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Fit for Life

YOU’VE ARRIVED. NOW ENJOY IT, YOU’VE EARNED IT.

By Tim Johnson

Year after year, Bellingham and the upper Puget Sound region top the lists of best places to retire, garnering laurels for affordability and abundant choices in recreation and entertainment. But you already knew that coming in.

Bellingham is a great place to retire for a variety of reasons—a vibrant economy, low crime rate and (believe it or not) still a relatively low average home price. But it’s the city’s Things To Do list that tops them all.

Snow slopes are as near as beaches and the sparkling islands of the San Juans, mountains are as plentiful as dells. Perhaps the most appealing aspects of the city, though, are the climate and walkability of neighborhoods. Mile upon mile of trails and bike paths thread their way through the city—and those can open into the hundreds of miles through the vast greenbelt that surrounds the city.

Need a trail guide? The City of Bellingham offers several of the printed variety. For a more personal guide, consider joining the Senior Trailblazers, a hiking club for folks 50 years old and over. The club’s purpose is to provide an opportunity for members to hike on a weekly basis throughout the year regardless of weather.

“Our philosophy is to promote fellowship and camaraderie in addition to keeping our bodies healthy and in shape,” Trailblazers say.

The club offers varying flavors of hikes for different fitness levels, from happy wanderers to more challenging climbs along longer paths. The easy hikes are on flat or slightly rolling terrain while the moderate hikes are uphill and in the mountains.

Want to go it alone?

Consider a hike along the Hertz Trail along the northeast shore of Lake Whatcom—nearly six miles on level, almost flat terrain surrounded by towering Douglas Firs. This beautiful trail sits between Stewart Mountain and Lake Whatcom and follows the railroad grade of the Bellingham & Eastern Railway.

Need a little help getting in shape?

Too often people associate fitness with strenuous exercise when, really, fitness is any activity that helps to get you moving. The benefits of physical activity are reduced stress and anxiety levels, improved circulation and mobility, increased energy levels and better heart health.

Nearly every local gym offers a special package for this kind of fitness, including stretching and strength training for increased mobility.

The Bellingham Family YMCA offers a full spectrum of fitness classes specifically designed for older adults. These programs give members an opportunity to stay physically active or, in some cases, overcome a fear of exercise. Active older adults programs include water exercise, yoga and stretching classes, strength and aerobic conditioning classes.

But getting outdoors is the simplest, easiest way to boost your physical and mental well-being, no matter your age. Going outside generally results in greater physical activity and it’s an easy way to socialize and interact with others.

Looking for a space to grow vegetables, herbs or flowers? Bellingham Parks and Recreation offers a community garden program at three locations. Some neighborhoods offer joint gardening space.

Planting a garden or tending a flower bed is terrific motivation to spend more time outdoors, and you’ll have the bounty of your work to enjoy, as well. Even a box garden designed for a smaller space requires regular care, so you’ll find yourself outdoors on a consistent basis.

For a gentler journey into the outdoors, consider birdwatching. Whatcom County is home to six key locations on the Audubon Society’s Great Washington State Birding Trail, Cascade Loop, and offers views of a tremendous variety of waterfowl and spectacular birds of prey.

For a more urban recreational experience, outdoor theaters offer numerous forms of entertainment, from music to plays. Many neighborhoods offer pocket concerts throughout the summer, as does the Bellingham Festival of Music through its community outreach programming. Western Washington University, too, offers performances throughout the year.

You might even pair a meal with a concert or a show for an enjoyable evening away from home. You’ve earned it.
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—Mary H., Ferndale clinic customer

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Lessons From Savvy Seniors

HOW TO HIT THE ROAD

By Carey Ross

I am not a senior, nor do I travel often. But I hope to become a globetrotter one day and am surrounded by a savvy group of experienced world-wanderers who love to answer my endless questions.

My most well-traveled friends are a mostly retired couple, Melissa and Thane, and to misquote the Johnny Cash song, they've been everywhere. They've toured the castles of Ireland, explored the nooks of New Zealand, sipped their way through Sonoma wine country, and walked the Camino de Santiago—and that's all within the past few years. Between their bigger trips, they take shorter excursions to Vancouver and Whistler, Anacortes and the San Juans.

You'd think with how much and how far they journey, that Melissa and Thane must have amassed great personal wealth during the 9-5 portion of their lives. However, that is not the case. Like so many seniors, they are budget travelers—they just know that the key to traveling well means spending wisely.

I have long thought that there were only two ways to get great travel deals: book way early or at the very last minute—not ideal for most people. But Melissa has taught me that flexibility and vigilance are the qualities required for cheap travel. Melissa and Thane often plan their trips during an area's off-season. Which is not to say they go to the beach in the dead of winter. Instead, they plan their getaways to just one side or the other of peak season, which enables them to enjoy the perks of sought-after places without the crowds or costs. Speaking of costs, Melissa is a first-rate deal hawk—and she likes to spread the informational wealth. Recently, she's posted on her Facebook page about round-trip tickets to Scotland for less than $500; a package deal to Ireland that includes airfare, auto travel and accommodations for $799; and an all-inclusive trip to Egypt for $1,799. Best of all, departure dates are flexible enough that none of the trips require keeping a packed suitcase by the front door.

The list of travel tips I've gleaned from Melissa and Thane is too long to recount, but among the more practical ones are: 1. Rinsing your clothes and hanging them to dry during long trips is a small price to pay for the convenience of packing light (but Melissa would tell you to pack an extra bra). 2. Choosing accommodations with a kitchen is a surefire way to save money. Thane and Melissa typically cook breakfast, cobble together a snack or picnic lunch and choose to allot their food budget to dinner. Given that they are avowed foodies, this seems like sound advice.

But the most valuable lesson I've learned from this dynamic duo is also the most out-of-left-field one: Sometimes you have to train for travel. Even before they hiked the Camino, Thane and Melissa were dedicated walkers, and their favorite way to explore is on foot. When they're gearing up for a trip that will cause their daily step count to rise, they train prior to departure. In the case of the Camino, they started early and stuck to a schedule of increasingly longer walks, but for most trips their regimen is as simple as logging extra miles in the days or weeks before they leave.

Some folks prefer to do the bulk of their traveling closer to home, such as my friend Diane, a retired teacher. Whereas Melissa and Thane are geographic explorers, Diane is on an endless quest to take in as much art and culture—particularly live theater—as she can. This causes her to journey to Seattle and Vancouver, BC many weekends of the year and, as such, she's become a bit of an expert in the art of the staycation. In recent years, as traffic gets worse and parking becomes harder to find, Diane has been relying on alternative forms of transit—trains and buses in particular—to get where she's going. Rather than decreasing her mobility, it has increased it and made her trips more pleasurable overall. These days, it is common to hear her sing the praises of Vancouver's mass-transit system alongside her theater critiques. As with Melissa and Thane, what I have learned from Diane is also a little unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you have learned from Diane is also a little unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you unorthodox: If you buy the tickets, you...
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A DATE WITH DESTINY

By Amy Kepferle

The day I turned 21, a checker at the Albertsons where I purchased my first legal six-pack of beer expressed disbelief that I was as old as my driver’s license informed her I was.

“You look about 15,” I recall her saying as she rung up my Coors Light. I took her side-eye skepticism as a compliment, and spent subsequent decades proving my age to anybody who asked me to.

Thirty years later, an interaction with a checker at a different grocery store brought home the reality it was likely I was never again going to be mistaken for being younger than I am.

“Do you qualify for today’s senior discount?” she casually quipped after tallying up the cost of the toilet paper, assorted vegetables, cereal and soy milk at her register.

I was aghast, but managed to sputter, “How old do you have to be to get the deal?”

“To get the 10 percent savings we offer at Bellingham Grocery Outlet on the second Thursday of every month, you need to be 55 or older,” she answered.

“I’m not quite there yet, but thanks so much for asking,” I countered with more than a touch of sarcasm.

Back at home—after confirming the nascent gray hairs on my head hadn’t quadrupled overnight—I came to the realization that although I’d much rather be mistaken for a millennial than a matron, I could use aging to my advantage.

At 51, I’m already prequalified for the sizable discounts offered through the American Association of Retired Persons. Although I’m not retired—and won’t be for a while yet—I’m wondering if it’s finally time to stop throwing the AARP membership offers in the recycling bin and pony up the $16 a year that will garner me deals on everything from renting a car to airplane tickets, hotel reservations, eyeglass prescriptions, life and property insurance, cell phone plans, roadside assistance, and beyond.

In addition to taking the foray into AARP or savings offered in my age range as part of the Senior Citizen Discount Card, I have been searching closer to home to make a list of bargains I can look forward to in coming years.

As well as the aforementioned deal at the BGO, Fred Meyer stores in Whatcom and Skagit counties offer 10 percent off to those 55 and older on the first Tuesday of every month, and both Community Food Co-ops in Bellingham feature free membership for people 62 and older—as does the Skagit Valley Food Co-op in Mount Vernon.

I also sussed out senior savings at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Amtrak, the Airport Shuttle, YMCA, Bellewood Acres, the Assistance League of Bellingham, Ferntucky Medical, Salvation Army, Mount Baker Vineyards and Winery, Mt. Baker Lanes and Park Bowl, the Pickford Film Center and Limelight Cinema, Regal Cinemas, Arne Hanna Aquatic Center, Silver Reef Casino Resort, and Whatcom Transportation Authority.

When I do near retirement age, I found those 62 and older can pony up $80 for a lifetime membership for the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass, which provides access to, and use of, Federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee.

Hopefully, by the time I’m old enough to reap these rewards, I’ll have come to terms with the fact that aging is a privilege, and I’ve earned the right to profit from it.
Welcome To Yes

BELLINGHAM ADVANCED MEDICAL IMAGING

As a CT Technologist at Bellingham Advanced Medical Imaging (BAMI), Jason Plumb knows when patients are confronted with the large, donut-shaped machine that has the ability to take pictures of their organs, bones and other tissues, he has the power to put them at ease.

“Calm patients make for a better exam,” Plumb says, noting the “quiet and quick” scans he oversees require people to remain still. “I’m very relaxed, and I want my patients to be relaxed as well.”

Although he’s been employed in the computed tomography field for almost 15 years, Plumb says the time he’s spent working at BAMI since the medical imaging center opened in June 2018 has opened his eyes to a more accessible King Street doors for a CT, MRI, Ultrasound, or X-ray know their care is the staff’s top priority. They’ll never be told the diagnostic imaging center isn’t accepting additional patients, or that the doctors don’t have time to talk to them. Instead, they’ll discover simple scheduling, transparent pricing that is often less expensive than the same service at a hospital or other imaging centers in the region, and personnel who are more than willing to answer questions.

“I love watching how patients react when I say yes,” Plumb says. “My experience is that older people especially want to know exactly what I’m doing along the way: ‘How long will it take? How accurate is it? When can I expect a phone call from my physician?’ I anticipate these questions, and am happy to say, ‘Yes, of course I can answer that for you.’”

Other common queries seniors have relate to the aforementioned cost of the services they’ll be receiving. Because BAMI works with patients on Medicare and Apple Health (Medicaid)—among a wide array of other major insurance providers—they can rest assured the group’s financial services team will help them navigate the often-confusing world of health insurance coverage. Payment plans and recurring billing are also options, and those without insurance can inquire about cash-pay prices and prepay discounts.

Whatever patients are dealing with—whether it be a torn ligament, unexpected abdominal pain, scoliosis or a cancer diagnosis—they should know they won’t be turned away.

Dr. Laurence D. Cambron, the Medical Director at BAMI and one of the neuroradiologists who saw the need to open an outpatient imaging center in the first place, says that in addition to serving Whatcom County residents, they also work with patients who are receiving care from as far away as Seattle and Vancouver.

This is possible because BAMI acts as a community partner to deliver their results to the patients’ primary physician, if necessary. After getting scans from the technologists, trained radiologists then provide detailed reports and high-quality images of the results to the physicians using an easy-to-navigate picture archiving and communications systems (PACS) portal.

“Our staff incorporates the latest technology in medical imaging and image-guided therapy into cost-effective clinical practice,” BAMI’s service statement reads. “We actively maintain a leadership role in providing these services to the medical community and collaborate with health care providers to continuously improve patient care. Our shared values include mutual respect, teamwork, superior service, professionalism and confidentiality.”

Don Enos, BAMI’s director of marketing and business development, says he’s found some people aren’t even aware they have an option when it comes to where they can receive medical imaging. He adds that as Whatcom County and surrounding areas have become more populated, outpatient services like theirs have become even more valuable to patients to save time and money. And the fact that BAMI is focused on customer service as well as top-notch medical care is a critical element to their success.

“We are an extension to doctors we work with, so there’s a seamless experience with the patients,” he says. “After all, we’re all patients at some point and just want to feel better.”

On a typical day at BAMI, patients might arrive to find one of the receptionists filling out thank you cards to send to prior visitors while fielding queries from someone else calling to find out if their scans had been sent to their physician (not surprisingly, the answer is often “Yes, of course”).

While waiting for their appointment, it’s likely they’ll take a deep breath while listening to the water feature behind the front desk or watching nature-focused videos that combine to put them at ease. More often than not, the technologists are working in a timely manner, and their appointment will soon be underway.

“Everyone here has a good attitude,” says Ultrasound Technologist Sarah Zhivora. She says caring for people has helped her get over her innate shyness, and she loves connecting with her patients.

Above all, though, she makes sure she’s doing her job to the best of her abilities. She wants to always be able to answer “yes” when asked if she did what was needed to provide care to the patient.
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