

# SWELL LETTER

## August 2025 Volume 5, Issue 8

### An Easy Way to Give to Your Community

Recently, Karen Knepper made available some pamphlets from DuRide, Dubuque's non-profit agency that finds rides for people over 65 who are no longer able to drive.

Would you have the time to give someone a ride to a doctor's appointment or the grocery store even once a week? It only takes a few minutes, as you simply pick them up and drop them off where they need to go- no waiting.

Giving someone a ride who cannot drive anymore is similar to why all of us at SWELL keep exercising. It helps them to:

- Remain independent
- Avoid isolation and stay social
- Have the ability to remain in their own home for a while longer

As a volunteer, giving someone a ride helps you to:

- Feel good about yourself because you've helped someone
- Meeting new and interesting people
- Participate in volunteering based on your available time
- Be a part of an agency that is one-of-a-kind in the majority of cities in the U.S.

You can offer to give people rides as often as you'd like. By receiving a daily email with the list of rides to fill for the upcoming week, you can sign up for as few or as many rides as you'd like to give, whether it's one per month or one per day.

There are several SWELL drivers who volunteer for DuRide. Just ask them how easy it is. Check with Barb Pfeiler, Colleen Zelinsky, Judy Kalb, Dan Rusch, or Mark Ressler just to name a few.

If becoming a DuRide volunteer driver is something you might be interested in doing, any of these people can talk with you, or just call the DuRide office at Fountain Park and talk to Greg, Margaret or Joyce. 563-451-4999.

Thanks!

--Barb Pfeiler



## Claudette and Tim Bees Anniversary in Freeport Bahamas

Congratulations to Claudette and Tim Bees on your 46th wedding anniversary in Freeport, Bahamas!

It's wonderful they're celebrating such a significant milestone in a beautiful location. As for "keeping younger," that's a fun and positive attitude to have, Be Well Be Swell.

Perhaps their secret to a long and happy marriage, and feeling young, is a combination of:

- **Shared Adventures:** Traveling and experiencing new places like the Bahamas together.
- **Laughter and Joy:** Finding humor and happiness in your everyday lives.
- **Love and Connection:** The enduring bond that has kept you together for 46 years.
- **Staying Active:** Engaging in activities that keep you physically and mentally sharp.
- Thanks for sharing how SWELL cultivates many of the things that keep you young.

**Photos by Claudette and Tim Bees**



# Americans in Their 80s and 90s Are Redefining Old Age

Story by Amy Dockser Marcus

Three times a week, Hank Van Parys, 94, heads to the YMCA in Kingston, N.Y., where he leads a cardiovascular fitness class.

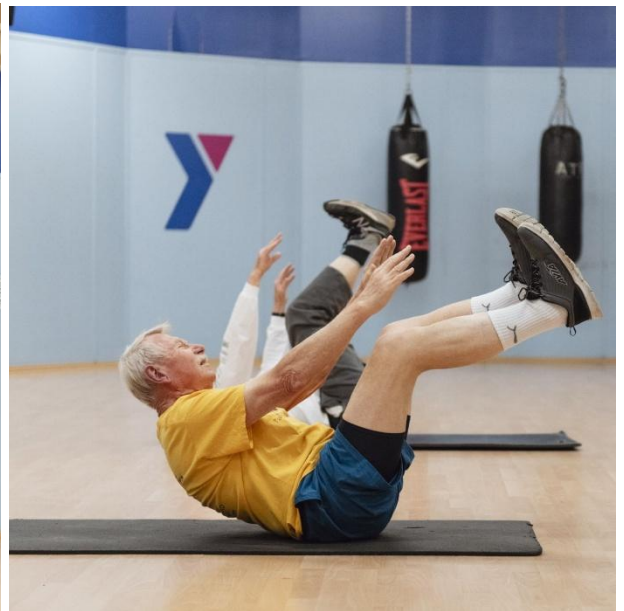
Van Parys joined the group back in 1980 when IBM, where he worked as a planner, offered the class as a perk. The workout, and the 1980s playlist that accompanies it, have not changed much, even as the people in the class have grown older. The five former IBM colleagues that remain regulars now range in age from 89 to 94. They call themselves the “Kick-Ass Old Farts.”

Van Parys runs a brisk set. “Pull on those hamstrings,” he urges. “Time to crunch,” he calls out. “Push-ups, the fun part!”

After the calisthenics, the group walks around the Y’s track for 30 minutes, then they head across the street to a favorite breakfast spot, Stone Soup Food Company. Over sausage and eggs in a spinach wrap, Van Parys sums up the credo that animates them: “Do it today so you can still do it tomorrow.”

For a growing number of Americans, old age has undergone a profound transformation. Many are living to advanced ages in good health, with some even demonstrating improvements with the passing years.

A long-running study of older people in the greater New Haven, Conn., area found that most who had lost the ability to feed or bathe themselves recovered within six months, and often sooner. The Einstein Aging Study, which has followed people 70 or older from the Bronx since 1993, discovered a declining rate of dementia in successive age cohorts born after 1929.



According to research at the Stanford Center on Longevity, older Americans report higher levels of emotional well-being and lower levels of negative emotions compared with young adults. “The reason we hadn’t seen things that tend to improve with age is we were never looking for them,” said Yochai Shavit, director of research at the Stanford Center on Longevity.

Len Waters, 89, is evidence of this growing resilience among older Americans. He joined the fitness class at the Kingston Y decades ago, after his IBM manager talked him into it. Waters had heart bypass surgery 20 years ago. Three weeks after surgery, he asked his doctor, “Can I go back to class?”

## Aging, But Not Declining

There have been warnings for years about a “gray tsunami” of old people in decline. They were going to overwhelm the economy and sink society.

Some of those predictions have come true. One in six people in the U.S. are now 65 and over, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By 2034, for the first time in U.S. history, adults 65 and older will outnumber people under 18.

Aging remains a key risk factor for major diseases. Wear and tear accumulate over time and can cause different parts of the body to eventually break down. Not everyone has access to preventive care to help stave off chronic illness and improve aging. Studies have shown [a longevity divide](#), with wealthy Americans living longer [than lower income individuals](#).

Longer lifespans have come with the challenge that many people live more years with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, according to research published last year by a Mayo Clinic team led by Dr. Andre

Terzic. The study found that, compared with other countries, the U.S. had the highest average gap, of 12.4 years, between lifespan (the years someone lives) and health span (the years lived in good health).

“Increased life expectancy is a true triumph of humankind,” Terzic said. Researchers are now working to find the treatments and interventions that will reliably delay or prevent the most common diseases.

Yet there are [modest lifestyle changes](#) that have [already proven effective](#). Dr. Mark Lachs, co-chief of geriatrics and palliative medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, regularly assures his geriatric patients that they can change the course of their own aging. He recommends volunteer work to reduce social isolation and walking programs to maintain mobility. These and other slight interventions have yielded measurable improvements, he said, in things like grip strength, gait, speed and steps per day. He also asks his patients about their ability to handle finances, do light housework and administer their medications correctly.

Although more older Americans are living with chronic disease such as arthritis, high blood pressure or diabetes, Lachs said these statistics say little about the quality of these lives: “You can’t tell if they are living in a nursing home or CEO of a Fortune 500 company.”

#### Pills and Pushups

Dr. Thomas Gill of Yale has drawn similar conclusions from his study in the greater New Haven area, which for more than 25 years has followed 750 people who are 70 or older. Six people from the original cohort are still alive, all of them 97 or older.

Gill has been struck by the physical resilience of those he followed as they aged. In monthly interviews, participants answer questions about their daily habits and tasks, such as bathing, dressing and walking across the room. In a study of people who had lost the ability to do such tasks, over 80% regained independence, most within six months—recovery rates that were higher than previously known.

“People who are in pretty good shape and cognitively intact are more likely to recover even after serious events,” Gill said.

In another study that Gill worked on involving more than 1,600 sedentary elderly people, the group assigned to walk 150 minutes a week had a lowered risk of disability and, especially in older men, reduced rates of serious fall injuries. Gill thinks the message about the relationship between lifestyle changes and longevity is starting to get through:

“Folks who are 75 now are in better shape on average than someone 75 a generation ago.”

No one now disputes the role that regular exercise, good sleep and a healthy diet play in lengthening lives and improving their quality. The market for more radical interventions for boosting health and longevity, including supplements and off-label drugs, is [also robust and growing](#). Avid consumers attend sold-out conferences and lectures by longevity influencers. They join longevity gyms and go to [longevity clinics](#).

Entrepreneur Peter Diamandis, 63, is a co-founder of Fountain Life, which offers longevity-related diagnostics and therapies to deep-pocketed customer-memberships range from \$6,500 to \$120,000. An agile advocate for healthy aging, Diamandis does a continuous set of 100 push-ups, and two sets of 50 knee bends every day, something he says he couldn’t do in his 30s. He takes 75 pills—supplements and prescription drugs—a day and gets to the gym for weight training at least four times a week. His aim, he says, is to keep himself in shape until better interventions can modify or even reverse the aging process.

Diamandis, who [founded and chairs](#) the XPRIZE Foundation, raised funds for the XPRIZE Health span, a seven-year competition with a \$101 million purse, for which teams of scientists from around the world are trying to develop interventions to reverse losses in muscle, cognitive and immune function by at least 10 years in people between 50 and 80 years old. On May 12, 100 teams reached the semifinals. Winners will be announced in 2030.

Since 2021 over 175 people have attended Diamandis’s five-day Longevity Platinum Trips, for which he charges \$70,000 per person. Participants meet entrepreneurs and scientists working on various longevity interventions and technologies. Sometimes they end up investing in these efforts. They also receive gift bags with devices and wearables.

Despite Fountain Life’s emphasis on cutting-edge technologies, much of Diamandis’s advice feels reassuringly familiar. At the start of a West Coast trip last year, he urged the group to cut down on sugar, get more sleep, stick to an exercise regimen and stay positive. “You don’t have to think about the next 50 years,” he told them. “Just think of the next 10.”

#### A Matter of Perspective

For most of human history, before birth certificates became common, people were called “young” or “old” based mainly on how they looked.

The passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 led to the idea that retirement should begin at age 65, according to James Chappel, a professor at Duke University and the author of the recent book “[Golden Years: How Americans](#)

[Invented and Reinvented Old Age.](#)” The federal government picked 65 because it aligned with European pension systems, and for years it was seen as the pivot to old age. For many people now, old age is based on how they feel. Inez B. Vanable, 97, a resident of Harlem who participates in the Einstein Aging Study, says that her favorite year was 1949, when she graduated from college and married her childhood sweetheart. “It was so great,” she said. She doesn’t associate older adulthood with a particular year; instead, she tries to look forward. “I keep getting new friends,” she said.



Inez B. Vanable, 97, prepares a breakfast of a boiled egg, toast and a cup of tea at home in Harlem on April 23.

Vanable met new people through her Scrabble group. She learned to tap dance at age 62, performing around the city in a seniors’ group until 2019. She uses public transportation to join fellow family genealogists on visits to historical sites.

Close to 200 people attended her 97th birthday party last October in the Grand Ballroom in Harlem. She joined friends and her family, which now includes 19 great-grandchildren and nine great-great-grandchildren, in a line dance to celebrate the milestone.

A former schoolteacher, she started volunteering at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem 36 years ago, giving tours to children. When her arthritis made it hard to stand for hours, she switched to the information desk, where she works for two hours a week.

In 2001 Vanable joined the Einstein Aging Study, which has been examining normal brain aging and dementia since 1980 at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. Dr. Richard Lipton, a neurologist and director of the study, said that she is not an outlier: “She is a great example of how you can get to 97 and remain almost fully cognitively intact.”

Lipton said that there are more people living with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia today because people are living longer. But when he and his team dug into how people are faring cognitively by age group, they found the rate of dementia is going down, not up, in successive birth cohorts. They believe that people are benefiting from more effective ways to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood sugar, which lowers the risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

Dancing, reading for pleasure and learning a new language were shown among study participants to protect against cognitive decline. “Not everyone gets dementia,” he said.

Mimi Gerstell, 79, went back to graduate school at age 45 after getting divorced, eventually earning a Ph.D. in planetary science at the California Institute of Technology. She joined a writing group when she was 68 to support her desire to write a book, which she self-published. “Fish Stories by a Scientific Nobody: Travels in the Galactic Argumentative Zone” chronicles what it was like to be a midlife doctoral student.

Gerstell, who had been splitting her time between Florida and Maine for more than a decade, now lives full time in Maine, where she has friends she has known since summer camp. Her social circle also includes people in her bridge club, her writing group, her church and her golf club, a sport she took up in her 60s. “I want to be surrounded by a larger community of people,” she said.

The same goes for the “Kick-Ass Old Farts” fitness group at the Kingston Y. They celebrate birthdays with beer and pizza. At their breakfasts, they discuss what’s happening around town. They share tips on how to find a good roofer or a top cardiologist. Three of them joined an investment club where members pool their money and vote on when to buy or sell stocks.

Frank Almquist, 90, a regular “Old Fart,” still serves on his town’s planning board. “It’s important to keep the mind and the body occupied,” he said.

One of the men left the breakfast a little early for a hearing-aid appointment. Another told Van Parys that he noticed some younger men in the locker room giving him extra room because his balance was a little off.

“No matter,” Van Parys told him. “You’re still here.”



Len Waters and his ‘Kick-Ass Old Farts’ friends at their favorite breakfast spot after their fitness class. Three weeks after his heart-bypass surgery 20 years ago, he asked his doctor, ‘Can I go back to class?’ © Kate Warren for WSJ



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**Submitted by Gary Conlon**

## Important Dates.

### Fall sign-up during class

**\*Returning SWELL Members (Now through Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> August)**

**Please let me know if you are not returning.**

**\*New members sign up (Monday August 25 through Friday September 26<sup>th</sup>)**

**\$100.00 each in an envelope with name on it, Make payment to Gary Wittman  
SWELL Registration:**

### Online Waver Form (Required):

1. Click the link below to access the online waver form:
  - o <https://dbqcentral.etrive.cloud/?isAnonymous=true#form/193>
2. Complete all fields on the form, including the E-Signature and Date at the bottom.
3. Click the "Submit" button located in the bottom left corner within the black margin.  
(Tip: Look carefully for the button!)
4. Next screen will ask if you are a robot, click no.
5. You may be asked to identify some photos.
6. The screen will show you have successfully registered your form.

**\* SWELL Picnic (Wednesday, 4:30 PM)**

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### SWELL PICNIC

**Wednesday October 1<sup>st</sup>, Rain Date Thursday October 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**STARTS 4:15-4:30 PM**

**EAT AT 5:00 PM**

**16674 WITTMAN HAMM CT.**

**DUBUQUE, IA 52001**

**BRING TABLE SETTING, DRINK, YOUR FAVORITE DISH TO PASS,  
AND CHAIR**

**SWELL WILL SUPPLY PULLED MEAT AND BUNS**

**RSVP SELF AND GUEST**

**RETURN TO THIS EMAIL**

**[garydonaldwittman@gmail.com](mailto:garydonaldwittman@gmail.com)**

**We could use a few volunteers to help with parking.**

### Performances at the Heritage Center

**\*BritBeat \$40 each Vineyard (Saturday, September 27, 2025, 7:30 PM)**

**Collect Money in envelope Name on outside (August 25 through September 19<sup>th</sup>)**

**\*Texas Tenors \$59 each Main floor Saturday, December 13, 2025, 7:30 PM**

**Collect Money in envelope Name on outside (November 10<sup>th</sup> through 28<sup>th</sup>)**

**Click on the link and see what happens during Tension Zen Meditation.**  
You will see the heart rate and stress levels drop during Tension Zen. This drop-in heart rate and stress will calm and relax you immediately after meditation. Over time you will become less stressed and calmer each day. Remember stress is the cause of up to 80% illness.

[https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/18954354811?share\\_unique\\_id=67](https://connect.garmin.com/modern/activity/18954354811?share_unique_id=67)



**Tension Zen Mind and Body** on Patreon offers 2 audio tracks to help you sleep better including the 20-minute meditation experience after lunch daily and the 7-minute Tension Zen Deep Sleep Experience when you go to bed and repeat if you wake up at night to go back to sleep.  
**Our Tension Zen meditation app is available on Patreon!**  
For just \$1 a month, you'll gain access to a wealth of resources designed to improve your physical and mental well-being. For \$2 a month you will gain access to SWELL workouts and Tai Chi.

<https://www.patreon.com/TensionZen>

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**Thanks to those who submitted wonderful articles to our SWELL newsletter.**