

Staying Healthy

SPRING 2021

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Feeling 'safe', 'relief' post-vaccination

Tri-Valley residents describe emotions, experiences after receiving COVID-19 shots

BY CIERRA BAILEY

As a sense of normalcy begins to return to the Tri-Valley amid California's rigorous COVID-19 vaccination rollout, many fully vaccinated people are resuming activities they haven't done in over a year like dining at restaurants, returning to classrooms, and gathering with family and friends.

"I'm looking forward to seeing my grandchildren sometime now," Livermore resident Helen Machuga said, adding that she hasn't seen them in person since March 7, 2020.

She and her two granddaughters have held a weekly book club to stay in touch with each other via Zoom — which the 73-year-old said she hadn't even heard of before the pandemic but has now become very well acquainted with it.

Although she said she doesn't always enjoy staring at a screen for hours, she believes the video conferencing platform, "saved many of our lives." She said, "If we couldn't do our book clubs and our talks and our meetings and things, it would have been horrible."

Machuga and her husband, John Hinton, received the Pfizer vaccine at Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare in Pleasanton.

While they are still wearing masks in public and practicing social distancing, Machuga said she feels safer now that she's vaccinated. She recently had two other vaccinated friends over for lunch for the first time. They all brought their own lunches and were planning to eat in Machuga's backyard, but it was cold and raining so they went inside: "We were inside without masks but we were socially distant, and it was the first time we got to do that since March (2020)."

According to the Bloomberg's COVID-19



LARA LESUER

Livermore teacher Lara Lesuer after completing the drive-thru vaccination.

vaccine dashboard, 17.8% of California's population have been fully vaccinated and 33.6% of the population has received at least the first dose.

Once fully vaccinated, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says people can gather with others who are fully vaccinated without wearing a mask or staying six feet apart, travel in the U.S. without getting tested before or after travel or self-quarantining after travel, and gather indoors with unvaccinated people of any age from one other household without masks or staying six feet apart — unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Marylin Avenue Elementary School teachers Lara Lesuer and Heidi Robinson both received their Pfizer vaccines at the Oakland Coliseum drive-thru vaccination site.

"It was like a relief," Lesuer, 49, said. "You feel like you can go anywhere or do anything — not that you're not going to wear a mask anymore or things like that, of course, but it's just a sense of relief. I could go back to teaching students in person, which is amazing, and it just feels better. It feels safer."

Along with being back in the classroom, Lesuer said it felt liberating to go back to the gym and to experience dining inside of a restaurant again for the first time since being vaccinated.

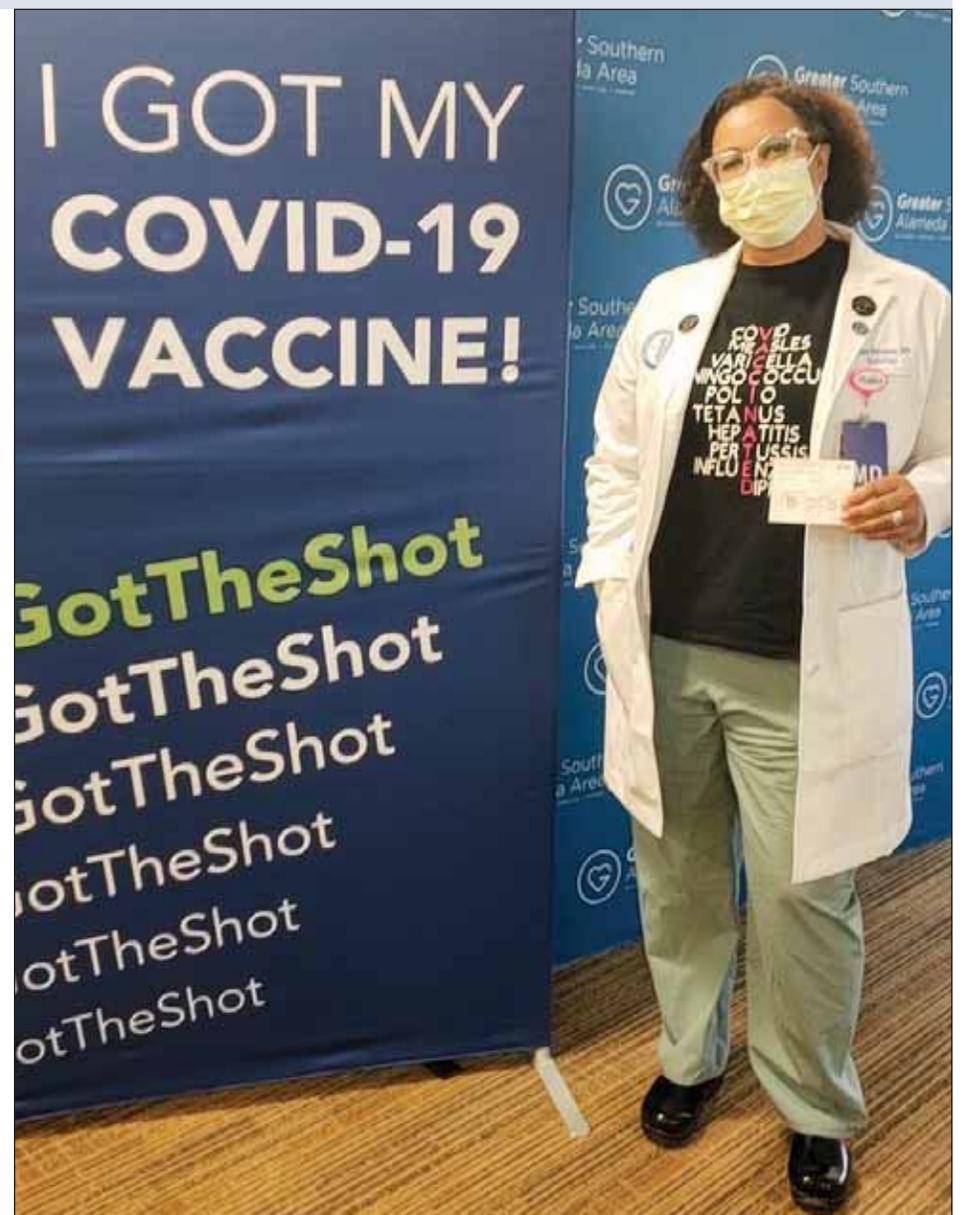
"Even though (the pandemic) is not over and we still have a long way to go, it almost feels like one step closer to normalcy," she said, later adding: "You can go out and not worry about being paranoid with people around you."

Robinson, 47, shared similar sentiments, saying that she feels "safe and protected" after being vaccinated. She said she has been seeing her parents over the past year outdoors, without getting close enough to touch them, but after they all were vaccinated they finally got to hug each other again.

"I just feel like I'm a part of history," Robinson said of her experience receiving the two shots. "It's just amazing that I'm living through it because it's going to be something that my grandchildren talk about," she added.

Last year, Robinson was featured on "Good Morning America" and other media outlets for personally delivering homework packets to the homes of all 17 of her transitional kindergarten students following school closures. Now that in-person learning has resumed in Livermore, she said she was so excited to see and hear kids back on the playground that she called her mom on FaceTime to share it with her.

Dr. Dawn Nwamuo, a physician who lives in Dublin, received the Moderna vaccine at



COURTESY OF NWAMUO

Dr. Dawn Nwamuo, a physician and Dublin resident, received the Moderna vaccine at Kaiser Permanente in San Leandro.

Kaiser Permanente in San Leandro. Although she is fully vaccinated, she said she's still being cautious.

"Because I'm a physician, I understand that COVID can still be transmitted," Nwamuo said. "It's not just about getting yourself vaccinated, it's about protecting others also. The vaccine is more to protect yourself from if you get COVID; you're not necessarily going to die because you will have some antibody response to the disease."

Nwamuo, 45, said that it wasn't until her husband got vaccinated that she started to feel a little more comfortable in public. She recently dined outside at a restaurant for the first time and even took a walk outdoors without wearing a mask. "I'm taking it very

slow," she said.

All four local residents said they experienced soreness in their arms at the injection site after receiving their shots. Robinson also mentioned having a headache that lasted about two days and Nwamuo experienced swelling and redness at the injection site along with body aches and fatigue that lasted about 24 to 48 hours. Despite enduring some mild side effects, none expressed anything but satisfaction about their decision to get vaccinated.

"People need to understand that getting COVID is much worse than getting the vaccine," Nwamuo said. "There are just so many people who have lost their lives and you don't know if it's going to be you, and I just don't feel like it's worth risking it." ■

Avoid processed foods, cookbook author says

Livermore resident focuses on healthy recipes that work well in family kitchens

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Cookbook author and blogger Michelle Smith says the best thing we can do for our health is eat foods that have minimal processing and are dense in nutrients.

“All these different diets have made it so complicated for average people,” she commented. “They are so hard to follow — so we don’t.”

Smith, a Livermore resident, describes herself as a child of the ‘80s food culture, whose favorite food was bread and cheese. But she had bad allergies, adult acne and other health problems and thought perhaps she would feel better if she ate differently.

“We started cleaning up our diet just because we wanted a better way to be doing things,” she said. “We started doing paleo.”

As she became more knowledgeable and began to discover what worked for her and her family, Smith began to blog about her eating and culinary journey at [www](http://www.www).

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JENNIFER SKOG

Michelle Smith prepares Grain-free Sheet Pan Eggplant Parmesan.

Grain-free Sheet Pan Eggplant Parmesan



JENNIFER SKOG

Grain-free Sheet Pan Eggplant Parmesan, which combines many ingredients the Smith family knows and loves.

- 1 globe eggplant (about 1 pound), sliced into 1/2-inch-thick disks
- 1-1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup almond flour
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons tapioca flour
- 1/4 cup crushed gluten-free crackers
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 2 cups marinara sauce
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
- Flaky sea salt

Place a sheet pan in the oven and preheat the oven to 425 degrees

Sprinkle the eggplant slices with 1/2 teaspoon of the salt. Set them aside on paper towels to drain a bit.

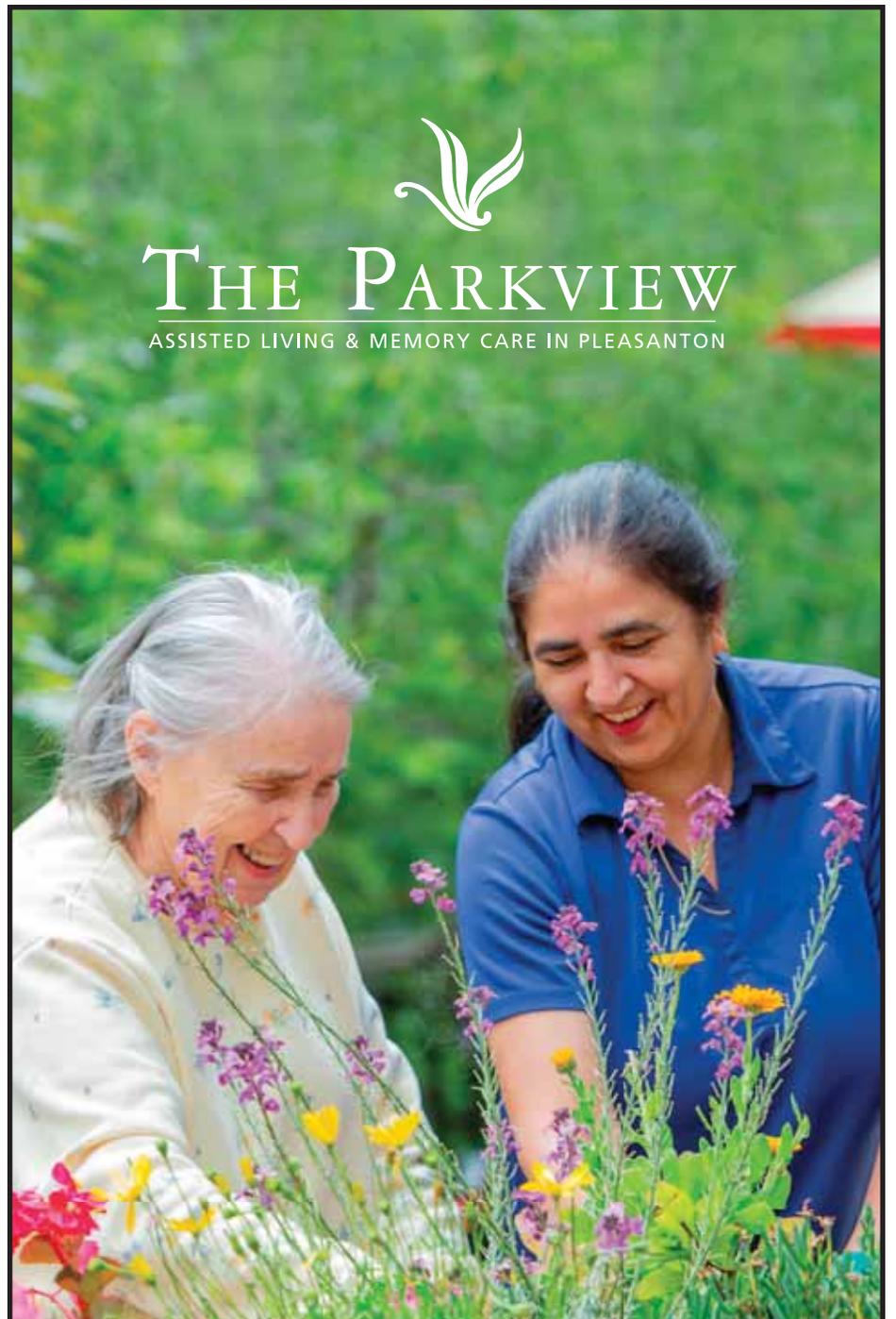
Combine the remaining 1 teaspoon salt, almond flour, tapioca flour, crushed crackers and garlic powder in a shallow bowl.

Dredge 1 slice of the eggplant in the eggs and let the excess run off. Immediately coat the eggplant all over in the flour-cracker coating. Set aside on a plate. Repeat with the remaining eggplant slices.

Once all of the eggplant slices have been coated, remove the hot sheet pan from the oven (make sure to use oven mitts!) and lay the coated eggplant slices on the pan in one layer. Return to the oven and bake the eggplant slices for 30 minutes, flipping halfway through, until they are lightly browned.

Remove the sheet pan from the oven and top each slice with a generous spoonful of marinara sauce. Top with a slice of the mozzarella and a sprinkle of the Parmesan. Bake for an additional 10 minutes, until the cheeses have melted.

Remove the eggplant from the oven and sprinkle the basil over the top, along with flaky sea salt, and serve.



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Domestic abuse services adapt to pandemic

Pleasanton sees slight uptick in reported cases of abuse amid pandemic

By RYAN J. DEGAN

Sheltering in place and limiting contact with others has been a necessity to prevent the spread of COVID-19, according to health officials, but in some cases these conditions have inadvertently also created potentially dangerous situations for residents living in abusive environments.

Services for treating people who are in violent domestic situations have been forced to adapt due to the ongoing pandemic — situations that have in some cases become more dangerous due to people being forced to quarantine with their abusers.

“It’s very scary because these people are very unpredictable and part of the safety planning is figuring out what you can do,” Vicki Thompson, director of domestic violence services at Tri-Valley Haven, told the Weekly. “We’re still offering all of our services, but they have changed.”

Headquartered in Livermore, Tri-Valley Haven serves residents throughout the region with counseling, homelessness, domestic abuse and legal advice services, among other support programs.

While all of its domestic violence services are still available, the group has been forced to adapt in order to continue services for its clients during the pandemic, according to Thompson.

Removing people from dangerous situations is a top priority for the group, so housing becomes a necessity once people leave abusive environments. To this end, Tri-Valley Haven offers a shelter for adults and children.

Residents can still find shelter through Tri-Valley Haven — the group is currently housing approximately 30 adults and children. However, due to the pandemic, the

group has lowered its onsite shelter population to allow for social distancing. Instead, overflow population is housed at hotels where case workers will provide regular check-ins as well as gift cards for food.

Tri-Valley Haven also has its Domestic Violence Housing First program that assists survivors of domestic violence in overcoming barriers to obtaining or retaining housing; this includes case management and cash assistance for moving, utility bills and other housing-related costs.

“It’s very individualized based on what somebody needs. We also have a transitional housing program where some families can stay with us for up to two years if they have long-term goals they are working for,” Thompson said.

Counseling services are also still available for residents, but have transitioned to a virtual telehealth model to prevent exposure to the virus.

In-person restraining order courses have also been suspended due to the pandemic, but residents can contact Tri-Valley Haven to receive legal advice on acquiring a restraining order from an abusive partner.

Abuse during the pandemic has sometimes taken a different form, according to Thompson, who described abusive partners sometimes changing their own habits around different paranoia related to the virus.

“We’ve had some people say they were strictly forbidden to leave the house because of the virus. We’ve also heard of cases where the abuser is very paranoid about getting it, telling people, ‘You go out, you do the shopping, because I’m not going to get COVID,’” Thompson said.

While some agencies have



TRI-VALLEY HAVEN

Due to security reasons, Tri-Valley Haven does not provide photos of its shelters, but the nonprofit does offer housing for people seeking to leave abusers. It also offers housing for homeless residents, as seen here.

reported higher numbers of domestic abuse cases during the pandemic, Thompson said it is often difficult to gauge the rates locally due to cases often not getting reported — especially when someone is sheltering-in-place with their abuser and unable to do so safely.

“It’s really difficult to gauge that because it may be more dangerous for people to report when they are sheltering in place with an abuser or where they are maybe afraid to leave. Our requests for shelter have stayed about the same, maybe a slight increase,” she said.

“What we have seen though is that people often stay a shorter period of time. If they have the option to move in with family or friends, they feel safer doing that then staying with a shelter,” Thompson added.

Reported cases of domestic violence have risen slightly in

Pleasanton during the pandemic, according to Pleasanton police Sgt. Marty Billdt, who said that in 2020 Pleasanton police reported 122 cases compared to 110 in 2019.

“Aside from COVID-19 safety protocols, the Pleasanton Police Department has not changed its procedure when responding to reports of domestic violence,” Billdt added. “We take each case very seriously and would like to remind survivors or witnesses of domestic violence that they can call our department without fear: 9-1-1 or 925-931-5100.”

For residents who may suspect a friend, loved one or neighbor may be in an abusive environment, Thompson advised that instead of trying to tell someone what to do, it is better to check in on them and ask how they can help.

“Just let the person know that you are concerned. Don’t say ‘you have to do this, you have to leave, you have to go to Tri-Valley Haven, you have to go to police’ — because

if the person isn’t ready to do any of those things, if they feel they can’t do it safely, it is just going to drive a wedge there,” she said. “Maybe just ask ‘are you OK? Is there something I can do to help?’”

“Just let them know you are there for them and meet them where they are at. Just know that leaving an abusive partner is a process. Most people in abusive relationships leave seven times before they stay out for good,” Thompson added. ■

Crisis support

The National Domestic Violence Hotline can be contacted several ways:
 Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
 TTY: 1-800-787-3224
 Live chat: www.thehotline.org.

The Tri-Valley Haven’s crisis line continues uninterrupted and can be contacted at 925-449-5842 or 1-800-884-8119.



TRI-VALLEY HAVEN

Shelter services have changed amid the pandemic, with overflow users being housed in hotels in order to provide social distancing.



TRI-VALLEY HAVEN

Tri-Valley Haven also offers a thrift store in Livermore, with proceeds benefiting its programs. The store on North L Street is now open for retail shopping indoors and donations.

Hike for Hope returning for socially distanced event

Outdoor fundraiser benefits Hope Hospice

By RYAN J. DEGAN

Hope Hospice has revived its annual Hike for Hope program after canceling the event last year due to the coronavirus crisis, and registration is open for residents who want to enjoy the outdoors while supporting a cause.

The nonprofit group's biggest annual fundraising event went dark in 2020 — which staff say shorted Hope over \$100,000 in anticipated revenue — due to the pandemic; however, Hike for Hope will return in a COVID-safe format this year that will have participants hiking at different locations from one another.

“Proceeds from the annual event raise support for hospice patient care and community programs, including grief support services, dementia-care education, and family caregiver resources. Programs are available to the local public at no charge, and are made possible through donations, grants, and fundraising events,” Hope Hospice officials said in a statement.

Retooling the event for 2021 in order to encourage physical distancing and health safety, instead

of gathering as a group at Del Valle Regional Park as in years past, 2021 event participants will remain in their own social pods and hike in a location of their choosing.

The concept around the hike continues to be centered around participants seeking support from family and friends, asking them to donate in the participant's name.

Interested residents can participate in a single-day excursion on Saturday, June 5, for the event or go the extra mile and accept the weeklong Champion Challenge and set a mileage goal for the week of May 29 through June 5.

For participants seeking donations from community members, Hope Hospice staff say that Graham-Hitch Mortuary has offered to match the money raised by top fundraiser in the Champion Challenge, whether a team or an individual, for up to \$10,000.

While the event is traditionally followed by a post-hike group barbecue, this year a virtual “jamboree” will be held, offering live music and engaging activities via Zoom.

The jamboree is being held in



HOPE HOSPICE

Unlike previous years, 2021's Hike for Hope will not see large crowds hiking together. Instead participants will hike in their individual social pods to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

partnership with Frankie, Johnny, & Luigi Too Italian restaurant in Dublin, who will be providing dinner to-go for participants who order prior to the event — with a portion of sales benefiting Hope

Hospice.

Registration for the 10th Hike for Hope is available online now at www.TheHikeForHope.com. Quick buyers can purchase the early bird registration fee of \$39

through April 30, after that the fee increases to \$45. Child hikers 12 and under are welcome to participate for free, but they will still need to be registered. Registration fees include an event T-shirt. ■

FOOD

Continued from Page 13

thewholesmiths.com, and in 2018 put together “The Whole Smiths Good Food Cookbook: Delicious Real Food Recipes to Cook All Year Long.” It was endorsed by Whole30, a 30-day nutrition program that encourages eating more plants and healthy fats, and eliminating sugar, dairy and gluten.

“I was never really strict with that,” Smith said, “but I'd been having far too much dairy, sugar and grains. Paleo helped me reset that ratio. Now I will eat healthy proteins, more fruits and vegetables and I might sprinkle it with a little goat cheese.”

Smith, 41, grew up in Pleasanton and graduated from Amador Valley High School, class of 1998.

“In my 20s, I was in business development and startups and sales, and lived in San Francisco doing that, but I've always been a lover of food,” she said. “Once the kids were born, I stepped out of the corporate work force.”

Soon she saw the importance of finding a way for her active family — husband Brad and daughters Teagan, 9, and Camryn, 11 — to eat well while keeping preparation quick and easy. She said she designs her recipes with the average home cook in mind.

Smith not only prepares healthy food, but she teaches her daughters the value of good nutrition.

“Most of what we eat at home is very healthy, but I want them to learn to make choices,” Smith said. “I present food not in

terms of how it's going to make us look but how it's going to make us feel. We want to fill our bodies with food that fuels us.”

“I am acutely aware of not demonizing any foods,” she added. “We will have pizza or get ice cream to celebrate.”

Smith realizes people do not always have a lot of time to prepare meals or cater to each individual. Her latest cookbook has chapters of “five ingredients or less,” “one-dish wonders” and “30 minutes or less.”

“We eat healthy but I do try to keep in mind the meals should be family friendly,” she said. “I take things we like and know and incorporate the ingredients into healthy recipes.”

Her “Grain-free Sheet Pan Eggplant Parmesan” is such a dish.

“It is flavors we know and love,” she said. “It all melts together really well.”

Smith's new cookbook came out Dec. 29, “The Whole Smiths: Real Food Every Day,” with the tagline, “Healthy recipes to keep your family happy throughout the week.” It includes another family favorite, her version of a burger bowl.

“It's lettuce and spinach, grass-fed ground beef, and sauteed onions in a bowl, like a burger salad,” she said. “I focus on the quality of ingredients, too, and talk about that in the beginning pages.”

Smith is now doing a weekly podcast, “Get Wellthy.”

“Podcasts are rapidly becoming my passion. I love talking with all these experts,” she said. “I just talked to Dr. Judson Brewer and his ‘Unwinding Anxiety’ program.”

“Diet is so important but there are other things — stress, anxiety, brain health, cognitive decline,” she noted. ■

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'Finding Wellness' for seniors

Senior Support Program keeps promoting good health and well being

BY DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Senior Support Program of the Tri-Valley has stepped up its "Finding Wellness" presentations during the last year, adapting everything for the internet while catering to a population not always able to go online.

"We had zero online offerings before," administrative director Mercel Amin said. "During COVID, all of our programs have transitioned into an online platform. We are streaming our classes and even have a coordinator who teaches classes in Mandarin."

Also, the program has increased its use of a newsletter, for clients who are more comfortable with low-tech information.

"We used to go out into the community, which made it so much easier because this program travels Alameda County-wide," Amin said. "Now we have the 'digital divide.'"

The staff works hard to reach seniors who are not on the internet.

"We've sent hard copies of classes to people, and broadcast our series in living facilities," Amin said. "And we have done newsletters and sent them out with Meals on Wheels."

Senior Support, which is in its 40th year of providing programs, offers Finding Wellness classes, plus holds Wellness Wednesdays, a 15-minute chat, every other week. Amin also started a seated exercise class each Tuesday and Thursday morning.

"We have 12 people who regularly join us," she said.

The Finding Wellness classes were planned in three series. The first one is six weeks, focusing on topics from fall prevention to nutrition labeling to healthy hydrating to emotional wellness. Series 2 is a five-week program of exploring the health of the brain, heart, gut, liver and skin. Series 3 is four weeks, focusing on lowering the risk profile for diabetes, stroke, cancer and inflammatory disease.

"This year we added what to do when

sheltering in place specifically, and the seven dimensions of wellness," Amin said. "And we are working on a fourth series."

"So many people have chronic conditions they are trying to manage," Amin explained. "All of the individuals on our team have backgrounds on wellness and health, and they are someone to filter information and keep current."

"We like to start conversations and bring the most scientific-based information to our seniors that we can," she added.

Amin recalled improving the eating habits of her own grandfather when she lived with him from when he was 90 to 96.

"He didn't know the benefits of wheat bread from white bread," she recalled. "Another big one is sodium, that we want to keep it down, and additive sugars and the different names they come under."

Clients range from age 60 and up, with a large group in their 80s and 90s, but Amin said at this point they are beginning to get Zoom fatigue.

"Seniors right now have so many challenges, not just visiting us on Zoom but seeing their doctors, family and caregivers," she pointed out.

"This time has been up and down. Someone in one class right now has a sister who lives in L.A., and we were able to connect the two to meet in a class. So it does have its pros," she said.

Amin is planning a two-hour webinar in May for older adults to address mental health, present tai chi for arthritis, and launch art therapy sessions. To learn about this and other classes, check out the calendar at www.ssptv.org or telephone the health education department at 931-5393.

The main line for Senior Support Program of the Tri-Valley is 931-5379, including to reach the Friendly Visiting Program, which is in need of volunteers. ■



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ABOUT HOPE HOSPICE

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Senior Support Program of the Tri-Valley (SSPTV) is an independent, non-profit agency serving people over the age of 60 throughout Alameda County.

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Senior Support Program of the Tri-Valley prints brochures for those who do not use the internet.