

Marin group fosters friendship and fun



One of SIR's activities is biking with George Osner's Old Spokes bike group. COURTESY OF PEXELS



Image



By Tom Verkozen

Special to the IJ

In June 2023, I joined Sons In Retirement (SIR), a social group for men that provides physical, mental and social stimulation, stretching members to grow older gracefully.

Six months after joining, I was sworn in as branch president, whereupon I announced, "I know less than a dozen of you. To find out who each of you is and why

you're here, let's have coffee."

When I got home and told my wife, Finola, that I'd be having coffee with 60 guys, she laughed and said, "Brilliant. Make sure you order decaf."

The 56 coffees in the first seven months have introduced me to some wonderful men, including an 87-year-old lifelong bachelor who's getting married this year and two men who filled me in on San Rafael nonprofit Ritter Center's efforts to end homelessness.

The backbone of Branch 007's speaker series is Dr. Bob Bundy, who recruits local luminaries to entertain and inform us during our monthly luncheon. Bundy brought us Marin sports columnist and author Joan Ryan, whose engaging talk about team chemistry inspired us to create teams to run our organization. From Marin Supervisor Brian Colbert we gained a new perspective on community building, and from Marin Villages Executive Director John Power's presentation we realized that our branch would benefit from a carpool coordinator.

Every coffee provided value. After a coffee chinwag with golfer, house boater and retired professor Don Lytle, whose expertise is how people play, he agreed to speak this month. After coffee, Gordon Haight, another one of our golfers and house boaters, agreed to enlighten and entertain us with stories from his years as a New York Times editor and to talk about the challenges faced by the news industry. (For this event, members will be encouraged to bring their partners.)

Not-yet-retired international banker Stuart Keirle said, "Let's do breakfast."

Then retired roofer Brian McLeran said, "Come on over for a barbecue."

With that, my get-togethers now include breakfast and lunch, and the "coffee" count jumped to 87 — only 33 chitchats to go.

Some members help run the show, putting in two or three hours a month with their co-chair committee. Social directors Ted Pullen and Dave Pell welcome 70 or more

guys to the monthly speaker events; Jim Flores and Drew Dowsett head up the treasury and the chairs of our membership committee; and Michael Sommer, Tom Martindale and Kelley Reid helped double our membership.

Many of our guys are very active and love to go on adventures. They go camping, river rafting and RVing around the states and even abroad.

They cruise the oceans and couch surf internationally; thus, as we grew from 58 to 119 members and our group grew younger, we added new activities: rides with George Osner's Old Spokes bike group, billiards at the Silver Peso and, with Dave Cooke and Al Wuthnow at the helm, a book group where reading the whole book is optional.

As a kid, I didn't always brush my teeth. As an adult, twice-daily tooth brushing is a must, socializing is critical and getting out of the house is reinvigorating.

Hearing guys say, "I love getting older," makes me smile. Come smile and get older with us.

For more information, go to branch007sir.org.

Tom Verkozen is a San Anselmo resident. IJ readers are invited to share their stories of love, dating, parenting, marriage, friendship and other experiences for our How It Is column, which runs Tuesdays in the Lifestyles section. All stories must not have been published in part or in its entirety previously. Send your stories of no more than 600 words to lifestyles@marinij.com. Please write How It Is in the subject line. The IJ reserves the right to edit them for publication. Please include your full name, address and a daytime phone number.