

HOW IT IS

# Never too old to make new friends

By Tom Verkozen

Special to the IJ

I first got involved with SIR, a group that provides social activities for men over age 50 and their partners, because I'd heard that people with a strong network of friends tend to live happier, more productive and longer lives, and because I wanted to support my friend Michael "Grumpy" Sommer as he revived a local Marin branch, whose membership had fallen during COVID. When I volunteered to co-chair the membership group with Kelley Reid, I experienced the magic of helping a group and getting to know people really well.

Not only is Reid a barrel of fun, but he's a former rugby player, the former mayor of Ross, a Vivalon volunteer and a member of an a cappella barbershop quartet.

Among the group of new SIR members, which includes engineer Jim Flores, former Anchor brewmaster Ollie Lagomarsino, roofer Brian McLaren and intrepid traveler Tom Short, is entertainer Jerry Mahoney. Member 100, newly arrived from Baraboo, Wisconsin, where the Ringling Brothers circus performed their first show in 1884, Mahoney is a red-headed man who says men have got to learn to be the "better man" — like Jack Nicholson's character, Melvin Udall, says in 1997's "As Good as It Gets."

Noble as Mahoney's *raison d'être* may be, men join SIR for friendship, recreation — golf, hiking, biking, billiards and more — chitchatting, telling jokes, discussing books and planning trips, or because the luncheon speakers are interesting.

On Thursday, our health and happiness toolbox will be enhanced by Brendan Hughes from Novato's Buck Institute for Research on Aging. Hughes will enlighten us on how to improve our sleep and keep on truckin' in life — peddling our bikes, playing chess, discussing great ideas and remembering why we just went back to the living

room for that thing — so we can continue having fun, enjoyment and vitality during our soon-to-arrive 90s and 100s.

Bob, Terry, Al, Allen, Grumpy, the two Toms and Thomas formed our book group, where it's OK to only read part of the monthly selection. In November, we will riff on "The Things They Carried," wherein author Tim O'Brien writes about a platoon of soldiers in Vietnam with the understanding that in war "almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true."

To those who enjoy dive bars, chitchat and billiards, we say, bring your game. Organized by Bob Bundy, the billiards contingent meets at the Silver Peso in Larkspur after our monthly and executive meetings.

If you're invested in adding a bit of SIR pizazz to your life, call or text me, Capt. Tom Verkozen, the soon-to-be Big Sir, at 415-637-7974 and I'll arrange for you to meet the guys.

*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 reserves the right to edit them for publication. Please include your full name, address and a daytime phone number.*