

HOW IT IS

# Making friends as we age

By Tom Verkozen

Special to the IJ

I had anticipated the loss of work-driven social interactions when I retired, but I returned from a six-month stay in Paris in November 2019 and ran smack into the isolation of COVID. When the lockdowns ended, my book, poetry and biking groups met outdoors.

But life is more than half a dozen get-togethers a month, so I joined a hiking group with friends and former co-workers — and life took off. Over coffee after a 5-mile marsh hike at Hamilton, Michael Sommer invited me to join him for lunch with a group he was involved with called Seniors in Recreation (SIR), a social group of retired men seeking joy post-retirement.

I walked into the McInnis Park Golf Center clubhouse and saw a sea of white-haired, merry men chatting and laughing. Michael dashed over and introduced me to a few of the guys: Ted Pullen, the social chairman, and Ed Powell, his 95-year-old Villa Marin buddy; Bob Bundy, the “Big Sir,” who rides with the Old Spokes bike group; and Terry Aleshire, an avid golfer who livens the meetings with his bagpipes on special occasions. In the mix were several men I knew: Dave Bernardi, who oversaw work on the Cal Park Hill Tunnel, Harry McKellop, who whups me at billiards in his home in Tiburon, and Tim Biddle, 71, one of the younger retirees, who serves on Ritter House’s board of directors.

The meeting commenced with Kelley “Rugger Bugger” Reid (whose wife Mary made him join to get him out from underfoot) leading us in “Ol’ Man River.” What a hoot! After a short round of business, we were dazzled and informed by Michael St. John, the nationally renowned leader of the Marin Search and Rescue team. Feeling at home, I joined.

Seniors in Recreation was founded in San Mateo in 1959 by Damian Reynolds and some of his retired friends. Unlike service clubs (Rotary, Masons, et al.), Seniors in Recreation is strictly social; we provide no service, do no fundraising and are nonpolitical. There are 85 branches of Seniors in Recreation, mostly in Northern California, with four branches in Marin.

After the third gathering, having been asked multiple times to “come and meet some of the guys who run the show,” I attended one of the board meetings and learned that, as a result of COVID, Branch 7 had fallen from over 110 members to 63. I agreed to co-chair membership with my newest buddy Kelley — and we now have 90 members.

One thing I love about being “on board” is that SIR leadership is easy: no commitment other than being a friend and collecting the lunch money. By the way, the men on the executive board are some of the most fun guys in SIR, and after a short meeting, we head over to the Silver Peso in Larkspur, our favorite dive bar, for an hour or two of billiards.

Having fun is my game, so I’ve stepped up and am actually pleased to be the “Little Sir” of Branch 7 — next year, “Big Sir.” Why not, I said to myself — being a leader in having fun is easy. Branch 7 meets for lunch on the first Thursday of the month at McInnis Park Golf Center in San Rafael.

Our next meeting is at 11:30 a.m. May 2. More information at [sirinc2.org/branch7](http://sirinc2.org/branch7).

If you’re interested in becoming more social, or if your wife gives you the nudge, call me at 415-637-7974 and I’ll buy you lunch.

*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](mailto:lifestyles@marinij.com). Please write How It Is in the subject line. The IJ*

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