

# Senior Living

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Potomac  
ALMANAC

# Senior Living 'Your Life Is Today and Tomorrow'

Residents of local senior living communities share their experiences.

BY ANDREA WORKER  
THE ALMANAC

"I didn't want to come here," said Bill Woessner, referring to Brightview Assisted Living Community in Great Falls. "That's right," agreed Sheila, his wife of more than 50 years, with plenty of her native Scottish brogue to be heard in her voice. "He really didn't. We have a lovely house here in Great Falls and I don't think he was ready to budge. But how long after we got here did that change?" she turned to her husband and asked. "At least a day," he laughingly replied. "Seriously," said Bill Woessner, "it probably wasn't more than the first 48 hours." What changed his mind, especially after

what many would call a major life-up-heaval? "The food!" was his answer. "We have gourmet food at every meal, served by the nicest people in the most beautiful surroundings, and we never have to cook it or clean up afterwards." According to Sheila, while the food really is that good, what probably impacted her husband's initial attitude was "the amazing staff, the friendly and interesting residents, and the freedom. Of course, we're retired, so we're not bound to the responsibilities of work." But neither are the Woessners bound to home maintenance concerns, housekeeping, cooking and cleaning. Or "shoveling snow, like we would have been doing last month if we weren't right

here," gloated Bill. "We have the time to do what we like, to try new things and meet new people, without that worry." Bill and Sheila Woessner chatted about their experiences as residents in a senior living community with friends and fellow residents Porta Nickles and Sophia Coulopoulos, over lunch in the Brightview dining room. Porta Nickles, who is 99, admitted to a bit of a sweet tooth. "My father owned a candy and ice cream shop in upstate New York," she said, recommending the homemade coffee ice cream for dessert. The ice cream is made using the recipe of the area's beloved Thelma Feighery. Brightview is built on the site of Thelma's Ice Cream, once the hotspot for local gathering in Great Falls. Thelma and her husband Frank started with a gas station on the site in 1950. Thelma took over and served her own recipe ice creams and other goodies after Frank's death in 1988, until her own in 2001. Porta Nickles came to Brightview after living the last 70 years in Middletown, N.Y., where she helped run the family's Coney Island hot dog franchise, and later went on to enjoy a career in education with the local school district. Having lived somewhere that long, it's understandable that the move took some adjusting to, but Nickles found herself comfortable and more than content in short order. "I was lonely there," she said. "And I didn't even know how lonely until I got here, starting making new friends, find-



PHOTOS BY ANDREA WORKER/THE ALMANAC  
Always ready for a few hijinks around Brightview Assisted Living Community in Great Falls are L-R: Sheila Woessner, Porta Nickles, Sophia Coulopoulos, Bill Woessner, and director of Community Sales, Joanna Banks.

ing out there were so many things I could still do and learn and enjoy. And now I get to see my kids, grandkids and great-grand kids." Having family nearby, the visits, and having opportunities designed to promote interaction with different age groups, all help make Brightview a home environment in the estima-

tion of this group of residents. The Brightview Great Falls location has only been open since September of last year. Sophia Coulopoulos, who had lived for several years in the Maryland suburbs around the District, actually came here from another area community, where she lived with her ill husband until his death. Speaking of him caused a quick smile, but also brought a hint of tears. Porta Nickles said in admiration. During her days with the British Information Services in New York City with Bill, Sheila Woessner took home some hefty prize money by playing on the televised "Name that Tune" game show, money that she used to finance their wedding. The couple even appeared on Johnny Carson's "Who Do You Trust?" game show. Nowadays, Sheila uses her ability to help out at the community's sing-a-longs. Many activities are organized and facilitated by Brightview's Vibrant Living Director, Josh Graf. Bingo is Sophia's favorite. She's been pretty lucky, winning often enough to splurge with her earned Brightview "bucks" at the monthly "gift shop" where you never know what interesting items might be on offer. Brightview Great Falls is part of Baltimore-based Brightview Senior Living, LLC. Brightview Great Falls offers independent living, assisted living, and accommodations for residents with Alzheimer's and memory impairment. The community also offers outdoor space with unspoiled views and a Natural Wildlife Habitat accreditation.



With Dale Jarrett on the piano performing some of the residents' favorites, Garrey Stinson, owner of Dancing With Garrey, Therapeutic Ballroom Dancing for Seniors, brings a smile to Sophia Coulopoulos.

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## Senior Living



**Women of the Nova United, part of the National Senior Women's Basketball Association get exercise with a team sport. They are part of a new fitness trend.**

# Fit for the Golden Years

Fitness programs for seniors are part of a trend.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE ALMANAC

One night each week, Sue Thompson can be found dribbling a basketball down the court, leading her team, the Nova United, to victory. Thompson, who is in her 60s, is one of the youngest players in her league, the National Senior Women's Basketball Association.

"There are women who play with me who are 80 and living out their dream to play basketball. We were way before Title IX," said Thompson, who is also a professor of physical education at Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale and Alexandria, Va. "The women are fit, but with seniors, the social part is really important. Some of the ladies have been widowed or have spouses with health issues. They've really been a support group for each other."

According to the American College of Sports Medicine, Thompson is part of a national fitness trend: fitness programs for older adults, including strength training and team sports. Fitness programs for the now-retired and retiring baby boom generation are increasing in popularity.

New research continues to show the benefits of exercise, aerobic and strength training, range from delayed cognitive decline and a boost in social functioning to an ability to manage chronic diseases and even turn back time.

"There are a lot of benefits for the aging population," said Lisa M.K. Chin, an assistant research professor at George Mason University's Department of Rehabilitation Science in Fairfax, Virginia. Exercise "slows physiological changes that come with aging. ... The other thing that exercise manages is chronic diseases that come with aging, such as cardiovascular problems or diabetes."

Mark Brasler, a 69-year-old who lives in Springfield, Va., has been active for most of the past 20 years. He moved into a retire-

ment community four months ago and got a fitness assessment in the property's gym. The results led him to up his fitness game.

"I still walk every morning and do weights and resistance machines every other day," said Brasler. "I was also told that I needed to take balance class. We focus on agility, how to stand up straight and how to get up when you fall. We also do stretching, yoga and Pilates. I feel more confident about myself."

Those who offer fitness classes to seniors have noticed a spike in interest. "Our Tai Chi classes have doubled and our bone builder classes have tripled," said Peter Selikowitz, Director of the Potomac Community Center in Potomac, Maryland. "We've seen the number of people who are active 55-plus [year-olds] and come into our fitness center increase."

Such fitness classes can help preserve mobility and cognitive function, say researchers. "It helps in terms of preserving bone mass and maintaining mobility longer," said Chin. "If you're using your muscles, especially during weight-bearing exercises, ultimately it reduces the risk of falling and improves balance."

An exercise class that includes both aerobic, strength and balance exercises can help preserve freedom and independence for seniors. "The key components of staying physically active are having



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENSPRING

**Mark Brasler performs balance exercises with wellness coordinator Juanita Kuntz. Exercises that include strength training, aerobic exercise and improves or preserves mobility.**

strong muscles, reasonable flexibility and endurance, such as the ability to keep walking or doing an activity and not getting tired and fatigued right away," said Rita Wong, professor of physical therapy

and associate dean of graduate and professional studies at Marymount University in Arlington. "It's essential to keep oneself mobile and active."

It's almost never too late to increase fitness levels, Wong said. "Often with older adults, people think that they can't improve anymore so why bother. But research has shown time and time again that older adults have an ability to improve that is as similar as young adults'."

**"The women are fit, but with seniors, the social part is really important."**

— Sue Thompson, Ph.D.

One fitness class that is multi-generational and incorporates aerobic exercise, balance and strength training is the newly formed TRUE Fit in Arlington, Va. The goal of the all-outdoor class sessions is to marry effective exercise with camaraderie, much like Brasler's experience.

"People need community [and are] finding it in a holistic approach to exercise at their own comfort level," said Nina Elliot, founder of the TRUE Fit program and co-owner of TRUE Health and Wholeness. "People work out to the best of their ability and everybody gets a workout that's right for their body. They're given modifications and the focus is to do your best, have fun and enjoy exercise."

Elliot believes exercising in groups has an accountability factor. "The number one thing that can keep you from aging is exercise," she said. "Aging can be very isolating for some people. The more people can get out and be around people, the better."