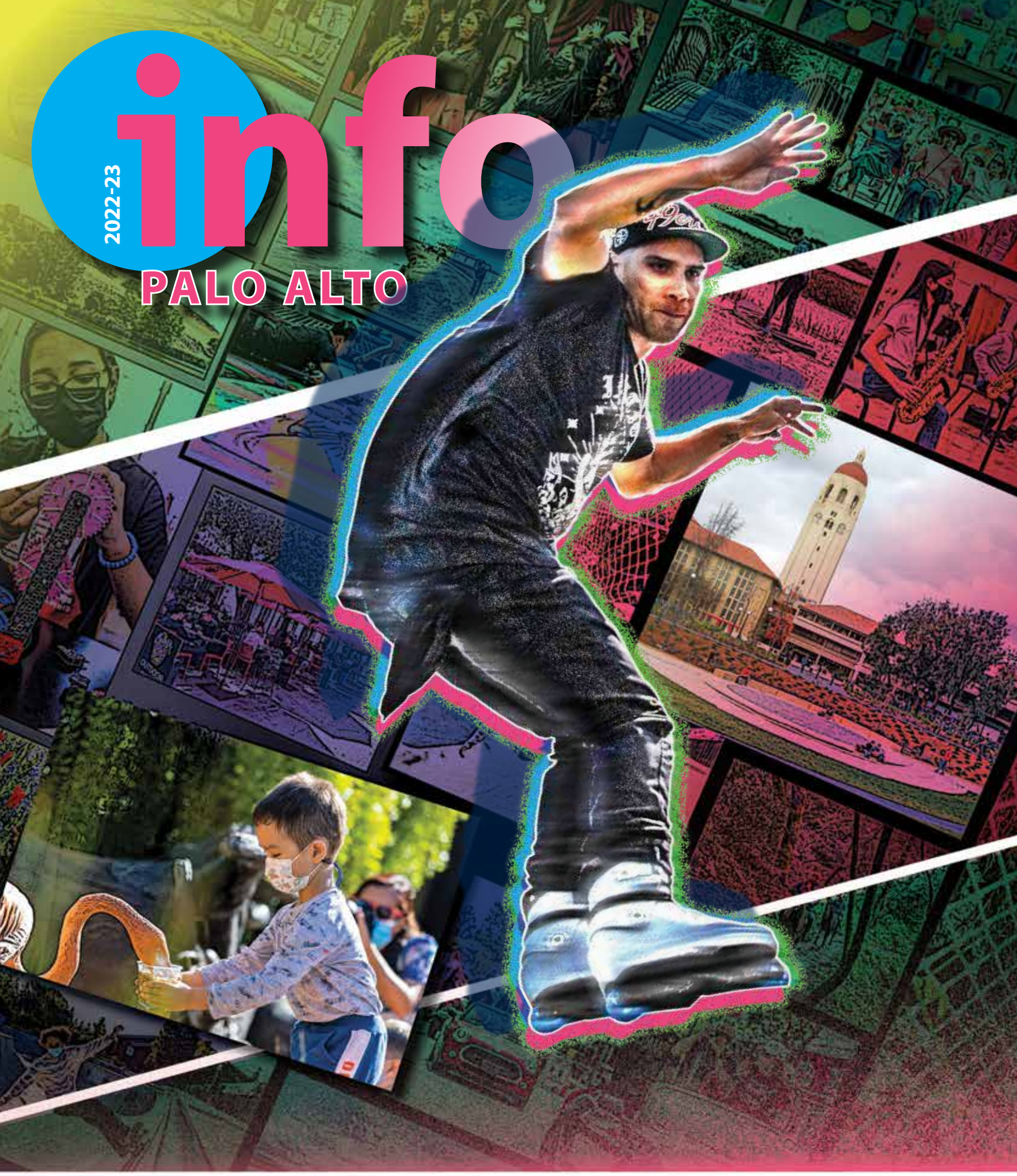


# info

2022-23

PALO ALTO



A LOCAL RESOURCE GUIDE PUBLISHED BY THE PALO ALTO WEEKLY

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government | social services | [PaloAltoOnline.com](http://PaloAltoOnline.com)



# 'Solo agers' have options on the Peninsula

*Local programs help childless seniors navigate the future*

BY CHRIS KENRICK

Throughout Palo Alto and the broader Peninsula, thousands of seniors are aging solo — without a partner and having had no children. But aging solo doesn't have to mean aging alone. There are plenty of local programs and senior-care experts to help older adults thrive in their golden years. People like Paula Wolfson, manager of social work and caregiving for the Palo Alto senior services agency Avenidas, and Sara Zeff Geber, a Bay Area retirement coach and expert in solo aging, advise older adults to think ahead, find like-minded people and consider all of their options.

Peninsula couple Ros and John, who are childless, are among those weighing the challenges of navigating old age. The longtime married couple, who agreed to share their story but asked that their last names not be published to protect their privacy, are without immediate family to provide them needed care as they age.

John, a software engineer, was diagnosed with cancer in 2005 at age 49, and had to stop working the following year. He now has difficulty walking, suffers from frontotemporal dementia and needs considerable care. Ros, who is in her 60s, looks after him at home as she continues to work remotely for Stanford University.

"I'm coping on my own as we navigate his illness," she said. "I have many friends, but you can't ask friends to do what you would ask family. It's a huge concern."

Ros and John are not alone. More than 15 million American adults over 55 — nearly 1 in 6 — do not have children, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And the bureau projects that "levels of childlessness among older adults" will increase in coming years as younger cohorts are increasingly not having children.

Without adult children to help in case they're no longer able to care for themselves, "solo agers" have particular challenges in planning for their futures, Wolfson said.

"Solo agers have literally called me from the hospital because they're going to be discharged and they don't have anybody at home, don't have any way to get food," Wolfson said.

For those with money, hiring in-home care or paying roughly \$10,000 in monthly fees to live in a care facility are possibilities, but most seniors do not have such resources, she said.

Rich or poor, it's especially important for solo agers to focus on proactive planning, according to Geber.

For those without children, "ties with friends, siblings, nieces and nephews and even community tend to be (and should be) more prominent," Geber said.

Geber and other local experts shared the following tips and local resources for solo agers:

## Choose a proxy

"Do you have a durable power of attorney designated in case you have difficulty with healthcare or financial decision-making? That is the key," said Paula Wolfson, manager of social work and caregiving for the Palo Alto senior services agency Avenidas. Choose someone to be your proxy decision-maker in case you develop an impairment and have difficulty making decisions. This can be a trusted friend or a trained professional, Geber added.

**Assistance for advance care planning:** The National Institute on Aging provides information on how to get legal and financial papers in order and other advance care planning information at [nia.nih.gov/health/getting-your-affairs-order](http://nia.nih.gov/health/getting-your-affairs-order).

## Develop a social network

Isolation often comes with living alone and can pose a greater risk of cutting one's life short than smoking or heart disease, Geber said. Think about your support system: Will your longtime neighbors, for example, stay around as they age, or will they move away to be with family, and all of a sudden, you're



Ros watches as her husband, John, reads from one of his birthday cards in the backyard of their Peninsula home. Without adult children to help in case they're no longer able to care for themselves, "solo agers" have particular challenges in planning for their futures. Photo by Magali Gauthier.

looking at a hole in your life because someone has left, she said. It's important to develop a strong support network and to keep investing in relationships with others. To remain active in the community, she suggests doing the following: Understand your transportation options; stay involved in activities; maintain ties to places of worship; get a dog; arrange dining with others; stay in touch with neighbors.

One way to find like-minded people is to participate in activities that you enjoy. Join a walking group, photography class or wine club.

**Classes and social activities:** Avenidas senior center ([avenidas.org](http://avenidas.org)), Oshman Family Jewish Community Center ([paloaltojcc.org](http://paloaltojcc.org)) and the YMCA of Silicon Valley ([ymcasv.org](http://ymcasv.org)) are among local centers that provide a variety of classes and activities.

## Choose to age in 'the right place'

Geber said don't just age in place, choose to age in "the right place." If someone lives in a large home and barely knows their neighbors, that might not be the ideal place to age alone. She suggests exploring possibilities beyond how or where a person is living now. She said consider other opportunities, such as co-housing developments, active adult communities or mobile home parks that provide opportunities to participate in a ready-made community with activity centers, communal laundry and other spaces to socialize. Those who want to age in place might consider living with housemates, she said.

## Housing resources:

- Avenidas Village is a support network for those aging in place, [avenidasvillage.org](http://avenidasvillage.org).

- For home-sharing information and a searchable index, go to [silvernest.com](http://silvernest.com). Mountain View is home to a co-housing community. For more information, go to [mountainviewcohousing.org](http://mountainviewcohousing.org).

## Affordable housing resources:

Affordable housing is the top request that Palo Alto senior services agency Avenidas receives on its help line, said social worker Thomas Kingery.

The Santa Clara County Housing Authority ([schousingauthority.org](http://schousingauthority.org)) as well as the nonprofits Alta Housing ([althousing.org](http://althousing.org)), Lytton Gardens ([covia.org](http://covia.org)), MidPen Housing ([midpen-housing.org](http://midpen-housing.org)) and Stevenson House ([stevensonhouse.org](http://stevensonhouse.org)) operate low-income apartments in the area and are among the groups seniors should check with when searching for affordable housing. Searchable waitlists for affordable housing also are available at [affordablehousingonline.com](http://affordablehousingonline.com). The Santa Clara County Housing Authority also provides Section 8 housing vouchers ([schousingauthority.org/applicantportal](http://schousingauthority.org/applicantportal)) to help qualified seniors with rental assistance. The Silicon Valley Independent Living Center ([svilc.org/workshops-and-events](http://svilc.org/workshops-and-events)), which offers guidance to older adults and people with disabilities, including hosting a monthly housing workshop on Zoom on the first Friday of the month to help people with their search. ①

— Linda Taaffe contributed to this article

# AVENIDAS PROGRAMS HELP YOU RE-CONNECT,



## Avenidas Village

### Living Better – At Home!

Pre-screened Vendors • Transportation Assistance  
Members-Only Website • Handyman & Tech Support  
Social Events & Interest Groups  
Check-in Phone Call (if desired)



## Avenidas Learning & Leisure

### Offering opportunities for personal development!

Medicare, Legal & Tax Counseling Services  
Art, Drama & Writing • Current Events & Lectures  
Games & Clubs • Improv & Wine Tasting  
Offerings Online & In-Person



## Avenidas Care Partners

### Guiding people through life's transitions!

Elder Care Consultations • Case Management  
Individual & Family Counseling • Family Caregiver  
Support Groups • Information & Referral Services  
Community Presentations



## Avenidas Rose Kleiner Center

### Caring for participants in a safe, nurturing day program!

Daily Nursing & Health Monitoring • Music & Art  
Group Exercise • Social Work Services & Caregiver Support  
OT, PT & Speech Therapy Interventions • Nutritious Lunches  
Holiday Celebrations • Transportation



## Avenidas Health & Wellness

### Keeping adults informed and active!

Fitness Classes • Health Lectures & Screenings  
Therapeutic Nail Care • Meditation  
Medical Equipment Loan Closet  
Qi Gong, Feldenkrais & Yoga Therapy



# RE-INVIGORATE, AND RE-DISCOVER YOURSELF!



## Avenidas Chinese Community Center

Exploring cultures, customs and languages!

- Activities in both English & Mandarin
- Tai Chi
- Dance Classes
- Mahjong, Ping Pong & Karaoke
- Calligraphy & Brush Painting
- Cultural Celebrations
- Offerings Online & In-Person



## Avenidas Volunteer Corps

Sharing Your Time and Talents!

- Tutor with Early Literacy Program (ELP)
- Provide Rides
- Help with Office Projects
- Do Blood Pressure Screens
- Assist at Conferences
- Lead a Class or Activity



## Avenidas Door to Door

Keeping seniors connected to outside services!

- Rides to Medical & Dental Visits
- Grocery Deliveries
- Medication Pickups
- Referrals to In-Home Services
- Calls from Friendly Voices (Avenidas Partner)
- Trips to Social Outings



## Avenidas Rainbow Collective

Delivering resources and services needed by LGBTQ Seniors!

- Socialization
- Case Management
- Health & Wellness
- Cultural Competency Workshops
- Information & Assistance
- Caregiving Support & Resources



## Senior Planet from AARP @ Avenidas

Innovative and award-winning technology programming!

- Virtual Tech Lectures & Workshops for Seniors
- Virtual Discussion Groups
- Virtual Programming Offered in Mandarin
- One-on-One Technology Support & Training
- Daily Virtual Fitness/Wellness Classes
- Free National Tech Hotline