

# Staying Healthy

## Inside:

Hike for Hope back on track

Page 12

It's all in your head

Page 13

Make a Statement

Page 14

## Maintaining a healthy marriage

Tips on building a meaningful, happy and thriving relationship

By MELISSA MCKENZIE

In December of 1957, a shy girl from the town of Turlock asked a gregarious boy from Los Angeles to the Fresno State University Queen's Ball.

Both only children, the young man and woman were told their budding relationship was doomed, but she found herself enamored with his manners while he said she brought out the best in him. Just over two years into their courtship, Bradley Hirst asked for Sandra Gross' hand in marriage and three months later, on Jun. 8, 1960, they wed.

"We had a lot of things in common: our family values, Christian faith, desire to have a limited number of children and political views," Bradley Hirst said of the Pleasanton couple's 60-plus year union, but that is only the tip of the iceberg.

Hirst came from a broken home. His mother married five times and he promised himself he would only say "I do" once. That commitment has helped keep the father of two and grandfather of four grounded and dedicated to his beloved.

According to Chandrama Anderson, a licensed marriage and family therapist out of Menlo Park and author of the upcoming "graphic medicine" (graphic novels exploring healthcare) series called "I Do, I Don't: How to Build a Better Marriage," couples typically seek therapy for issues relating to sex, money or power with the underlying problem being attachment or lack thereof.

Anderson said that in secure attachment, "Your well-being comes second to none. You're confided in first. Your opinion matters most. You feel admired and protected. Your need for closeness is rewarded with even more closeness. You seek comfort in sex from each other and you create a home that's a haven so you can do all the other things you have to do in life. Your marriage has to be top priority, is a way of simplifying all of those things."

Without making the marital relationship a top priority — even that over the relationship with a child — the marriage will suffer, Anderson said, adding that negative self-talk, generational trauma and the intention and impact of statements all contribute to problems within a marriage.

"There are three parties in every

marriage: you, me and the marriage," Anderson said. "Think about what's best for the marriage, which doesn't mean giving yourself away."

By taking an "if it's important to you, it's important to me" mindset and finding ways to support their spouse, individuals can do what's best for their marriage. Other ways include avoiding "you" statements, which escalate arguments. "If you're upset, say, 'when blank happened, I felt blank, blank and blank. I wish or I need blank,'" Anderson said, adding that both men and women have trouble giving empathy, but it's important to understand each other's feelings.

Early in their marriage, the Hirsts made a promise never to fight in front of their children, and often played tennis together or golfed, which kept them close. Additionally, they share a love of sports (he's a Los Angeles Rams fan, while she is faithful to the San Francisco 49ers), have maintained a mutual respect for each other, sustained a healthy division of chores and learned when to keep their mouths shut.

And, although Sandra Hirst joked that dirty looks have gone a long way in their marriage, they continue to make time for one another. The Hirsts often fall asleep holding hands, and connect daily by sitting down together between 5 and 6 p.m., having a drink and talking about their day.

"We've had our ups and downs," Bradley Hirst said. "No marriage is perfect. It takes work."

Anderson said there are also a handful of simple things that can be done to create stronger bonds. Greeting partners at the door and before children, always saying goodbye and hello, setting aside time for each other, only speaking to partners when eye contact can be maintained and participating in two minutes of eye-gazing a day can all help build emotional connections and intimacy.

Additionally, Anderson said, unless each person is their authentic self, their needs will never get met.

"You can only do your own work," she said. "You can ask for healthy change, but you can't change anyone. Everyone needs to work on your relationship after saying 'I do'." ■



MELISSA MCKENZIE

Longtime Pleasanton residents Bradley and Sandra Hirst reflect on their over 60 years of marriage.

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# Hike for Hope is back on track

Hospice fundraiser returning to Del Valle park in May

By DOLORES FOX CIARDELLI

Hike for Hope. The name says it all. Hope Hospice has opened registration for its annual hike being held May 14 at Del Valle Regional Park in Livermore, in plenty of time for participants to share the news with family and friends who may want to donate toward their efforts.

The popular fundraiser, which began in 1980, was canceled in 2020 as it was planning to celebrate its 40th. Last year it was held virtually, with participants walking on their own as the COVID-19 pandemic persisted.

“It certainly wasn’t the same as when we get together at Del Valle Park but we did get a good turnout as far as donations toward the cause,” said Kendra Strey, director of communications. “We had half the participants but raised almost as much as in a regular year.”

The goal each year is usually \$100,000, she said, and last year’s event yielded around \$96,000, including gifts of in-kind donations.

“It’s been a challenging time for fundraising as people are unsure of their employment status,” she noted.

The money raised helps Hope Hospice provide compassionate end-of-life care and support for patients and their families as well as education programs for families and caregivers of dementia patients, and grief support.

“Some of the funds go for patient care — there are some cases where we take on uninsured cases,” Strey said.

Hope Hospice shifted some of its services to telehealth during the pandemic, she said.

“A lot of concerns can be handled over the phone with the family members,”

## Hike for Hope

### Route options:

- 2.6 miles: easy lakefront route that can be shortened
- 4.4 miles: adds a moderate incline loop

### Registration donation:

- \$35 adult, ages 18 and up
- \$15 youth, ages 13-17
- Free for kids 12 and under (register to get a shirt)
- \$80 family package, includes two adults and two youths.

she explained. “The most challenging thing was for patients living in a facility — skilled nursing or assisted living. Then we were subject to the facility’s unique rules.”

When a face-to-face visit was needed, home health aides had full protective equipment, and everyone is vaccinated.

“Our staff is 100% ready to serve,” Strey said.

And ready to Hike for Hope along with others, many of them members of former client families.

“We are happy to be getting back together in person, especially for the folks who volunteer or who come every year — it’s nice to have the reunion,” Strey said. “But the event is also about reminding the community that Hope Hospice is there so the more hikers we can get involved, the better.”

Register at [TheHikeForHope.com](http://TheHikeForHope.com) or call 925-829-8770 on weekdays from 9



CHUCK DECKERT

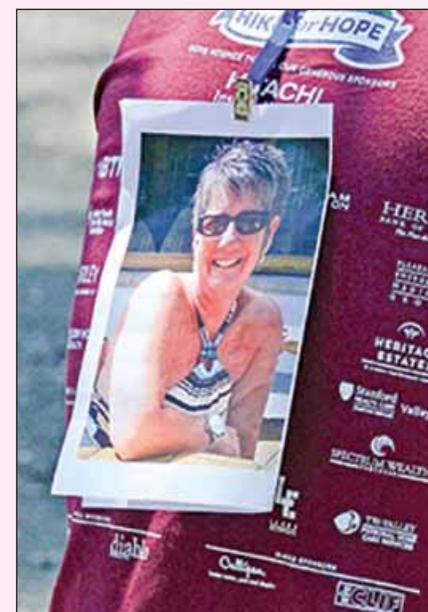
Hikers in 2019, the last time Hike for Hope was held at Del Valle park. The pandemic forced cancellations of the past two years’ in-person events.

a.m. to 4 p.m. Everyone is encouraged to sign up by April 15, which would guarantee a T-shirt, but registration remains open through the day of the event.

Hikers may start anytime between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m. When they finish, a free barbecue lunch will be sponsored by MCE Corp.

“This year we’re going to have extra hand-washing stations,” Strey said. “We’re not going to require masks at this time because it is outdoors and we will be spaced out.”

Hope Hospice is also seeking event sponsors and offers four levels, including a Friends & Family sponsorship for individuals who would like to honor the memory of a loved one. Anyone interested in sponsoring should connect with Hope Hospice prior to April 15 so that their company logo/family name can be included on the event T-shirt. Details are available at [TheHikeForHope.com](http://TheHikeForHope.com). ■



CHUCK DECKERT

Some hikers carry photos or mementos of their loved one on the hike.



CHUCK DECKERT

The Hike for Hope is scheduled to return on May 14 for the first time since 2019, with participants that year seen here.



CHUCK DECKERT

Those hiking in memory of a loved one can write the names of the departed on a paper shoe for a group display.

# It's all in your head

'Migraine is not fatal but it can affect your quality of life'

By JULIA BAUM

The day that I pitched a story about migraines for Staying Healthy during our staff meeting, I had one of my own brewing, coincidentally.

As I explained my idea while occasionally massaging my left temple — usually the focal point for the worst of the pain that I'll feel — I knew I wasn't the only person who has suffered with migraines at work.

Migraines are, in fact, the third most common medical disorder in the world, so the odds are good that many workplaces have at least one employee who suffers from migraines. According to the American Migraine Foundation, more than 36 million Americans have migraines — more than the number who have diabetes and asthma combined.

And while migraines are estimated to cost American business more than \$29 billion in lost time and lost work productivity, they take an incalculable toll on one's quality of life. Dr. Charlene Hu, a migraine specialist at Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare, said she has seen this in many of her patients.

"Migraine is not fatal but it can affect your quality of life. I see so many so often, affecting the quality of the life for the family," Hu said.

So what makes a migraine different from a regular headache? "Migraine has this unique presentation compared to other headaches or such a tension headache," Hu said.

Migraine headaches can take over someone's life for several days. For me, they start with what I describe as a mental fog that hinders my concentration even before the onset of actual pain. They're comparable to a hang-over but worse (in my opinion). Headaches are still annoying and painful, but much more tolerable and don't typically hang around until the next day or after like a migraine does.

Usually mine lasts about 24 to 36 hours, a period of time during which I try to sleep as long as possible, and avoid any bright lights and screen time. Maybe this is TMI, but nausea and vomiting are also common among migraine sufferers — possibly due to serotonin levels.

Relief often only comes in the form of deep sleep or over-the-counter medication. Sometimes I'll experience a lingering throbbing sensation in my temples the day after. Hu said these are all common symptoms, though each migraine patient's profile is unique.

I am fortunate, though, because mine could be more frequent and worrisome (2020 was by far the worst year that I've ever experienced so many, simply due to the stress — the top trigger for migraines, according to Hu).

Migraines aren't generally a link to other conditions, but Hu said "there is a small risk for the patient who has migraine aura, a slight risk for stroke."

"Specifically if the migraine involves aura and the patient is a smoker, and takes birth control," Hu said. "All three in combination put them at even higher risk for a stroke. I think that might be the only one in terms of risk with any other medical conditions from the migraine."

Migraines are much more common in women, who Hu also said "tend to have more severe headaches because women tend to have more triggers."

"We're not sure of the cause of migraines; it's a complicated area," Hu said. "What we know for sure is that it's a genetic condition, that's the most common."

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, serotonin and estrogen level changes are believed to be responsible for triggering migraines, as well as general vascular system



GETTY IMAGES

changes. Women are also more likely to have migraines than men because of fluctuating estrogen levels, which affect women only and naturally vary throughout their life cycles.

Hu said migraines typically occur anywhere from the teenage years (when hormone fluctuations also start to happen) until someone is in their 40s or 50s. Once women finish menopause, Hu said their migraines usually improve.

While the causes of migraines are still unknown, Hu said there's a long list of documented triggers, with emotional stress taking the No. 1 spot, followed by hormone changes.

Other triggers for migraines are unique to each individual but Hu said they can include weather changes (a thunderstorm may have actually triggered my very first migraine), strong or very bright lights, sleep disturbances, alcohol, smoke, exercise, and all sorts of food, including red wine, chocolate and cheese.

For patients who have a migraine more than four days out of every 30 days, Hu will "start them on preventative headache

treatment to stop the headache instead of chasing it." Migraines that are less frequent and more mild can be treated by taking over the counter medication such as Tylenol or Motrin. Severe migraines may be treated with Imitex or something else more powerful.

"There's a whole group of meds we use for acute migraine attacks, and the key pain medication for migraine is very important. You have to catch it early — that is very, very important," Hu said.

There are many very effective treatments existing, Hu said, so people don't have to suffer and should be able to find something that works for them.

"All of those pain medications that are over-the-counter, for the most part they work, but the migraine — if you don't control them — they tend to become more severe more often," Hu said. "The beauty of the preventative way is you would not have a headache."

Take it from me — when it comes to migraines, it's always worth the ounce of prevention to save a pound of cure. ■

## Contra Costa County lifts requirement for vaccine or negative test at restaurants, gyms

Department cites community's 80% vaccination rate in rule change

By JEANITA LYMAN

The neighboring Contra Costa Health Services announced last Friday that the county would be lifting a health order that requires patrons of some indoor businesses to provide proof of vaccination or negative test results, citing the high vaccination rate among county residents.

"We believe now is the right time to loosen a requirement that made a lot of sense last summer, when a different variant of COVID-19 was dominant and there was less community immunity," said Dr. Ori Tzvieli, acting Contra Costa County health officer. "But by no means are we back to normal. There are still many more cases of COVID-19 in our community now than there were in mid-December, so we need to continue to take precautions when we go out."

The move comes as hospitalizations have been declining countywide, and as health officials believe that the surge of cases brought on by the omicron variant has peaked and will continue to decline.

Under the now lifted health order, which went into effect in September, businesses where

patrons remove their face coverings or breathe more heavily than usual, such as restaurants and gyms, were required by the county to check patrons and workers for proof of vaccination or negative test results.

With the order lifted, businesses will still be able to choose to implement their own vaccine requirements, which CCHS encourages them to do.

As of Feb. 3, 80% of county residents were vaccinated against COVID, and more than 48% had received booster doses.

Despite the high rates of community immunity, CCHS still urges that everyone eligible for vaccines and booster doses to get them, especially the latter. Last Friday's announcement points to county data showing that those with boosters have a lower risk for contracting COVID of more than threefold, compared with those who are unvaccinated, and are approximately nine times less likely to be hospitalized as a result of the virus.

"We deeply appreciate everyone who has chosen to vaccinate. You have made yourselves, your loved ones, and the entire community safer," Contra Costa health director Anna Roth

said. "If you are eligible and you have not gotten your booster, it is really important that you get one. People who get boosted are significantly safer from serious COVID-19."

Other health orders from the state and county, such as workplace vaccine verification

for some workers, and face coverings in indoor public spaces, remain in effect. Under state guidelines, proof of vaccination or recent negative test results are still required for visits to hospitals and long-term care facilities, as well as indoor events with 500 or more attendees. ■



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# Make a Statement: International nonprofit started at Dougherty Valley High

By JEANITA LYMAN

When Emily Han, a Dougherty Valley High School junior and co-founder of the worldwide nonprofit organization Make a Statement, came to the United States from China, she was already a skilled public speaker at 9 years old.



Emily Han

“In China, when I was in elementary school, I was trained to be a moderator for a lot of events that were province-wide and even featured on television,” Han said. “So I was a very confident person, and I started to lose some of that confidence. I felt like as someone who was in speech and debate and an international student, it was very unfriendly to people who might not be familiar with English, or might not have enough money to afford speech and debate tournaments.”

Trying to resume her studies in public speaking, immersed in a culture and language that were foreign to her at the time, proved to be no small feat for Han. Not only did she find herself in unfamiliar surroundings, but Han found that others also regarded her as unfamiliar and an outsider, despite her wealth of experience as a public speaker.

“Everyone just kind of developed this

Co-founder seeks to help students worldwide find their voices

mindset that to be naturally good at debate, you have to be a tall white guy who sounds very assertive,” Han said.

Han continued to pursue speech and debate, and ultimately came to literally and figuratively find her voice as she gained proficiency in English in her new surroundings.

However, she noticed patterns in the culture and atmosphere of speech and debate organizations and competitions that continued to trouble her — as she watched other girls, non-native English speakers, and students in general who didn't fit the traditional mold, grow discouraged and quit the program, saying they'd “had enough,” while those with more privileged statuses and backgrounds excelled.

“Unfortunately I know so many people, especially predominantly female friends, who have dropped out of speech and debate,” Han said.

Han said that while she stuck with speech and debate throughout middle and high school, and intends to in college, she understood why others would leave an atmosphere that can be competitive, stressful and ultimately unhealthy for some students.

“I think there is a lack of inclusivity in that space that I recognize, and I wanted to do something about it, because I experienced a lot of mental health issues to go through the hyper-competitiveness of a space where it just favored privileged students over the people who may

not have had a lot of resources ... to start with,” Han said.

Rather than trying to persuade others to stick it out in the existing climate, Han became determined to work toward improving that climate, and expanding the reach of speech and debate resources to those who might not otherwise consider taking it up.

“After a few years of assimilating into this American culture, and getting really familiar with speech and debate, I wanted to help other people recognize the power in their voices,” Han said.

Han eventually seized the flexibility and time that the pandemic shutdowns of 2020 offered, launching Make a Statement that June, with her friend and co-founder, fellow Dougherty Valley High student Kaylan So. Since its inception, the organization has gained international reach, offering speech and debate resources, as well as peer support and mentorship, to students locally and abroad.

The goal of Make a Statement for Han and her fellow student organizers has been to increase the accessibility of public speaking education — both for the sake of benefiting those who might not otherwise have access to it, but also for the sake of changing the culture and atmosphere in the speech and debate circuit that had threatened Han's own mental health at times.

“Just think about how when you were going

through a hard time, you probably wished for someone with a similar experience to be there and tell you that it will be ok and give you some guidance,” Han said.

“I feel like for me that person was really lacking during the time that I was stressed about assimilation, stressed about identity, stressed about an accent, about communicating with other people, and I wish there was someone who had gone through that experience to be there to give me some guidance on what I should do,” she added.

Going into college, Han said she plans to use the skills she learns and the connections she makes to further expand the organization, and to continue making her own statements from within as she continues on the speech and debate circuit at the collegiate level.

She expects Make a Statement to continue to grow and develop as she and her colleagues do, and said she looks forward to expanding its reach not just to students, but to more adult mentors who can help it flourish.

In addition to helping other students through the organization, Han said she has benefited from learning about herself, and gaining a sense of what motivates her, as a young entrepreneur and leader.

“Focusing always on advocating for those whose voice may not be heard is something that definitely plays a large part in my future,” Han said. ■

An annual magazine featuring Pleasanton neighborhoods.

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