

# Staying Healthy & Active as We Age

ARTICLE PAM BAKER | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED





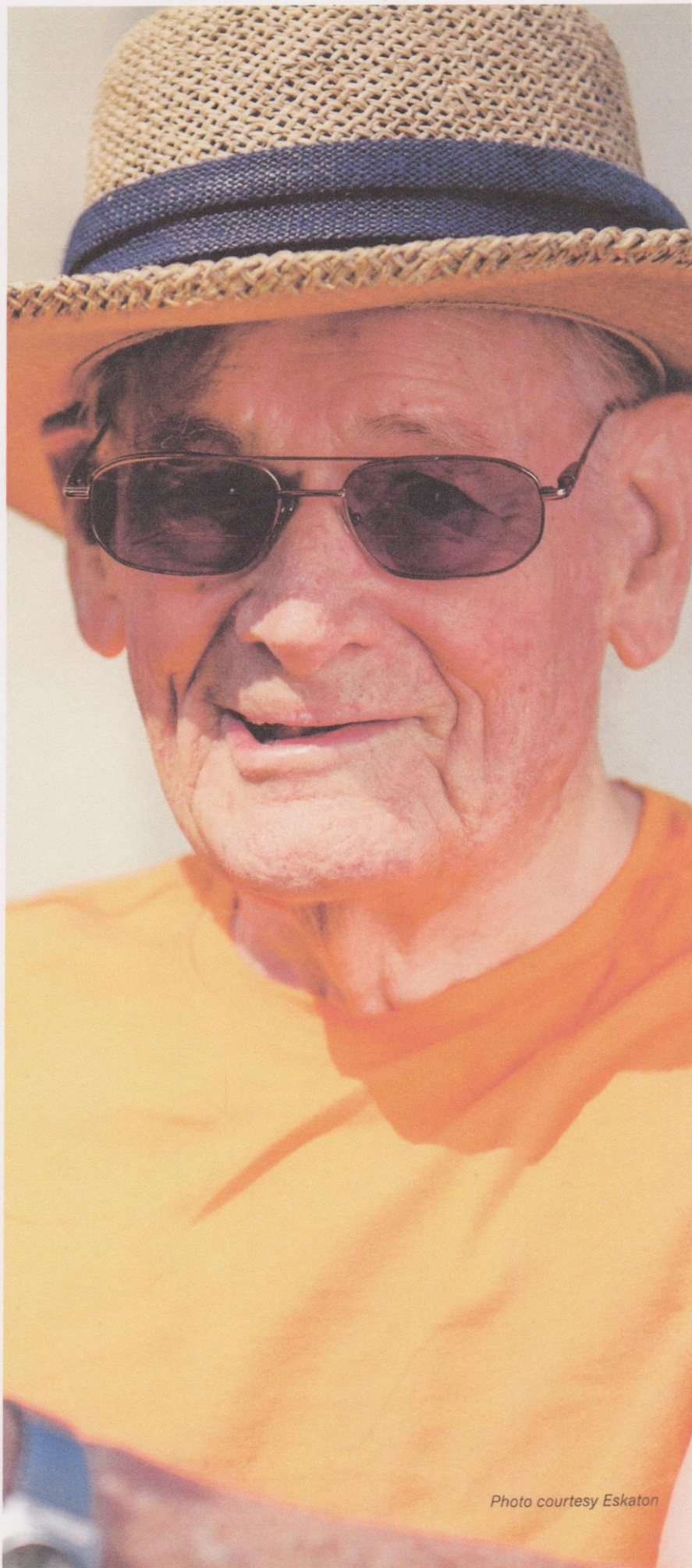


Photo courtesy Eskaton

**A**ging is no excuse to give up exercise. Staying active can improve the way you feel, keep your mind and reflexes sharp, and research shows, add years to your life. So what can seniors do to slow down the aging process or at least stay active and healthy while aging?

Bruce Coolidge, programming director for the Capital Athletic Club in Sacramento, advises "If you are active now, stay active. If you're not, get started."

#### **GET MOVING!**

Coolidge advocates patience for seniors just getting started with exercise. Don't assume you can move like you did in your 20s. It takes time to build up and seniors should start from the ground up. Coolidge advises people to build strength in their feet, then their legs, then their core and upper body. He also advises seniors to devote more activities to balance. "By the time you are in your fifties, 10 percent of your exercise routine should be devoted to activities designed to promote and improve balance."

Coolidge, who started at the Capital Athletic Club in 1989, has seen a lot of changes in the club's membership over the years. Back then, he says there were only a small number of members in their 70s. But today's generation is different and more and more seniors are seeking to stay active and healthy. Now 10 percent of the club's membership is comprised of people in their 70s, 80s, and 90s.

And, not surprisingly, a number of those members have had joint replacements. Coolidge, himself the recipient of a hip replacement, specializes in helping new members with joint replacements adapt to an exercise routine. When you have a limitation due to pain, you move less so he focuses on helping them restore "movement confidence," to restore and rebuild. Coolidge says, "If you don't move with confidence, you don't move."

Coolidge also advises seniors to keep their heads up when they walk. He said that as people age and their eyesight declines, they start to narrow their focus and look down as they walk. "You can still move slowly but keep your head up and see the hazards around you," says Coolidge. Looking up expands your field of vision, taking in millions more data points to scan the environment, and anticipate what's ahead. He has taught this technique to many of his older clients and he says the effect is amazing: "Like watching a person transform into a whole new being."

**CONTINUED >**





But today's generation is different and more and more seniors are seeking to stay active and healthy. Now 10 percent of the club's membership is comprised of people in their 70s, 80s, and 90s.

*Photo courtesy Eskaton*

#### **FIND YOUR PASSION**

Suzanne Olson, executive director of marketing and sales for Eskaton in the Sacramento region, advises seniors to "find something that they love to do, something they have a passion for. Find the activity that will challenge you." She also says that "Activities are the most important thing in helping people age well."

And Eskaton offers its residents plenty of activities. There are yoga and tai chi exercises, puzzles and trivia games, computer classes, music, and a generous selection of outings to restaurants and cultural events. She says that Eskaton residents, particularly in the independent living communities, often find themselves busier than ever before.

Eskaton also offers some of the more innovative programs. One offering is a

class called "Laughing Yoga." The certified instructor who teaches it incorporates stretching with silly moves and gestures that quickly have everyone laughing out loud.

Eskaton also recently piloted a new system using "SingFit" for assisted living and memory care. SingFit is a music-therapist-designed cognitive and physical stimulation program that incorporates singing, movement, and reminiscence. SingFit can also be downloaded as an app from iTunes for at home personal use. Olson says that "music is the best therapy" for memory challenged seniors.

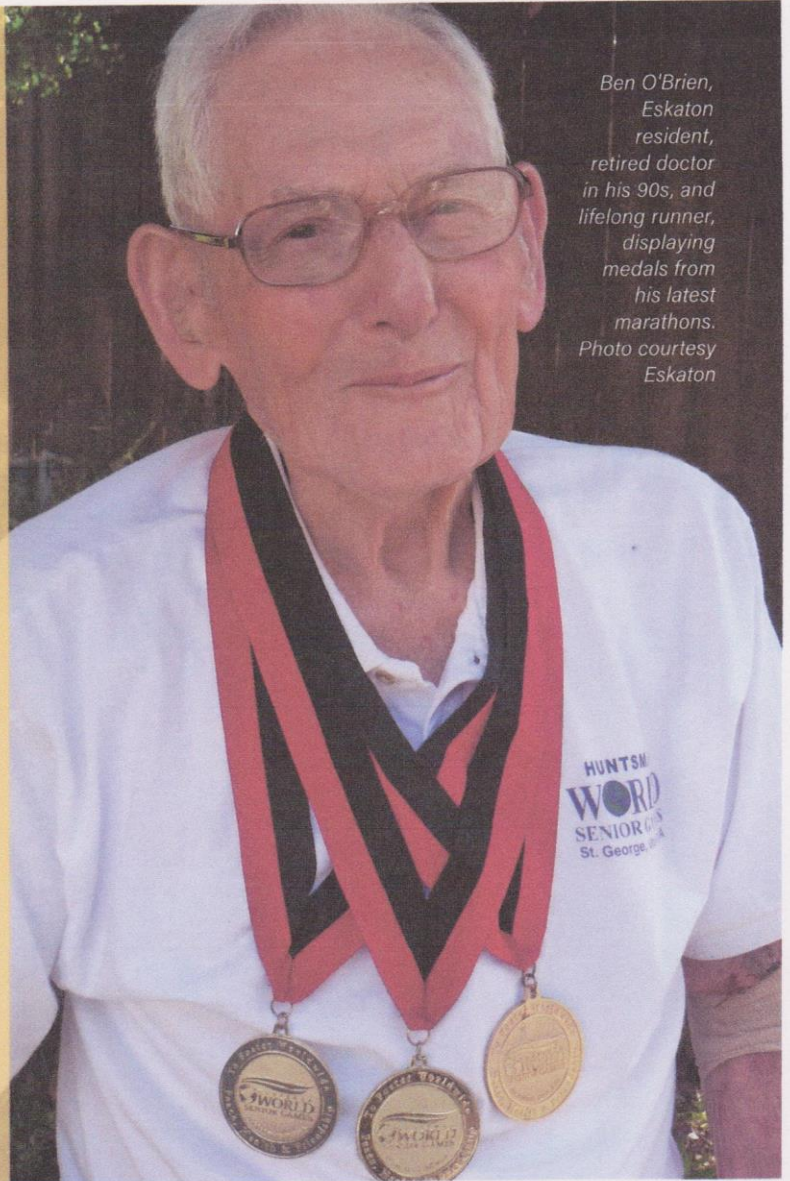
#### **STAY SHARP**

So we know that exercise and social activities help us stay healthy while aging. How do we keep our minds sharp? One

way that seniors can expand their opportunities and world is to take advantage of everything the Internet offers us. Senior Computer School on American River Drive, offers low cost computer courses to seniors who want to stay current and use technology to communicate, research, organize photos, run clubs and even keep track of bowling scores.

The school, in its 25th year, is run completely by volunteers. Housed in a double wide trailer behind Rio Americano High School, the classroom holds 16 workstations for students. Most classes run for six sessions over a two week period at an affordable cost of \$30 per student. The school runs year round and offers classes ranging from computer fundamentals, word processing, the Internet and Email, Excel, to a course on genealogy and how to use the tools to trace your family





Ben O'Brien, Eskaton resident, retired doctor in his 90s, and lifelong runner, displaying medals from his latest marathons. Photo courtesy Eskaton

heritage. The school also offers a wide variety of workshops covering topics such as how to use an iPad or how to understand your computer's operating system.

Instructors are patient and deliberate. These volunteers are all seniors teaching seniors and they understand the challenges their students face when learning new technology. One of the challenges is in coordinating the hand to the mouse, especially for those with arthritis. Joe D'Alexander, the school's long time executive director, says "It's hard to be accurate with a mouse and that takes time to learn."

Other seniors struggle with learning to use a keyboard. On the day I observed a computer fundamentals class, D'Alexander was teaching students how to use Word by creating a simple garage sale flyer. Slowly, step by step, he taught them how to

change font sizes and colors, insert pictures, and save the finished product, all functions that younger generations do almost instinctively.

D'Alexander says that once seniors learn how to be comfortable with computers, their desire to learn and do more grows naturally. He says "if I learn a little bit, then my curiosity helps me want to learn a little bit more," all the while stretching and stimulating our brains.

He says that many seniors come to the classes because they are embarrassed by their lack of understanding, want to be online like the rest of their family, and appreciate being able to learn in an environment that is geared for their age group. Once seniors are comfortable using the Internet, there is a whole world available to keep one's mind active. Skype and

email keeps us connected to our friends and family, as does social media like Facebook. But there are tons of online games and websites designed to help us keep our minds sharp.

**Luminosity.com**, for example, is an online service designed to help exercise the human brain and increase memory through the use of short daily games. Learning a second language is also known to help adults fend off dementia and there are many ways to learn that second language online. **Alison.com** offers free online courses in multiple languages and is easy to navigate.

So there you have it. Aging doesn't have to limit your physical, social, or mental capacities. In fact, these opportunities suggest that staying healthy and active while aging can be fun as well as challenging.