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East Sacramento News

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Introducing the Sacramento Children's Musical Theater

See Page 3

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Blind Sacramento resident discovers the art of independence

Susan Hood was working on a degree in art history in Connecticut and a lifelong dance history project. Then, a dental visit led to a staphylococcus blood infection that nearly killed her in 2017.

"I wasn't expected to live, but I did," Hood said.

After nine weeks in the hospital, Hood was alive, but the infection had damaged her mitral valve and caused 12 small strokes. She had open heart surgery to replace her mitral valve. She had to learn to walk again and lost much of her vision. After multiple eye surgeries, her vision improved slightly, but she still would need to learn to navigate her world very differently.

"Seeing through my left eye is like looking through a Coke bottle that has Vaseline smeared on it – I can see shapes, color and movement, but that's all," Hood said. "In my right eye, my central vision is completely gone."

As she lay in her hospital bed in Connecticut, she confessed to a friend that her biggest fear was losing her independence. She knew of no services for people with vision loss in Connecticut. With a little help from her brother in Galt, Hood moved herself across the country to Arden-Arcade on Christmas night 2017. In less than two months, she had signed up with the Department of Rehabilitation and begun working with Sacramento nonprofit Society for the Blind. She began with the group's Senior IMPACT Project retreat, an eight-day immersive experience for seniors to learn blindness skills.



"With the Senior IMPACT Project, I started to feel confidence in the possibility of retaining my independence," Hood said. "I was struck by the really warm, positive, upbeat approach of the facilitators and instructors. They took an interest in each of us and that really built my confidence."

Hood graduated from the Senior IMPACT Project and became a mentor for the program. Just a few months later, she entered Society for the Blind's Core blindness skills classes determined to overcome her fear of cooking without sight.

"That got me over the hurdle," Hood said. "I was so afraid of burning or cutting myself, and the heat was scary, but I got over that."

Through her Core classes, she also learned orientation and mobility, Braille and how to use assistive technology, including a computer program that would allow her to continue to write in longform, tracking footnotes and citing sources. In April 2019, she was teamed up with her guide dog, Geode, who is now 4 years old. She also participates in Society for the Blind's writer workshops and yoga classes.

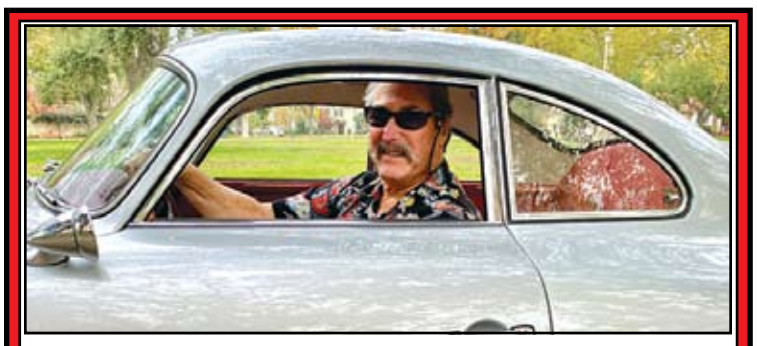
"My landing at Society for the Blind was extraordinary," Hood said. "It was like taking a running jump into the pool and immediately swimming."

Hood had managed to maintain her independence, but she was still navigating how to maintain her lifelong interest in art. She had previously worked as a freelance theatre critic and arts journalist for local Connecticut newspapers. Now she could no longer see details in paintings or dance movements.

She began asking for magnifiers and digital press kits when she went to local museums.

"My vision now depends on scale and contrast," Hood said. "With magnifiers, I can get a general idea or look for certain

See INDEPENDENCE on page 6



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Introducing the Sacramento Children's Musical Theater

The Sacramento Children's Musical Theater is a new theater group dedicated to offering high quality performing arts experiences to youth ages 5-18. Welcoming both newcomers that are exploring performing on stage for the first time, as well as experienced performers, SCMT is committed to creating a space for all local youth.

Over the past thirty years John Bisceglie and his team have worked with thousands of children in the San Francisco Bay Area producing more than two hundred original musicals, movies, singing showcases and special events featuring kids of all ages. Now, having recently relocated to Sacramento, John is excited to introduce his program to the Sacramento valley and bring the magic of children's theater to a new community of families.

Throughout the year, SCMT will offer three live theater productions as well as a variety of acting classes and workshops. Recently the Sacramento Children's Musical Theater launched a partnership with the Fulton-El Camino Recreation & Park District, establishing that weekday rehearsals will be held at the Richard T. Conzelmann Community Center located in Howe Park. Featuring a newly renovated theater, Howe Park is centrally located and convenient to access for all.

"We are grateful to the Sacramento Children's Musical Theater for making this investment at Howe Park Theater, introducing children to the performing arts in the Arden Arcade community," shared Emily Ballus, General Manager of Fulton-El Camino Recreation and Park

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Farm and Flavor: How green is your spring cleaning?

By Kerin Gould

The first buds are popping, sparrows are nesting under my eaves again, and the last frost will be over soon, so thoughts turn to freshening up the house and tidying up the garden. The (battery-powered) weed-whacker is going to be used to death, and I'll be mixing some white vinegar and orange peels for window cleaning. For myself, I aim to garden with other living beings in mind, and I only use non-toxic products, because otherwise, what does "clean" really mean? Is shiny orderliness worth the negative effects of poisonous products and destructive practices?

First, if you can leave the leaves alone a little longer, leaf debris is a great place for birds to forage, for beetles to break down organic matter, and for earthworms to aerate. Some critters are dormant in there, so please don't disturb them. Perhaps the mower deck can be raised, too. The time for pruning ends soon, as trees leaf out and birds nest and raise their young. I desperately need to thin the oleanders, but I'll wait until September. The scrub jays, towhees, and brewer's blackbirds are already installed for the season. Also, when you prune, keep an eye out for praying mantis egg cases attached to branches. In each one-inch cocoon-like case, there are 50-200 individuals who will hatch and immediately get to work on managing your garden pests. As you lift tarps, boards, or what have you, please look out for lizards, too. They are trying to stay warm but may be sluggish when temperatures are low. They'll be ready to patrol your garden soon enough.

Most of all, I implore you not to use toxic sprays, such as the one whose manufacturer had to pay $10 billion in a class-action lawsuit to folks whose lymphoma was attributed to this product. Maybe you think you'll never get cancer or think that it will be worth it if you can glimpse your perfect lawn as you slough off your mortal coil and ascend (or wherever you are going), but think about your pets (with their bare feet and curious noses constantly in the grass) or your kids. Ken Cook, EWG president and co-founder, commented on a 2015 Harvard study that connected pesticides to childhood cancers: "The findings confirm parents' worst fears that they could be unknowingly exposing their children to harmful chemicals that can lead to serious, even life-threatening, illnesses.". Products with the OMRI label are certified organic, so please try those or home remedies such as vinegar.

Indoors, we can also make our cleaning deeply clean, rather than surface-clean but ugly in terms of chemical and vapor exposure. Try certified green cleaners (Green Seal or EcoLogo) without lots of dyes and scents. Open windows when cleaning. Avoid "anti-bacterial chemicals and air fresheners. Dilute products, and use no more than needed. If you are spiffing the place up, try paint with "low VOC" (less off-gassing); cabinets and carpets are notorious off-gassers; even some upholstery can bring unwanted toxins into your home. Get the EWG's healthy home checklist at https://www.ewg.org/healthyhomeguide.

Inside our bodies, it's also a good time for cleansing and detoxing, turning to fresh, spring foods that are full of fiber (picture tiny brooms going through your system), and energizing nutrients. Strawberries are reputed to support heart health and boost red blood cells, cilantro sequesters heavy metals and helps them exit your body, dandelion greens clean your urinary tract, artichokes and cardoons support the liver, and asparagus is considered a kidney cleanser.

Try this recipe that features asparagus!



Asparagus Mousse

Ingredients

- 1 cup thick cashew milk or other neutral-flavored "cream"
- 1 bunch fresh asparagus, steamed with a splash of olive oil and cut into small pieces
- 3 eggs (ideally pastured, organic eggs) or a vegan substitute
- 1 tbsp corn starch or arrowroot
- olive oil
- salt and pepper
- Fine bread crumbs (or panko, gluten-free varieties do exist!)
- (Vegan) Parmesan-style "cheese"

Directions

- Preheat the oven to 355.
- Place the milk, asparagus, eggs, corn starch in the blender and puree the ingredients until the mix is very fine. Salt and pepper to taste. Mix in the parmesan if desired. Optionally, you can mix in ¾ of the asparagus and later add the remaining pieces in to add texture.
- Lightly oil a loaf pan or custard cups, then coat well with the bread crumbs.
- Pour in the egg mixture.
- Set the loaf pan or custard cups in a roasting pan and set them on the oven rack. Pour hot water into the pan, avoiding the mousse containers, to come up halfway up the sides of the dish(es).
- Bake until a knife inserted halfway between edge and center comes out clean, about 45 minutes for the loaf size, less for the smaller cups. The mousse should be firm, with light cracking on the surface, but not dry or hard.
- When done, remove from the oven and let cool on a rack. You can serve in the custard dishes, slice the flan from the loaf pan, or unmold the mousse (at your peril) by running a very thin knife around the edge before inverting it.



Local veteran to partner with Sacramento Public Library to offer art therapy program for female vets

By Monica Stark

The Sacramento Public Library and the Women's Veteran Alliance partnered up to offer female vets a 4-week virtual art therapy program, led by local art instructor and veteran, Deidre Trudeau. Participants will get to try out different media such as watercolor, pencil or collage while they have the opportunity to connect with other female vets. During the program Melissa Washington, a local representative from Women Veterans Alliance will share her story and resources available through the organization.

With the militant, regimented and left-brained lifestyles troops face while on duty, Trudeau argues for the importance of tapping into their right brains because a military lifestyle is "a far departure from the right brain thinker who is explorative and flowery and, and, and expressive. So I feel it's really important to help women tap back into the flower of themselves and the more the non regiment, non military militant aspect of their sensibility, their spirit, their psyche."

A graphic artist for over 30 years and a professional artist, Trudeau said the premise of the program is "100% around acceptance."

"Just coming to a place of acceptance in the very moment that we're in. I start them off with some really beautiful deep breathing exercises where there's a lot of imagining, I show them how our imaginations are so powerful," she said.

For example, she takes participants through a lemon exercise, leading them on to salivate and "feel the sourness of the lemon that doesn't even exist. It's just through their imaginations." She then amps their imaginations up towards imagining what they want for themselves in their lives, be it peace and calmness, a retreat for vacation. "None of that is any of my business. It doesn't matter, but I have them imagine these things."

Combined with meditative practices, the participants begin to imagine the colors, the fragrances as Trudeau helps them to hear the sounds and feel the things that they would feel if they were where they wanted to be, say a beach vacation with the ocean smell and the feel of a breeze in their hair. "By doing all of that our brain starts to make it real. Our brain starts to be convinced that that situation is a real thing. And therefore we subconsciously start working towards those goals."

So, what does that have to do with art? Trudeau says it's this: People have a personal demand on themselves for whatever it is they're trying to do and achieve. And if they think they're not creative, they close up. So she tries to say it's not about being talented. It's about doing and being and feeling and exploring.

"So I help to disarm that need to feel like they've got to perform right now and be talented at it. That's out the window: None of that makes any difference. What makes a difference is them learning to explore and to explore with the purpose of their own vibration. So if you know you're loving the color blue and you have your own reasons for it and you assign a fragrance to it."

She then has students move a pencil around a piece of paper, in different directions. At the end when they look at that paper, they start to get an idea of who they are, how they would express themselves if there were no rules and nothing mattered.

Trudeau describes the process as moving a pencil around a piece of paper, and finding out perhaps that "you're very very organic and flowery and have lots of circles and are light and gentle. You might find that about yourself."

But, she says, you also might find that you've got zigzags and you draw very dark and things are static and there's big open spaces. "All of those things say something about you and it helps you to identify the kind of energy you have while expressing without any demands on you," she said.

It's not about what's right or wrong, she said. "It just is what it is. And so that's why I really circle around the world word acceptance."

Akin to creating a looking glass with their fingers, the participants of the aptly-titled program, "Discovering the Hue of You," get to travel through this menagerie of doodling to find a place they like a lot. And, finally, participants draw that image on a separate piece of paper, which then becomes somewhat of a composition based on their sensibility.

For Trudeau, art therapy is her safest place and the course helps participants find theirs. It helps them to reignite their creative chamber. "There have been billions of people on our planet and there probably will be billions more but there's only going to be one of you. And so this helps us focus on the gem and jewel view, and that's why I call it "The Hue of You".

Registration via Zoom is required.

Visit https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYoduyorTkuGdUhuQRM0pW5UehQ9aUnyqEa to register.

The first 20 people to register will receive art supplies, available for pickup at your closest Sacramento Public Library location.

The start time for the Female Veterans Art Therapy Program is 4 p.m. on Thursdays March 3, 10, 17 and 24.

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Local residents can file taxes online for free through United Way

Participants across Sacramento region can receive up to $8,000 in tax credits

Local residents throughout the Sacramento region are eligible to file their taxes online for free through United Way California Capital Region's Free Tax Prep program through April 18. Households that earned less than $65,000 in 2021 can file for free and receive up to $8,000 cash back from state and federal credits, including the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC and CalEITC). The local United Way's Free Tax Prep program saves qualifying residents an average of $200 in preparer fees. When needed, the program provides free tax help virtually and in person in multiple languages. Two virtual tax workshops will be held on Feb. 26 and March 12 where certified volunteers will help participants prepare their own returns and answer questions before filing. To learn more about United Way's Free Tax Prep program or begin filing, visit YourFreeTaxPrep.org.

"Many families in our region have earned these tax credits, but often do not know they are eligible," said Dr. Dawnté Early, president and CEO, United Way California Capital Region. "These are important funds that local families can use to meet immediate needs and increase their household's financial stability. Our Free Tax Prep program is a key piece of United Way's work to help every family succeed so their community can too. That is square one for ending poverty in our region."

Households may be eligible for the CalEITC tax credit if the taxpayer is at least 18 years old and the household earned less than $30,000 in 2021. Many CalEITC-eligible households are not legally required to file taxes due to low income, but if they file, they can claim state and federal credits.

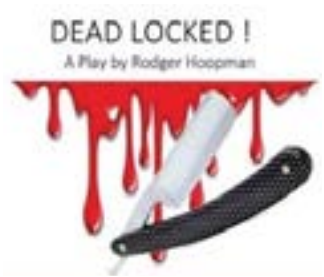
Families that received advance payments of the Child Tax Credit must file a tax return and could be eligible for additional Child Tax Credit payments. United Way's Free Tax Prep program can help non-U.S. residents apply for their ITIN, as ITIN holders are eligible for some tax credits. Experts recommend everyone files early, noting that many people do not realize that unemployment income is taxable. Even if people owe money, it is not due until April 18 no matter how early they file.

In 2021, more than 4,000 households across the Sacramento region filed their taxes through United Way's Free Tax Prep program, claiming a total of more than $7.5 million in credits and saving a total of $885,000 in tax preparation fees.

For nearly 100 years, United Way California Capital Region has brought local people together to make community change happen. With a mission to build stronger, healthier and more compassionate communities, the local United Way starts at square one: helping every family succeed so their community can too. Serving Amador, El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo counties, the local United Way is working to meet its 20-year commitment to significantly reduce poverty in the region by helping kids excel in school, investing in families, creating meaningful partnerships and organizing to lift impacted families. For more information or to make a donation, visit YourLocalUnitedWay.org.

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Independence:

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details. With digital press kits, I can blow up wall text and labels."

With dance, Hood relies on contrast and lighting. She can see silhouettes and some costume outlines. She has spoken with dance professionals in the area about providing audio narration and has been interviewed about what makes for good audio description of dance.

Thanks to the tools she learned at Society for the Blind, Hood continues to work on her lifelong dance history project and visit exhibitions and performances in Sacramento's art community.

"I'm just really grateful that Society for the Blind exists," Hood said. "Thanks to them, Sacramento is a really good place to be if you're blind or visually impaired."

For 68 years, Society for the Blind has created innovative ways to empower individuals living with low vision or blindness to discover, develop and achieve their full potential. Society for the Blind has grown from a dedicated group of volunteers to a nationally recognized agency and the only comprehensive rehabilitative teaching center that provides services for a 27-county region of northern California. The nonprofit provides low-vision eye care, life and job skills training, mentorship, and access to tools to maintain independence for more than 5,000 youth, working-age adults and seniors experiencing vision loss each year. For more information or to make a donation, visit SocietyfortheBlind.org.

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California health classes now require more expansive teaching on mental health amidst decline in high schoolers' well being

By GraceAnn Lesser
Rio Americano High School/ Sac School Beat

Senate Bill 224 went into effect in January, requiring all California middle and high school health classes to include mental health in the curriculum.

By January 2023, the Department of Education is required to incorporate the new topics into the state standards, and school districts will be teaching the new material by the following January.

According to Rio Americano Health teacher Vicky Warren, these standards are vital to ensure consistency between educators.

"The current curriculum is extremely outdated." says Warren." The district is currently piloting new Health textbooks, which is long overdue. Most health teachers have relied on supplemental materials for the last several years to compensate for the outdated text. The real issue is that there is a lack of consistency without a reliable, vetted curriculum. One teacher may choose to cover some aspects of mental health that they feel are important and another teacher may choose other topics. A consistent, board-adopted curriculum will ensure all students receive comprehensive mental health education."

However, some educators worry about the increasing volume of material that must be crammed into a single semester, and the demands this places on health teachers.

"We already have mandates for CPR instruction and comprehensive sexual health. We need to cover nutrition, tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs as well," says Warren. "I worry that a mandated curriculum could be based on unrealistic time expectations. I don't think we're going to solve any student's mental health crisis through instruction in the health class, but hopefully it will help students be more aware of their own mental health and those around them and that they will be empowered with access to resources so they can advocate for themselves and others."

The new curriculum will not only require mental health education for classes that did not already include it, it will expand upon any existing mental health curriculums. New standards will teach students how to spot and intervene in a mental health crisis; the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on mental health; and the defining characteristics of serious mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia.

Students seem to think this would be beneficial.

"I think that more serious mental health conditions should be discussed in health class because a lot of them are super misunderstood," said Rio senior Zoe Buck, who took Health last semester.

Rio senior Hannah Lee, who took Health as a freshman, seems to be in agreement.

"I do think teaching more about the serious conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, OCD, eating disorders, PTSD, etc. would be so helpful and important for students to be educated on," she said.

Warren says these topics should be approached with caution.

"Covering conditions like eating disorders, depression, and suicide can be very tricky," she said. "These topics can be triggering and upsetting to some students who are already struggling. Leaving this out of instruction is not really an option though either. With regards to these, and other conditions like OCD, PTSD, schizophrenia I think the most helpful thing we can teach students is identifying signs and symptoms and accessing reliable resources for help."



The bill cites the effectiveness of mental health education in reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues, while encouraging awareness and seeking out help.

It also mentions the vast numbers of Californians, particularly adolescents, that struggle with mental health issues.

This struggle has been greatly exacerbated by the two-year period of isolation and uncertainty caused by COVID-19, evidenced by a national 24 percent increase

See TEACHING on page 9



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Theater:

continued from page 3

District. "Fostering creativity is essential to youth development so we are thrilled to be a venue that helps champion these young artists."

By creating and producing colorful youth theater productions within the community, SCMT provides performing arts training that boosts children's self-esteem, confidence, and teaches the value of teamwork.

SCMT will hold auditions on April 24th for its first live production, "Ticket To Broadway" an all singing, all dancing, dazzling salute to Broadway. The show features songs from Hamilton, Wicked, Dear Evan Hansen, Frozen, Waitress, In the Heights, Rent, West Side Story, Hairspray, Matilda, Grease, Aladdin, Into the Woods, Lion King, Les Miserables, Annie and more.

An exciting and convenient twelve-week program with only one rehearsal per week on Tuesdays makes participation fun and easy for local youth ages 5-18. No experience required, and all who audition will be accepted.

SCMT Founder John Bisceglie added, "After two years of no in-person rehearsals or live shows, we are thrilled to once again create live theater and get Sacramento kids back on stage and into the spotlight."

For more information about SCMT's youth theater productions, classes and workshops, please visit www.sacramentochildrensmusicaltheater.com or call John Bisceglie at 916-905-7514.

Teaching

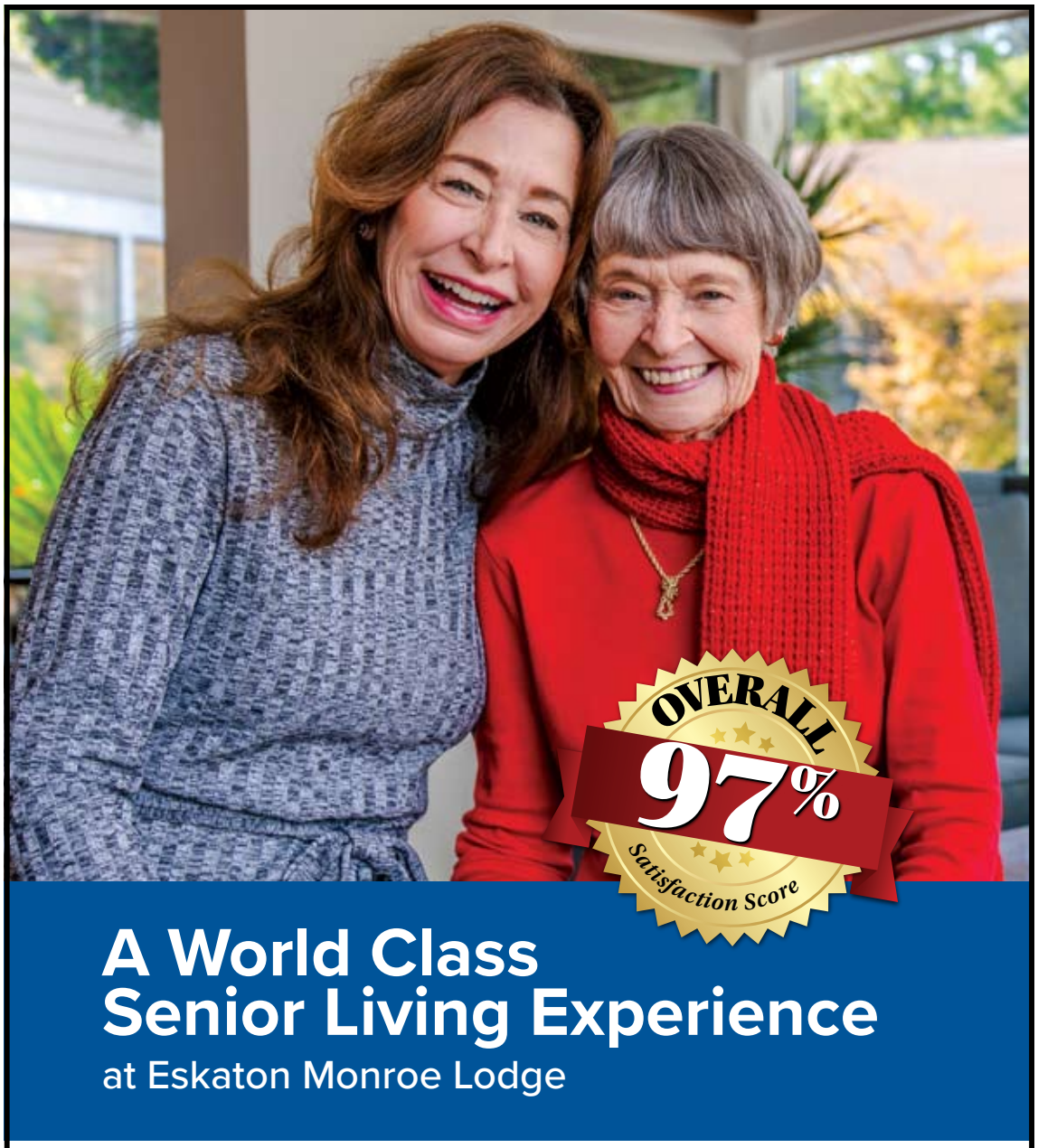
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in mental-health-related hospital visits for children ages 5-11, and a 31 percent increase for ages 12-17 between March and October 2020. Visits for suspected suicide attempts increased by 50 percent among teenage girls 12-17 early in 2021 compared to early 2019.

"The most significant change I have noticed in students' mental health over the course of the pandemic has to do with a decline in social skill," Warren says. "Students seem more withdrawn and less interested in engaging with each other and their teachers. In general, the energy level feels low. This could be result of underlying mental health concerns of just a generalized fatigue from the constant changes, disappointments, and fear of the unknown. We're all tired."

GraceAnn Lesser is a student at Rio Americano High School and originally published this article on Sacramento School Beat.

On the web: sacschoolbeat.com/1092/news/california-health-classes-now-require-more-expansive-teaching-on-mental-health-amidst-decline-in-high-schoolers-mental-health/



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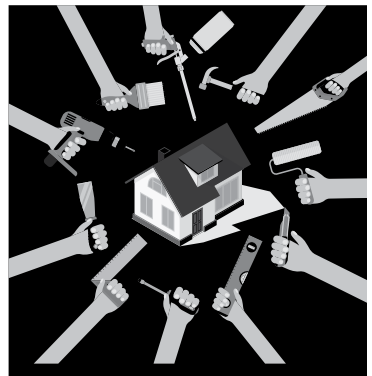
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