plays with his English springer spaniel, Squire.

Gillen is a member of the board of The Writer’s Center in Bethesda and its former vice chairman, and the former secretary of the American Independent Writers.

“I read a lot,” said Gillen. “When it came to writing novels, I decided that I could do it. Even though I wrote a lot on trade policy and issues as a lawyer, I grew up with in a family that liked to talk. I was always listening to storytelling. Dialogue in a novel was never a problem for me.”

Potomac resident Joram Piatigorsky knows Gillen from the Writer’s Center. “Neal definitely loves literature,” said Piatigorsky. “He writes without self-promotion.”

Piatigorsky says that Gillen is steadfast when it comes to setting and reaching goals. “He has a lot of determination. He is very sincere in what he does. He is a person who sets his sights on what he wants to do. ... When things don’t go the way he wants them to go, he has a way of keeping focused, not getting hysterical and faltering. I have a lot of respect for him.”

Gillen’s gentle nature shows when his English springer spaniel, Squire, and cocker spaniel, Brodie, race into his living room, jump on the sofa and lick his face.

“You know you shouldn’t be up here,” he tells them. Squire snuggles in his lap, taking in Gillen’s gentle stroking.

Gillen, a 42-year Potomac resident, has been active in community civic affairs. He was a member of the Western Regional Advisory Committee, President of the West Montgomery County Citizens Association, Chairman of the Avenel Equestrian Center Council, the board of the Seneca Valley Pony Club, and as a co-founder of Fairness In Taxation, which succeeded in the passage of a referendum capping Montgomery County property taxes.

GILLEN’S WIFE, MARY-MARGARET, who he affectionately refers to as Mimi, has been an unwavering supporter and one of his biggest fans.

“Neal is very driven,” said Mary-Marga-

ret, who is also an attorney. “If he has a project, he completes it before it’s due. I’m impressed with the way he commits time and effort to accomplishing what he wants to do.”

She is also one of his advisors. “I’m critical of his writing,” she said. “I will make writing suggestions, but I never look to see if he’s adopted them.”

The two met when Gillen was in law school and Mary-Margaret was in college. It was love at first sight. “I knew when I saw her that she was the person I’d marry,” he said. “It was her willowy shape and blue eyes. She is brilliant, but also kind and considerate.”

His youngest daughter, Donnelly, an attorney in Oakland, Calif., said that Gillen has always been passionately committed to his family.

“He has always been a devoted father,” said Donnelly, who has swum with her dad in the Alcatraz aquathlon. “Both my parents were. They had demanding jobs, but were still able to give us so much time driving us to practices and helping us with our homework.”

Dozens of family photos and an array of brightly colored ribbons fill the bookshelves in Gillen’s light-filled family room. Ribbons represent the family’s equestrian success, another passion for which Donnelly credits her father.

Most important, said Donnelly, are the character traits the Gillens modeled for her and her sister, also an attorney. “My dad, and my mom as well, taught us to always put our best effort forward and keep working at something,” said Donnelly. “They always stressed that honesty, integrity and loyalty are the best qualities to have.”

Gillen shows no signs of slowing down. His desk is covered with work in progress and a side table in his office is overflowing with stacks of paper. The bookshelves hold legal tomes, current historical novels and biographies.

“A lot of people his age would take a more relaxed approach towards sports and writing,” said Donnelly. “I forget how old my parents are a lot of the time because there are so active. ... He is always someone who is going to keep his brain moving.”



Neal and Mary-Margaret Gillen

PHOTOS BY MARILYN CAMPBELL/THE ALMANAC