

R O C H E S T E R

ACTIVE LIVING

C H R O N I C L E S



KERRY
MELNYCZENKO
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RODNEY
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TRUE
HARVEST
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125
LIVE

A close-up portrait of Sylvia Bujak, a woman with blonde hair and bangs, green eyes, and red lipstick. She is wearing a dark blue sweater and a gold chain necklace with a toggle clasp. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

dear READERS

Dear Friends,

Here we are - already at the fourth issue of Rochester Active Living Chronicles. When we started this magazine, I wasn't entirely sure what it would become. I just knew there were far too many interesting people, great stories, and good things happening in our community that nobody was talking about.

Four issues later, I think we are proving my point.

One of my favorite parts of my job is meeting people and hearing their stories. And I have learned that you should never assume you know someone's story just by looking at them.

The person exercising next to you may have traveled to places you have only dreamed about. The quiet person drinking coffee in the corner may have spent decades serving our community. Someone walking slowly around the track may have accomplished things that would absolutely surprise you.

And the 90-something-year-old you think you should probably be helping may very well be busier than you are.

That is what I love about this community.

We talk a lot about "active aging," but I don't think it necessarily means running marathons, lifting heavy weights, or trying to look 30 when you are 70. Frankly, I don't want to be 30 again. I was far too worried about things that didn't matter.

To me, active living means continuing to participate in your own life.

It means having plans. Having people who expect to see you. Trying new things. Taking care of your body so it continues to take you where you want to go. Finding something that gives you purpose. Laughing. Traveling. Volunteering. Learning. Creating.

And sometimes doing something completely outside of your comfort zone just to see if you can.

I get to watch this happen every day at 125 LIVE.

People may initially walk through our doors because they want to use a treadmill, swim, take a class, or because their insurance company told them they have a free membership. But somewhere along the way, something else often happens.

They learn someone's name. They start having coffee together. Someone notices when they don't show up. They join a group, volunteer, try pottery, discover pickleball, or somehow find themselves dressed in a ridiculous costume for one of our events.

That part isn't listed on the membership brochure, but I think it may be the most important thing we do.

And that is also what I want this magazine to celebrate.

Rochester Active Living Chronicles isn't about telling you how to age. There are plenty of people willing to do that. I want us to show you what is possible by introducing you to people in our community who simply keep living their lives - sometimes quietly, sometimes adventurously, and sometimes in ways that make the rest of us wonder where they find the energy.

I hope somewhere in these pages you meet someone who inspires you, learn something you didn't know about our community, or discover something you want to try.

Thanks for reading!

Sylvia Bujak

Cover Art:
Devon Huguahl

To advertise with us, contact me at
info@125livemn.org

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Spotlight On

Service, strength & community

Kerry Melnyczenko



At 125 LIVE, community is built one connection at a time – and few people embody that spirit more fully than Kerry Melnyczenko. Whether she is leading an energetic Pound Cardio Drumming class, encouraging participants during Aqua Aerobics, or simply greeting members with a warm smile, Kerry brings heart, positivity, and purpose to every interaction.

Since becoming a member in 2022, Kerry has quickly become a familiar and beloved face at 125 LIVE. Today, she teaches four classes each week: Strength, Aqua Aerobics, Pound Cardio Drumming, and Stand Strong. Her classes are known not only for helping members improve their physical health, but also for creating an atmosphere of belonging, encouragement, and genuine connection.

In fact, one member summed it up perfectly after Kerry's interview: "Kerry sees people as a person and is truly concerned about their well-being and health." For Kerry, that caring approach comes naturally.

Born in Nebraska and raised in Ohio and Michigan, Kerry now proudly calls Minnesota home. She and her husband have been happily married for 22 years and are raising three sons, ages 18, 15, and 10. When asked what she is most proud of, her answer comes without hesitation: "My family."

The Melnyczenko household is close-knit, active, and full of laughter, especially during spirited games of Rummikub and Monopoly Deal. Although Kerry has formed many meaningful friendships through 125 LIVE, she says her

husband remains her best friend.

Family, connection, and support have shaped much of Kerry's life, including an extraordinary 27-year career in the United States Air Force. Following in her father's footsteps, she enlisted in 1996 and retired in 2023 after nearly three decades of service.

As a Force Support Squadron Leader, Kerry was responsible for providing personnel, community, and morale services to Air Force members, civilians, contractors, and their families. Her role focused on enhancing quality of life, strengthening morale, and supporting mission readiness.

Kerry served in the United States Airforce for nearly three decades.



It is a position that perfectly reflects who Kerry is at her core: someone dedicated to helping others succeed and thrive.

Many people are surprised to learn about Kerry's military background, but she believes the lessons she learned through service apply far beyond the armed forces.

"It is important to have a good wingman," Kerry says. "Whether you are in the military or not, people need to look out for each other." That philosophy is evident in every class she teaches at 125 LIVE. Kerry describes her water exercise classes as "a big hug," where fitness and friendship come together in a welcoming and supportive environment.

When asked what 125 LIVE means to her, her answer is simple: "Community and health."

Those values continue to guide her life both inside and outside the fitness studio. In addition to teaching at 125 LIVE, Kerry works part-time at Salem Glen Winery and enjoys spending time outdoors, walking her dog, and staying active.

One piece of wellness advice she passionately shares with members is: "Get outside. Take walks in nature. Enjoy the beauty of our world."

Kerry believes that living well requires balance across four key dimensions of wellness:

- Social • Physical • Spiritual • Mental

She embraces a holistic approach to health that recognizes the interconnectedness of our relationships, physical well-being, sense of purpose, and mindset.

"The priorities shift with the ebb and flow of life," she explains, "but all four areas matter."

Maintaining awareness of each dimension, she believes, is essential to overall wellness and resilience.

A self-described morning person, Kerry starts her day with a cup of coffee and prefers tea in the evening. She enjoys all kinds of music, especially the "oldies but goodies" of the 1970s. Her adventurous spirit has taken her around the world, including travels to Alaska, Japan, England, Kuwait, Qatar, and throughout the Middle East.

Yet despite her impressive military career and global experiences, it is Kerry's kindness, humility, and genuine concern for others that leave the greatest impression.

For anyone nervous about walking through the doors of 125 LIVE for the first time, Kerry offers simple encouragement: "Just come. You'll find people who care."

At 125 LIVE, Kerry is much more than a fitness instructor. She is a motivator, a listener, a mentor, and a friend. She inspires people to move their bodies, care for their health, and connect with one another.

Through every class she teaches and every relationship she builds, Kerry continues to live out her personal mission: to leave the world a little better than she found it.

And for the countless members she has encouraged along the way, she is doing exactly that.



Pursuing A Calling Meet Jalal Soleimani

There are people who enter a room quietly but somehow leave a lasting impression on everyone they meet. Dr. Jalal Soleimani is one of those people.

If you've attended one of our community acupuncture sessions at 125 LIVE, you've likely experienced his calm presence, gentle smile, and genuine desire to help others feel better. But what many members may not know is that Jalal's journey to Rochester has been one of perseverance, lifelong learning, and a commitment to healing.

Originally from Iran, Jalal has spent his life pursuing a calling that began long before he ever stepped into a classroom.

"When I was about three years old," he recalls, "one of our neighbors told my mother, 'Your son has a big head - he should become a doctor one day.'" While it may seem like a humorous childhood story today, those words stayed with him. More importantly, they taught him just how powerful words can be -

and inspired him to dedicate his life to helping others.

Today, Jalal is an internationally trained medical doctor, researcher, licensed acupuncturist, Doctor of Acupuncture, and specialist in Chinese herbal medicine. Yet despite his impressive credentials, what stands out most is his humility.

"The most rewarding part of my work," he says, "is seeing patients free from pain and watching the smiles return to their faces."

His passion for healing continues today. While preparing to open his own practice, Acurion Sol Clinic, Jalal also dedicates two days each week to providing community acupuncture at 125 LIVE. Even with a busy schedule, he still makes time for continuing education because, in his words, "there is always something new to learn."

At home, Jalal shares life with his wife, an anesthesiologist and consultant at Mayo Clinic, and their twin sons, who are currently attending Rochester Community and Technical College.



Dr. Jalal Soleimani offers acupuncture classes twice a week.

Family remains one of his greatest sources of pride and motivation.

When asked what accomplishment means the most to him, his answer has little to do with professional titles.

"What I am most proud of is that I never gave up," he says. "Every obstacle has made me stronger, more compassionate, and more determined to help others."

That resilience extends into every part of his life.

Outside of work, Jalal enjoys gardening, walking, exercising, and is finally pursuing a dream he postponed for years - learning to play the setar, a traditional Persian string instrument. He starts every morning with a cup of coffee before switching to herbal teas throughout the day, and whenever he can, he escapes to nature. A recent trip to Montana reminded him how much peace he finds in the mountains.

Music also plays an important role in his life. His favorite artist is the internationally acclaimed Iranian musician Kayhan Kalhor, whose expressive performances reflect the same balance of discipline, tradition, and emotion that Jalal strives to bring into his own life.

Fitness has always been a priority. In fact, he laughs that he may be "a little addicted to working out." Staying active isn't just exercise for him - it's one of the best investments he can make in his health and his ability to continue serving others.

Ironically, it wasn't boxing or strength classes that first brought him through the doors of 125 LIVE.

"It was Tai Chi," he says. "I had always wanted to master it."

Since joining about two years ago, his interests have expanded to include Boxing, Core, Qi Gong, and of course Tai Chi. More importantly, he discovered something even more valuable than the classes themselves - the people.

"The staff have been incredibly welcoming, and many members have shared stories that remind me why community spaces like this matter," he says. "Their openness, humor, and resilience have inspired me and made me feel at home."

That sense of belonging is something he hopes every newcomer experiences.

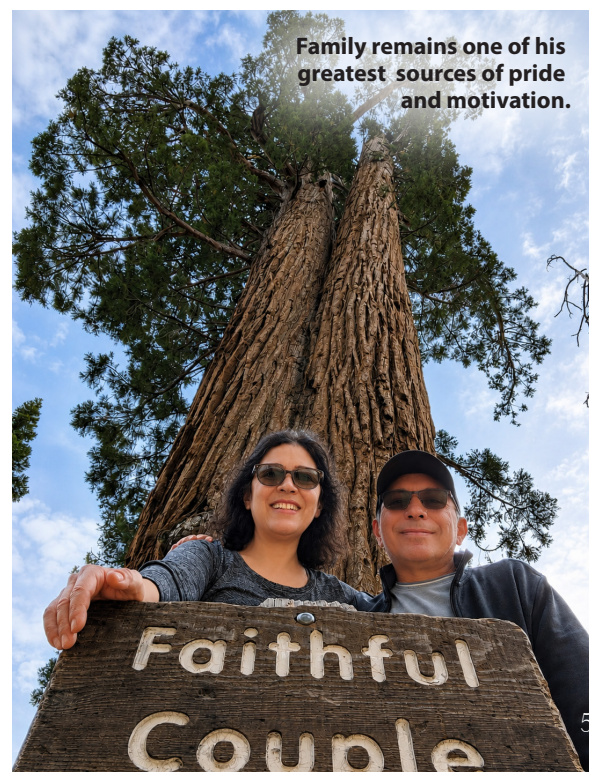
"If you're nervous about coming to 125 LIVE for the first time, just take a breath and walk in," he encourages. "Everyone here was new once. You'll be surprised how quickly you feel comfortable."

When I asked Jalal what "living well" means, his answer perfectly reflects why he fits so naturally into the 125 LIVE community.

"Living well means being healthy, grounded, and able to serve my community with clarity and compassion. It's building something meaningful, nurturing relationships, and creating a life that is balanced and aligned with your values."

At 125 LIVE, we often talk about healthy aging being about so much more than exercise. It's about continuing to learn, finding purpose, building friendships, and using our gifts to make life better for others. Jalal embodies every one of those values.

He reminds us that healing comes in many forms - a thoughtful conversation, a shared laugh after class, a helping hand, or simply showing up for one another.



Why More Seniors are Choosing Group Travel



Travel has a way of enriching our lives. It introduces us to new places, new people, and new perspectives. Whether it's exploring a historic city, experiencing a different culture, or simply enjoying beautiful scenery, travel creates memories that last a lifetime.

Yet planning a trip can sometimes feel overwhelming. Coordinating flights, hotels, sightseeing, transportation, sightseeing, and meals takes time and effort. For some travelers, the planning process can become stressful enough that they put off a trip - or decide not to travel at all.

Group travel offers a different approach.

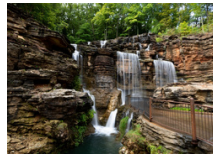
With a professionally organized tour, the details are handled for you. Flights, hotels, transportation, many meals, sightseeing, and local guides are arranged in

advance, allowing travelers to focus on enjoying the experience rather than worrying about logistics. Group tours often include knowledgeable guides who provide historical background, local insight, and context that help bring destinations to life.

Safety and security are also important considerations for many travelers. Traveling with an organized group provides added peace of mind, whether navigating an unfamiliar city, managing transportation, or dealing with unexpected situations. Having an experienced tour director, local guides, and fellow travelers nearby can make travel feel more comfortable and reassuring, especially when visiting destinations far from home.

Many tours also offer unique experiences that independent travelers might not easily find on their own. These can range from cooking classes and traditional music performances to visits with local residents and unique cultural activities that provide a deeper understanding of a destination. Knowledgeable guides add historical background and local insight, helping travelers appreciate the places they visit in ways that go beyond what a guidebook can offer.

Just as important is the companionship group travel provides. Some travelers join because they no longer have a travel partner, while others simply enjoy



sharing experiences with like-minded people. Friendships often develop over shared meals, sightseeing adventures, and memorable moments along the journey.

At Ed-Ventures, we have witnessed these connections for more than 50 years. Our family-owned company began in Rochester when local German teacher Larry Larsen challenged his junior high students to create a mock tour of Germany—ending with one simple question: “When can we go?” That question sparked a five-week bicycle tour with fifty students and the beginning of what would become Ed-Ventures. From our office on Elton Hills Drive, we continue helping travelers explore destinations across the United States and around the world. Along the way, we strive to make every journey enjoyable, educational, and worry-free while treating our travelers like family and celebrating life’s special moments such as birthdays, anniversaries, and milestones.

Travel should be about discovery, learning, and making memories—not worrying about reservations and schedules. Group travel provides the perfect combination of convenience, enrichment, and companionship.

If travel is still on your bucket list, now may be the perfect time to start planning your next adventure. We invite you to explore Ed-Ventures' upcoming tours and discover the destinations, experiences, and friendships that await.

Upcoming Tours with Ed-Ventures:

If you're ready to start planning your next adventure, consider one of our upcoming tours:

Egypt - October 5–15, 2026

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Celebrate the magic of the season with festive lights, holiday entertainment, and Christmas traditions. Highlights include Kansas City's famous Plaza Lights, Silver Dollar City's spectacular "An Old Time Christmas," and the breathtaking Miracle of Christmas production at Sight & Sound Theatres.

Looking Ahead to 2027

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97 years young and still dealing new hands

Story of Bill Smet



At 97 years young, Bill Smet embodies the spirit of active living in every sense – curious, engaged, independent, and always ready for a good game of cards.

A relatively new face in Rochester, Bill moved from his hometown of Moline, Illinois, in 2025 to be closer to family. Today, he calls Cottagewood Senior Community home, but you are just as likely to find him at 125 LIVE several times each week, seated at a card table, focused on the next hand and surrounded by friends.

Bill is a regular in the card-playing circle, joining a consistent group of about 13 players. His game of choice is cribbage, though he is equally comfortable playing pinochle, 500, or euchre. For Bill, the cards are only part of the attraction. The real reward is the camaraderie.

When asked for his advice on making friends, he offers a simple philosophy: “Have fun and play friendly.”

It is advice he readily shares with new members as well. If someone is looking to get connected, Bill recommends learning a card game and pulling up a chair.

But Bill’s story stretches far beyond the card table.

A proud Navy veteran, Bill served in 1950 and was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, aboard the destroyer DDA-41. His time in the military introduced him to travel and adventure—experiences that helped shape the independent spirit he carries to this day.

Following his service, Bill built a successful career as an electrician at Alcoa, eventually supervising a team of ten electricians. The role reflected both his technical expertise and natural leadership abilities.

Outside of work, however, Bill pursued a remarkable variety of hobbies.

He trained falcons, raised singing canaries, and raced pigeons. He was also an avid hunter who purchased 80 acres of land to create his own hunting grounds. One of his favorite memories involves harvesting an impressive eight-point buck with his crossbow, a trophy that later earned a place of honor in his home.

Yet when asked what accomplishment makes him most proud, Bill does not mention his career, military service, or hunting achievements.

Instead, he talks about bees.

What began as a hobby became a lifelong passion for beekeeping. Over the years, Bill not only raised bees but taught many others how to care for them as well. Remarkably, he often worked with his hives without wearing a protective bee suit – a testament to both his confidence and his deep understanding of the insects he admired.

His appreciation for bees continues to influence how he views health and longevity today.

When asked for his secret to staying well at 97, Bill does not hesitate.

“Eat lots of honey – every which way you can.”

It is advice delivered with a smile, but given his vitality and sharp wit, it is hard to argue with the results.

Bill’s life has been rich in experiences and even richer in family. He is the proud father of four children, grandfather to



A proud Navy veteran, Bill served in 1950 and was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia.

ten grandchildren, and great-grandfather to nine great-grandchildren. Family remains one of the greatest joys of his life and one of the reasons he made the move to Rochester.

Despite his many accomplishments, Bill remains refreshingly straightforward.

When asked whether there was anything he always wanted to do but never did, his answer came quickly: "I always did what I wanted to do. I still do."

Those seven words may be the best summary of Bill's philosophy on life.

In his quieter moments, Bill enjoys country music, especially artists such as Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, and Hank Williams. He also fondly remembers his many trips to Branson, Missouri, where he traveled several times each year to enjoy live performances, including shows by one of his favorites, Jim Brandy.

Bill is definitely a morning person. He starts each day simply, fueled by a single cup of coffee and a determination to make the most of whatever lies ahead.

It is a fitting routine for a man who has spent nearly a century embracing life with curiosity, confidence, and purpose.

At 125 LIVE, Bill Smet is more than a card player. He is reminder that staying active is not just about exercise - it is about remaining connected, continuing to learn, sharing experiences, and making new friends along the way.

His story proves that age is not measured by years alone, but by a willingness to stay engaged with the world around you.

And if Bill has taught us anything, it is that a good hand of cards, a spoonful of honey, and the company of friends can go a long way toward a life well lived.

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Rodney Kossick

Some people spend a lifetime chasing success. Others spend it helping others find theirs.

When I sat down with Rodney Kossick, I quickly realized I wasn't speaking with someone interested in talking about awards or titles. Despite a career that has taken him around the world and influenced thousands of lives, Rodney speaks most passionately about people. About believing in them. About helping them discover they are capable of far more than they ever imagined.

That philosophy has shaped every chapter of his extraordinary life.

A longtime member of 125 LIVE, Rodney has devoted more than six decades to helping people who are blind or visually impaired achieve greater independence. His work has taken him from Minnesota to Vietnam, Australia, Washington State, Wisconsin, and beyond, helping build rehabilitation programs, establish national professional standards, and train specialists whose work continues to improve lives today.

Yet if you ask Rodney what mattered most throughout his career, his answer is wonderfully simple:

"Look at the whole person."

I think that's advice all of us could benefit from.

Minnesota has always been home

Rodney grew up near Moorhead, Minnesota, graduating from Moorhead High School in 1955. Even after living and working across the globe, he still lights up when he talks about his hometown.

"The friendships, experiences, and memories have stayed with me forever," he told me. "Whoever said, 'You can never go home,' never went to Moorhead High School."

His wife Susan, with whom he has shared more than forty years of marriage, smiles when she talks about his lifelong love of Minnesota. "You can take the man out of Minnesota," she says, "but you can't take Minnesota out of the man."

After earning a degree in psychology, Rodney continued his education in Orientation and Mobility—a field dedicated to teaching people who are blind how to travel safely and independently. At the time, the profession



Seeing Possibility in Every Person

was still in its infancy, making Rodney one of the early pioneers helping shape what would become an essential rehabilitation specialty.

Building opportunities where none existed

One of Rodney's most memorable experiences came during the Vietnam War, when he spent two years helping establish one of South Vietnam's first comprehensive rehabilitation programs for people who were blind.

He wasn't simply teaching skills. He was helping build an entire system that included mobility training, vocational education, independent living instruction, and employment support. Just as importantly, he worked alongside Vietnamese professionals to ensure they could continue serving their communities long after he returned home.

It was meaningful work carried out under incredibly difficult circumstances. Resources were scarce. Infrastructure was unreliable. War surrounded everyday life. Yet Rodney remembers



the resilience of the people he served more than the hardships.

"They showed me that blindness never defines what someone is capable of accomplishing."

His family left Vietnam just two days before the Tet Offensive began in 1968. Looking back, Rodney remains grateful not only for their safe departure but also for the opportunity to leave behind something lasting - opportunities that continued changing lives for years afterward.

Helping shape an entire profession

Many people don't realize that Orientation and Mobility wasn't always a standardized profession.

During the 1960s, specialists across the country were trained differently, with few consistent expectations. Rodney became part of a team working to change that.

Together with his wife Sue, they developed professional standards and educational guidelines that ultimately contributed to the National

Orientation and Mobility Certification Examination still used today. That means every certified Orientation and Mobility specialist helping someone confidently cross a busy intersection, ride public transportation, or safely navigate their community is benefiting from foundations Rodney helped build decades ago.

It's an incredible legacy, although Rodney talks about it with remarkable humility.

Looking beyond limitations

One of my favorite parts of our conversation centered around the misconceptions people often have about blindness.

Rodney explained that vision loss exists on a broad spectrum. Some individuals retain partial sight, others use Braille, some travel with guide dogs, while many use white canes or today's rapidly evolving assistive technologies.

What never changes, however, is human potential. Throughout his career, Rodney refused to define people by what they couldn't do. Instead, he focused on their strengths, talents, dreams, and possibilities.

Modern technology - from screen readers and GPS navigation to AI-powered wearable devices - has expanded opportunities even further, allowing people with vision loss to live independently, pursue meaningful careers, raise families, and fully participate in their communities.

Listening to Rodney reminded me how often we all underestimate ourselves.

A life grounded in family

For all of Rodney's professional



accomplishments, family remains at the center of his life.

He and Susan cherish time spent with their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. And when I asked what advice he would give his younger self, his answer wasn't about career success.

It was about friendship.

"Find a lifetime friend and stay close to that person."

It's simple advice, but perhaps some of the most meaningful in today's busy world.

Finding joy in the little things

Another surprise? Rodney is an avid birdwatcher. He has identified forty different bird species right in his own backyard. Birding, he says, requires patience, curiosity, and paying attention to details many people overlook. Somehow, that seems perfectly fitting for someone who has spent a lifetime helping others discover possibilities that many never saw.

Finding community at 125 LIVE

Rodney has been a member of 125 LIVE for the past nine years. You'll often find him working with a personal trainer, participating in activities, or simply enjoying conversations with fellow members.

When I asked what he would say to someone considering joining 125 LIVE, his answer immediately made me smile.

"125 LIVE is a perfect cross-section of American life. Everyone should feel comfortable here."

Then he added something that beautifully captures what makes our community so special:

"Take advantage of everything. The people are what make it special."

A life that continues to inspire

Meeting Rodney reminded me that the greatest legacies aren't measured by awards or recognition.

They're measured by the lives we touch.

Through his work, Rodney has helped thousands of people gain confidence, independence, and opportunity. He has strengthened an entire profession, mentored countless rehabilitation specialists, and shown generations that limitations should never define a person's future.

His story is a beautiful reminder that true vision isn't just about what we see with our eyes.

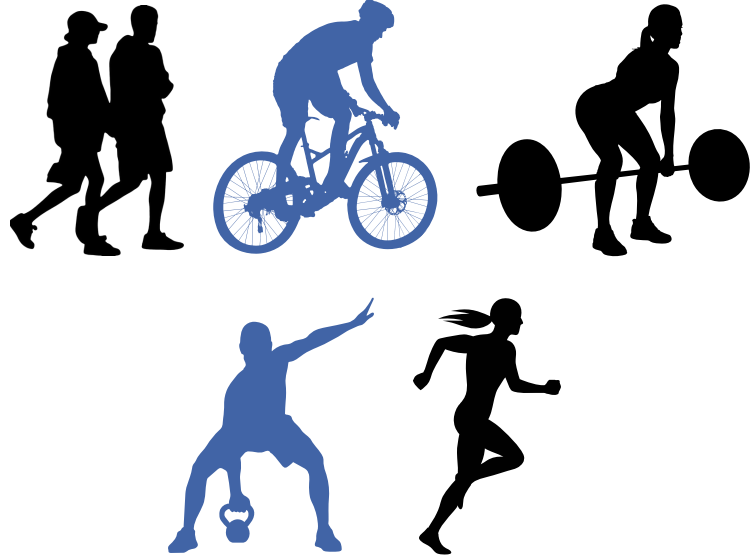
It's about recognizing potential where others see obstacles, believing in people before they believe in themselves, and leaving the world just a little better than we found it.

And that is a legacy worth celebrating.



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Finding Purpose

*Through Learning,
Leadership, and Living Well*



Some people teach because it's their job. Others teach because it's their calling. For Dr. Chelsie Gaspar, teaching isn't simply a profession - it's a way of making a difference in the lives of others every single day.

A Rochester native, Chelsie has always had a passion for learning and helping others grow. At just 35 years old, she has already earned an associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate in Educational Leadership, completing her doctorate by the age of 30. Today, she teaches Communication Studies to college students at colleges and universities across the United States, inspiring learners from Minnesota to Virginia and beyond.

When she isn't teaching, Chelsie enjoys spending time with the two biggest supporters in her life - her parents, Sandy and Greg - and her energetic eight-year-old miniature schnauzer, Cooper, who keeps her smiling and active.

Chelsie's schedule would exhaust most people. She teaches nine or ten college courses each semester, prepares lessons, grades assignments, meets with students, and continues her own professional development. Yet when you ask her about her career, she simply smiles. Teaching doesn't feel like work to her - it feels like purpose.

Her students are the reason she loves what she does. Every semester, former students reach out to tell her how much she influenced their lives, and those conversations remind her why she chose education in the first place.

Like many successful people, Chelsie's journey has not been easy. She openly shares that she has faced adversity and discrimination throughout both her academic and professional career. Those experiences challenged her confidence early on, but they never diminished her determination. Instead, they strengthened her resolve to become the kind of educator who encourages others to believe in themselves, especially when life becomes difficult.

One of the places that has helped nurture that confidence has been 125 LIVE.

Chelsie first discovered us through our Fresh Air Fitness classes in downtown Rochester. Curious to try Yoga and Zumba, she attended a few outdoor classes and quickly fell in love with the welcoming instructors and positive atmosphere. After taking Cardio Kickboxing and Strength during her first visit inside 125 LIVE, she signed up for a membership before she even left the building.

Today, fitness is woven into nearly every week of her life. She challenges herself to attend multiple group fitness classes, walk more than 100 laps on

our indoor walking loop, and continually increase her strength. Recently, she celebrated being able to comfortably lift ten-pound dumbbells – a goal she proudly worked toward.

But what impresses me most isn't how often Chelsie exercises. It's her willingness to keep trying new things.

Since becoming a member, she has discovered a love for cycling, boxing, watercolor painting, and many of the social events offered at 125 LIVE. She particularly enjoys watercolor classes, describing them as both relaxing and rewarding. She believes learning should never stop, regardless of age, and she's already looking forward to taking another class this fall.

Her commitment to our community extends far beyond attending classes.

Many members recognize Chelsie as one of our Friday tour guides, enthusiastically welcoming prospective members and sharing why she loves 125 LIVE. She also teaches technology classes in our Technology Learning Center, combining her passion for education with her desire to help others become more confident using technology.

Outside of 125 LIVE, Chelsie makes time to enjoy life's simple pleasures. Saturday evenings often include a walk around Apache Mall, treating herself to a relaxing spa visit, or enjoying dinner at one of her favorite local restaurants. She loves reading, writing, cooking, traveling, public speaking, and has a personal goal of learning several new languages, including French, Italian, German, and Chinese. Having traveled to nearly every state in the country, she says Chicago remains one of her favorite destinations.

One of my favorite parts of Chelsie's story is that she never stops growing. Whether she's earning another degree, learning a new fitness skill, picking up a paintbrush, or mastering another language, she approaches life with curiosity instead of fear.

That mindset perfectly reflects what Active Living is all about.

At 125 LIVE, we often talk about belonging. For Chelsie, belonging has meant friendships, confidence, opportunities to volunteer, and the courage to step outside her comfort zone. She credits the members, instructors, and staff for helping her become a stronger, more confident version of herself.

Her advice to anyone who feels nervous about joining 125 LIVE is beautifully simple: don't worry about being perfect. Just walk through the doors, try something new, and give yourself permission to learn. You never know what friendships you'll make or what new passions you'll discover.

Chelsie believes that living well means taking care of yourself – physically, mentally, and emotionally. It means making time for your health, finding balance, and remembering that growth is possible at every stage of life.

I couldn't agree more.

Chelsie's story reminds us that success isn't measured only by degrees earned or careers built. It's measured by the lives we touch, the kindness we share, and the willingness to keep learning long after we've mastered something.

And in that regard, she is an extraordinary example of what it means to truly live well.



Chelsie always enjoys a night eating out at one of her favorite restaurants.



Miniature schnauzer, Cooper, who keeps Chelsie smiling.

50

States, One Family Countless Memories

There is something inspiring about meeting people who refuse to let milestones simply pass by. While many of us celebrate birthdays with dinner or a party, Dori and Martin Gibbs decided to celebrate turning 50 in a way they would remember forever: by visiting all 50 states.

It's the kind of story I love sharing in Rochester Active Living Chronicles because it reminds us that adventure doesn't have an expiration date. In fact, sometimes the best adventures begin when life is busy - with careers, teenagers, responsibilities, and every excuse to stay home.

Martin and Dori have been together for 30 years and married for 26. They are the proud parents of two sons, Aidan (19) and Sam (15), and have been active members of 125 LIVE for the past year and a half after first joining in 2020.

The idea for their journey began with a simple conversation. Dori heard someone mention that visiting all 50 states was on their bucket list, and the thought stayed with her. After counting the states she had already explored, she realized she was much closer than she imagined.

"I had already visited around 37 states," she said. "Suddenly the goal didn't seem impossible."

Turning 50 became the perfect reason to stop talking about it and start planning. Rather than waiting for retirement or "someday," they spent the next two years intentionally checking off the remaining states.

Their travels were anything but ordinary. Most adventures combined flights with road trips, allowing them to experience multiple states in one journey. Alaska, however, deserved something special, so they explored America's last frontier from the deck of a cruise ship.

Like every great adventure, theirs came with a few unforgettable stories.



One of the most dramatic happened while driving Nevada's famous "Loneliest Road in America." Rounding a mountain hairpin turn late at night, Martin suddenly found himself face-to-face with a wild horse standing in the middle of the road, with a steep cliff beside them and only seconds to react.

Thankfully, everyone - including the horse - walked away safely.

Not every surprise was quite so dramatic. On another trip, a major Delta computer outage delayed the very first day of a West Coast adventure. Instead of letting frustration win, the Gibbs family adjusted their plans and still managed to visit six states in just five days.

That attitude seems to define how they travel: flexibility, curiosity, and the willingness to embrace whatever comes next.

When asked about favorite destinations, neither could settle on just one.

Martin loves the dramatic landscapes of Nevada and the mountain scenery of Vermont, which reminds him of his native Wisconsin - only with mountains. Utah also earned high marks for its



Road trips allow the Gibbs family to spend important time together.

breathtaking scenery.

Dori found herself drawn to America's East Coast. The Outer Banks of North Carolina, the beaches of Delaware, the cliffs of Rhode Island, and the mountain-meets-ocean beauty of Maine all left lasting impressions.

"There's something about being near the water and ocean that speaks to my soul," she shared. "There's also something about those quintessential old East Coast towns that's hard to put into words."

Rhode Island surprised her the most.

"I really didn't know what to expect," she admitted. "The beautiful coastline, charming seaside towns, and rich history made it one of the most memorable places we visited."

Of course, every traveler remembers the food just as much as the scenery.

Martin still dreams about fresh seafood in North Carolina's Outer Banks, while Dori says nothing beats authentic Texas barbecue. Their favorite small town? Kennebunkport, Maine, where the lobster rolls were every bit as good as advertised.

Perhaps the greatest gift of the journey wasn't crossing states off a map.

It was the time spent together.

Long hours on the road created opportunities for conversations that don't always happen in everyday life. As parents of two teenagers, Martin and Dori found that those uninterrupted hours in the car became some of the most meaningful moments of the entire adventure.

Sometimes the destination matters. Sometimes it's simply being together along the way.

Maintaining an active lifestyle has also played an important role in making these adventures possible. Their membership at 125 LIVE helps them stay fit enough to hike scenic trails, explore cities on foot, and enjoy biking through new destinations.

Many of their favorite memories weren't created from behind a windshield, but while walking a coastal trail, climbing a scenic overlook, or wandering through a historic downtown.

So what's next?

They're already dreaming about driving Colorado's spectacular Million Dollar Highway and experiencing the world-famous Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in New Mexico.

It seems fitting that after all 50 states, the adventure is far from over.

When I asked Dori what advice she would give someone over 50 who keeps postponing a dream,



her answer was beautifully simple:

"Don't wait. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed, and the memories you make along the way are worth far more than waiting for the perfect time. If it matters to you, go make it happen."

I couldn't agree more.

Whether your dream is to visit every state, learn to paint, hike a national park, volunteer in your community, or simply take that first fitness class you've been thinking about, there's no perfect age to begin – only the decision to start.

After all, the best stories are still waiting to be written.

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The Trainer Who Once Hated Exercise

The story of Jake Rodriguez-Cruz



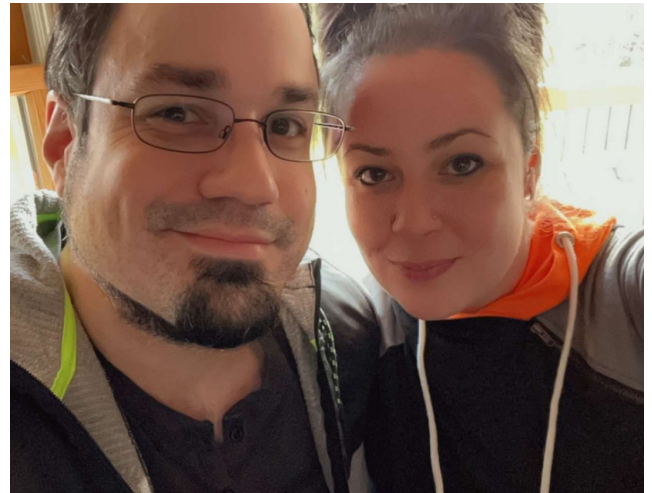
When members see Jake Rodriguez-Cruz working with clients at 125 LIVE, they see a confident personal trainer who makes fitness approachable and encouraging. What many do not realize is that Jake's passion for helping others began with his own deeply personal transformation.

Today, Jake is one of 125 LIVE's dedicated personal trainers, helping members achieve their health and fitness goals one step at a time. But growing up, fitness was the last thing he imagined would become his career.

Born in Fairmont, Minnesota, Jake moved to Rochester with his family when he was seven years old. His father was born and raised in Puerto Rico and served as a pharmacist in the Army. His mother, who is proudly 100% Polish, was born and raised in Minnesota. Jake grew up with two older brothers, but unlike the trainer members today, he spent much of his childhood avoiding physical activity.

"I was obese and didn't like working out or being physically active," Jake recalls.

Like many kids, he preferred spending his free time indoors. Video games, drawing cartoons, and watching animation filled much of his day. Fast food and junk food were common habits, and exercise was something he actively avoided - especially if it involved sweating.



For years, Jake believed his weight was something he could never change.

"I thought obesity was just in my genetics," he says. "I didn't think I would ever be fit or comfortable in my own skin."

Those feelings were reinforced by bullying and the challenges of gym class, where running tests and pull-up bars seemed to highlight everything, he struggled with.

But one person helped change his perspective: his older brother.

Jake watched his brother excel as a football player, becoming one of the strongest athletes at Lourdes High School and eventually playing college and semi-professional football. More importantly, his brother showed him that physical activity could be enjoyable.

When Jake began lifting weights in the old Lourdes High School weight room, everything started to change.

The equipment was old and rusty, and Jake laughs when he remembers always washing his hands afterward because they would be covered in rust. Yet those early workouts sparked something inside him.

One defining moment came when he participated in football strength testing as a freshman.

When coaches and players watched him bench press 180 pounds, they were impressed. For the first time, Jake realized that physical activity could reveal strengths he never knew he had.

“That was the big moment for me,” he says.

What followed was a complete shift in mindset.

Jake joined the football team, made new friends, and learned to embrace challenges that he once avoided. He spent countless hours in the weight room and became known as the first player through the doors after school each day. By his senior year, he had earned the respect of teammates and coaches alike, starting at offensive guard and being voted “Most Improved” by his fellow players.

The physical transformation was remarkable. Through consistent training and healthier habits, Jake lost more than 60 pounds.

But something even more important happened. He discovered that his true passion was not football.

It was fitness itself.

“I found my passion wasn't for football,” Jake says. “It was for being healthy and strong for myself.”

That realization ultimately shaped the direction of his life.

Years later, after recovering from carpal tunnel surgery in both hands, Jake continued pushing himself and reached new strength milestones, eventually bench pressing 360 pounds—double the weight he first lifted during that memorable freshman-year strength test.

Those experiences inspired him to become a personal trainer.

Today, Jake draws on his own journey every day when working with clients.

“I know what it's like to be in their shoes,” he says.

His approach focuses on meeting people where they are, helping them build confidence, and reminding them that lasting change does not happen overnight.

“Small consistent steps can lead to large changes,” he says.

Now in his seventh year at 125 LIVE, Jake spends his days training clients, maintaining the fitness center, and helping members feel comfortable in a space that once intimidated him.

His own wellness routine reflects the lessons he teaches others. Each day begins with breakfast, hydration, and paying attention to how his body feels. Every other morning includes mobility exercises, stretching, and foam rolling to stay healthy and pain-free. Four days each week, he finishes his workday with his own strength and cardiovascular training session.

His career has taught him the importance of

listening to his body, prioritizing recovery, and investing in long-term health.

When he is not at 125 LIVE, Jake enjoys spending time with his girlfriend and their four-year-old cat. He still loves lifting weights, but his interests extend far beyond the gym. He plays three guitars, writes music, attends rock concerts, enjoys crafting, and spends time gaming with his girlfriend.

One thing many people are surprised to learn is that Jake once dreamed of becoming an animator.

As a child, he spent countless hours drawing anime and cartoons, imagining a future in art and animation.

While his career ultimately took a different direction, creativity remains an important part of who he is.

When asked what he is most proud of, Jake's answer comes quickly. Not the weights he has lifted.

Not his professional accomplishments. Not even the transformation others see on the outside.

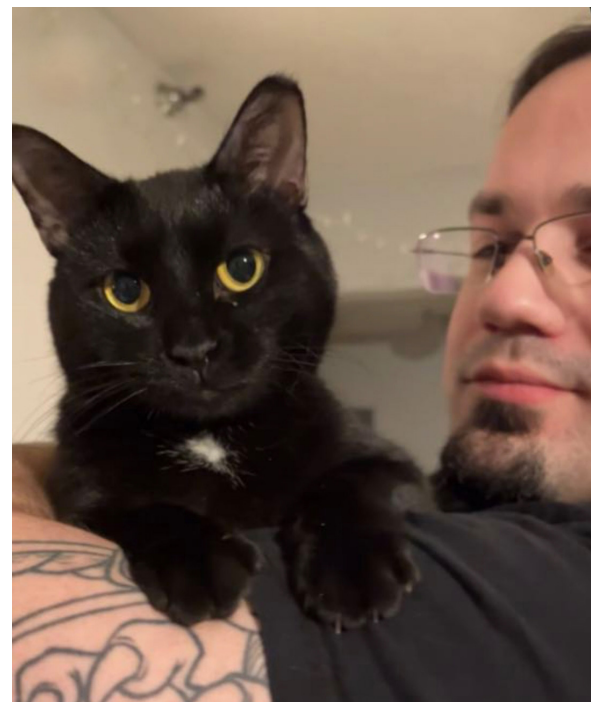
He is most proud of overcoming the barriers that once convinced him change was impossible.

Today, he helps others do the same.

For members beginning their own health journey, Jake offers the same advice that transformed his life:

“Small consistent steps can lead to large changes.”

It is a simple message, but one that reflects everything Jake's story represents: progress over perfection, persistence over excuses, and the belief that every person can become stronger than they were yesterday.



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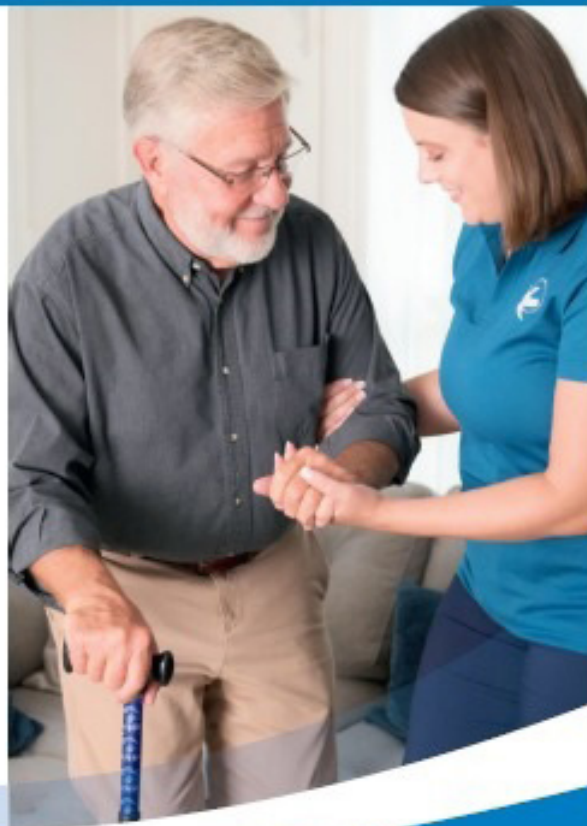
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The True Harvest



There is an old saying that we are what we eat. Over time, I have come to believe we are also shaped by where our food comes from, the hands that grow it, and the relationships that bring it to our tables.

I have spent many mornings standing beside farmers before sunrise. They rarely begin by talking about vegetables. Instead, they talk about rain that came just in time, fields slowly recovering, grandchildren helping with the harvest, and the quiet hope that another growing season will leave the land healthier than they found it.

Those conversations changed the way I think about food.

Every harvest is an act of faith. Months of preparation, uncertainty, hard work, and patience come together with the hope that what is carefully grown will nourish someone else. Food, I realized, has never been just food. It is one of the ways we care for one another.

Here in Rochester, we are fortunate to live in a community known around the world for advancing health. Yet some of the most meaningful work happens quietly every day—in classrooms, on farms, through volunteer service, around family tables, and in places where people continue to learn, connect, and find purpose.

That is one of the reasons 125 LIVE means so much to our community. For decades, it has been a place where people continue to learn, remain active, discover new interests, build lasting friendships, and embrace healthy living with purpose. Every day, it reminds us that well-being is about more than adding years to life, it is about adding life to our years.

That same spirit is reflected in 125 LIVE's commitment to buying fresh, seasonal food directly from local farmers through Community Supported Agriculture. By investing in local farmers, 125 LIVE

strengthens Southeast Minnesota's regional food system while bringing exceptional seasonal food to its members. It is our honor at Southeast Minnesota Food Rescue & Redistribution to serve alongside the 125 LIVE community in this partnership, connecting members with local farms and celebrating the richness of our region's harvest.

On distribution days, it is easy to notice the boxes first.

They are filled with the season's harvest, just-picked vegetables, fresh eggs fire-baked bread, and other foods prepared with the same care and craftsmanship that have long been part of our region's story. By day's end, every box found its way home.

With each distribution, it became clearer that the boxes were never the destination. They disappear into kitchens where soup simmers on the stove, bread is broken around the table, grandchildren help prepare dinner, and conversations linger long after the meal has ended.

Before long, the box itself is forgotten. What stays is everything it made possible.

A meal shared.

A neighbor welcomed.

A family tradition continued.

A farmer whose work is valued.

A community strengthened in quiet ways that rarely make headlines.

I do not believe we need to return to another time to rediscover what matters. Every generation is called to build something worthy of those who come next. Yet there is wisdom worth carrying forward: when we care for the land, invest in the people who grow our food, and make room for one another around the table, we cultivate something that reaches far beyond a single harvest.

Learn More

Members interested in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and seasonal farm shares can learn more at www.mnfoodrescue.org

PROTECTING OLDER ADULTS FROM FINANCIAL ABUSE: A GROWING RESPONSIBILITY

As people age, the risk of financial exploitation quietly increases. These fraud attempts can hide in plain sight behind everyday interactions, routine transactions, or the trust placed in caregivers and acquaintances. Preventing elder financial abuse requires awareness, preparation, and ongoing involvement from family. Experts emphasize that the most effective protection begins long before any signs of trouble appear. Let's break it down.

Protective steps you can take

One of the first steps is helping aging loved ones put legal safeguards in place while they are still able to make informed decisions. Establishing tools such as a power of attorney and health care directives ensures that trusted individuals can step in when needed. These documents form a foundation of protection, but they work best when paired with open, ongoing communication.

Regular conversations about scams are essential. Older adults are frequently targeted through phone calls, emails, text messages, social media, and fake tech support warnings. Encouraging loved ones to pause before responding and to reach out to a trusted person before sending money, sharing personal information, clicking links, or making pressured financial decisions can prevent significant harm.

Staying connected is another powerful safeguard. Isolation increases vulnerability, so consistent phone calls, visits, or messages help maintain awareness of a loved one's well-being. Building a relationship with caregivers or others involved in daily care also provides insight into changes that may signal risk.

Systems in place to protect older adults

Financial institutions can play a role as well. Asking about account alerts, monitoring tools, and trusted contact options – especially for brokerage or investment accounts – add another layer of oversight.

Equally important is regularly reviewing financial activity to help identify:

- Unusual withdrawals
- New payees
- Repeated small payments
- Wire transfers
- P2P payments
- Gift card purchases
- Other transactions that fall outside normal patterns.

Setting up direct deposit reduces the need for others to handle checks, and enabling alerts for transactions, low balances, logins, or new payees increases visibility.

Older adults should avoid signing documents or agreeing to financial transactions they do not fully understand. Getting details in writing and reviewing them with a trusted family member, adviser, or attorney can prevent costly mistakes. For those who use computers or smartphones, keeping software, apps, passwords, and security settings up to date is another important defense.

Financial behavior to monitor

Even with precautions, certain changes in financial behavior may signal exploitation. These include:

- Out-of-sequence check numbers
- Bounced checks
- Sudden increases in credit or debit activity
- ATM withdrawals at unusual times or distant locations
- Large withdrawals from previously inactive accounts
- New authorized signers
- Unexplained transfers of assets
- Missing funds or valuables, confusion about transactions, or excessive payments to caregivers may indicate deeper issues.

Documentation changes can be equally concerning. New authorized signers, redirected statements, unfamiliar cards, unrecognized online banking activity, or abrupt modifications to powers of attorney, wills, or property records may point to manipulation or fraud.

Physical signs to watch for

Beyond unusual account activity, shifts in appearance or demeanor can reveal underlying problems. An older adult who seems confused, anxious, withdrawn, or controlled by another person may be at heightened risk. Expressions of excitement about unexpected prizes, or fear when discussing finances, can also be red flags. Allegations of missing funds, coercion, or abuse should always be taken seriously.

Protecting older adults from financial abuse is an ongoing effort built on vigilance, communication, and compassion. With the proper prevention measures in place, you can give your loved ones an enhanced layer of safety and security from increasingly sophisticated fraud attempts.



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