

Taking a new look at the issue of aging

Before aging can be redefined, thought should be given to what term actually means

*"Age is not important unless you're a cheese."
— Helen Hayes*

Ahh, if only that were true. But in this age-obsessed society, a person's age does matter — in innumerable ways. Unfortunately, when we think about aging, one of two

things usually happens. Our thoughts are negative — or we're in complete denial.

What can we do? Change the way we think about aging. Or, as the name of this series suggests, redefine it.

"Reframing the issue requires the disrupting of "othering" older people and sending the message that

older age, like any other time in life, involves both challenges and opportunities," FrameWorks Institutes suggests.

And so today, we present these profiles to help illustrate there is no one definition of aging in the first place. We asked four individuals, who range from 62 to 94 years old, to talk a

■ REDEFINING AGING

This is another in an ongoing series that examines issues associated with aging.

bit about what "aging" looks like to them. Here are their stories.

— photos by Jim Slonoff



Retiring relatively young was the right move for Lop Chin

Up until a few of years ago, Lop Chin could climb ladders "like a monkey" and hold his own against his son on the ping pong table. Turning 60, however, seemed to usher in a sensory slowdown and greater susceptibility to aches and pains.

"All of sudden I can't see the ball anymore. He's kickin' my a--! It's not good," Chin said with a laugh. "My body can no longer do things that my mind thinks I can do. Now things I would normally do myself, I hire out."

Chin, 62, is in his fourth year of retirement. He intentionally pulled the cord earlier than many on his work life — spent at his Jade Dragon Restaurant in Hinsdale — to avoid the fate of his parents.

"My parents worked six, seven days a week, 14-hour days," he said. "My mom retired at 65. She had one good year of retirement and she suffered a stroke and slowly dies."

"I said at the time, 'If I don't learn anything from this, what's the purpose?' So I was going to work hard, save and retire as early as I can."

Chin is an avid golfer in season and recently started a self-guided yoga regimen. He uses an app to manage his daily and long-range to-do lists.

"Today, I've got to get my car sticker, my emissions test," he read off his phone. "When I do things, I click it and I hear a ding. When I get a few dings, I

feel like I've accomplished something."

He counseled his peers not to put off retirement just to remain at a particular economic comfort level. Other areas of life may suffer as a result.

"When you're physically and or mentally ready to retire, do it!" said the father of a son and daughter, both in college. "People worry about finances, but you'll make it work."

His wife, Ellyn, still enjoys working. He expressed his gratitude that she never greets him with the potentially guilt-inducing, "What did you do today?"

"She always says, 'How was your day?'" Chin related. "I love her for that."

A self-admitted worry wart, Chin endeavors to release his anxiety.

"I try and remind myself, 'Let it go. Don't worry about it. It'll work out fine,'" he said. "Reduce stress, because, to me, stress is the No. 1 killer. I'm trying to stay healthy, which is not easy."

He looks forward to the time when retirement can be experienced as a couple.

"When my wife is ready to retire, at that stage we'll probably do different things. We'll probably travel more," said Chin, noting that traveling has never aligned with his worry-wart nature.

"At this stage in life, I'm just very appreciative," he said. "I really think I'm the luckiest guy in the world."

— by Ken Knutson

Stage 3 cancer diagnosis gives retired Jim Horn new purpose

Five years ago, Jim Horn retired after practicing law for more than 35 years.

"To be honest, I did not have a plan going forward other than to just withdraw from the professional world and live a healthy lifestyle and wait and see what might appear or become interesting or capture my imagination," he said.

What captured his attention was a diagnosis of stage 3 prostate cancer after his physical in February 2016.

"I was absolutely shocked," he said, noting that he had been active and in perfect health all his life. "That was my first reaction, and then, as the awareness increased, I felt genuinely primal fear."

He also experienced a period of withdrawal and planned to keep his diagnosis from most of his family. His wife suggested he go to Wellness House and, despite reservations, he agreed.

"One of the first things I learned at Wellness House is don't do cancer alone," he said. "You need to have a medical team that you have total confidence in, and you need a community of other cancer patients and survivors and caregivers to help you go through."

In June 2016, doctors removed the entire prostate gland and some surrounding tissue. Forty radiation treatments followed in June and July of 2017 and then two years of androgen deprivation therapy to reduce his testosterone levels. The radiation was effective and left with him a PSA level of 0.00, where it

has remained for almost two years.

Horn said once he accepted his cancer, he was able to approach it with a positive attitude and an assurance of the outcome.

"I just knew it. Intuitively I thought, 'OK, I have an illness and I have the best health care in the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois and I will succeed.'"

In addition to his doctors at Northwestern, he credits his deep faith, the support of family — especially wife Judy and daughter Shannon — and Wellness House with supporting his optimistic approach.

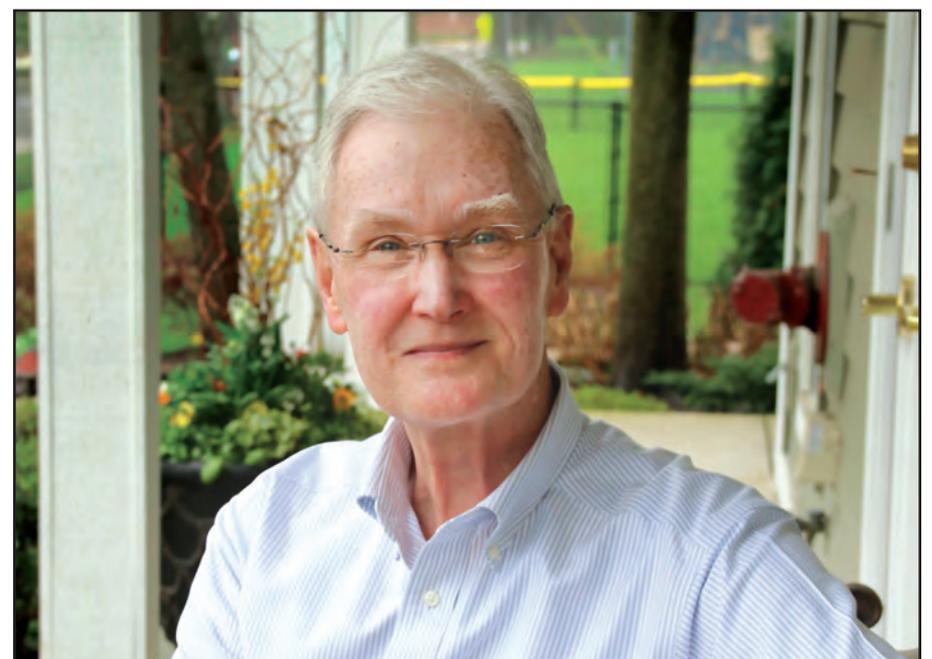
Encouraging others to get an annual physicals and appropriate screenings has become a calling for Horn, who once planned to become a Catholic priest. He said he thinks people postpone visiting their doctor because they don't want to receive bad news.

"Many of us have so many defense mechanisms that try to assure ourselves, 'I'm perfectly fine. I'm healthy. I'm at full capacity and I'm going to live to 100.'"

And while he wouldn't wish cancer on anyone, he said there are benefits to "taking that journey."

"When you are facing the prospect of death and you really come face to face with your own mortality, it brings you alive," he said. "I have had a very blessed, fortunate life, but I am even happier now."

— by Pamela Lannom





Bill Brandenburg said senior life is good for his game

The number 85 is a target for Hinsdale's Bill Brandenburg. He's already reached it in terms of age; the goal now is to match it (or lower) with his golf stroke total.

"I shoot my age fairly regularly," Brandenburg remarked, noting his senior championship at Oak Brook Golf Club in 2017. "I play usually three rounds a week."

Retired since 2001 from a career in chemical engineering, Brandenburg said he's glad he stayed on the job until he was 67, a little past the typical point of work stoppage.

"Don't be so anxious to retire," he offered as counsel. "I was pretty much ready to retire."

Working on his golf game has consumed a large part of the last 18 years, along with traveling with his wife, Sally, and sharing quality time with their three children and seven grandchildren ranging in age from 30 to high school freshman. The couple has lived in a condominium for four years, eschewing the continuing care retirement communities that many of their peers opt for.

"We just didn't feel that we were ready for that," Brandenburg said. "Fortunately neither us have had any (joint) replacements. I'm still able to play golf, and walk the course if I have to."

They also enjoy taking road trips. They recently drove to Florida and back, which included a stop in Nashville, Tenn., to visit a granddaughter at Vanderbilt University.

Having extensive exposure to technology in his professional life has helped Brandenburg navigate the digital era.

"I use Waze," he revealed of his directional system. "That's a handy app to have."

Brandenburg grew up in La

Grange and Western Springs, graduating from Lyons Township in 1952. He met Sally at Iowa State University, and they were married right out of college. They raised their family in New Jersey as Brandenburg traveled the world as an executive with International Flavors and Fragrances.

When their daughter and her family by happenstance settled in a La Grange home a block away from Brandenburg's childhood abode, it was time to relocate.

"We figured that we needed to get closer to them so that they wouldn't have to be going halfway across the country to see us," he said, adding that their son's family lives in Aurora.

Brandenburg put his engineering background to use now matting and framing Sally's watercolor paintings.

"Supporting my wife and her activities has been an important part (of retirement)," he said.

The two have been active church members throughout their lives and belong to the Art Institute of Chicago, Brookfield Zoo and Morton Arboretum. Brandenburg is also converting the family photo albums into electronic form. In other words, there's not much couch potato-ing.

"We don't have the TV on during the day," he said. "We're usually going heavily right up until the time we sit down to dinner."

Having the ability to be with family regularly is the mark of aging well for Brandenburg.

"I wanted to make sure that we would have enough money to have a comfortable retirement," he related. "I'm not as agile as I once was. And sometimes I lose my words when I go to say something. But other than that, things are going pretty well."

— by Ken Knutson

Triple digits are only five short years away for Ly Hotchkin

Ly Hotchkin doesn't mind being 94.

She misses having a drivers license and better eyesight, but she still enjoys laughing with people she loves over a good drink.

That wasn't the case 18 months ago. At the time, she was ready to die — and she told her doctors as much.

"I begged them to let me die because I was so lethargic I didn't want to do anything, and it was horrible," Hotchkin said. "Guess what they did? They put this pacemaker in."

The device changed everything.

"The operated one day. The next day you thought I was a different person. It was invigorating," she said.

Hotchkin's cardiologist had tried to convince her to get a pacemaker earlier, but she refused. Now she sees that was a mistake.

"My advice to old people is to listen to your doctor," she said.

About six months before the surgery, Hotchkin moved in with her son, Randy, and daughter-in-law, Chris. She had spent the previous 25 years at one of the cottages in the Woods at King-Bruwaert in Burr Ridge.

"I'm going blind. I can no longer read. I take two shots a day (for diabetes) and I take two things of pills a day," she said. "It was getting ahead of me, and I had to either get someone to come and live with me in the Woods or I had to make a change."

Hotchkin, who spent 37 years as executive director of The Community House, knew she wanted more independence than living in the "Big House" at KB would allow.

"I cannot have that kind of control on my life and I don't want to eat what they want me to eat," she said. "Chris is wonderful. She is best bartender you'll ever find."

The two enjoy cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and conversation before dinner each night.

Interaction like that is important, Hotchkin said, especially with people who have celebrated fewer birthdays than she has.

"B.J. (Chimenti) is good for me. Chris is good for me," Hotchkin said. "They're a little younger. They're doing things, and I'm interested in what they're doing and I follow in it. You cannot stop living."

And she hasn't. Two years ago at age 92 she was the oldest cast member in The Community Revue, the biennial show that benefits The Community House. She claims, as she has in the past, that she will not return to the stage. But she'll be in the audience at the next show and available to celebrate afterward.

"I think I'll go to the parties whether they invite me or not," she said.

Her 100th birthday, she notes, is only five years and six months away.

"I'm hoping I won't be here! I'm serious! I know I have no control," she said. "God's going to come down and say, 'Hey, idiot — die.'"

She's quick to note she already has planned her funeral and appointed Norm and B.J. Chimenti, Jay and Jan Tuthill and Tom and Judy Casten as party planners.

"Norm said to me the other day, which I think is funny, he said, 'If you don't hurry up and die, I'll be dead before I can do your funeral,'" she said. "I told him I don't know how to hurry it, but OK."

It should come as no surprise that she plans on maintaining her sense of humor, no matter what the future holds.

"If I can't laugh at me, I'm in serious trouble," she said.

— by Pamela Lannom

