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## Home alone during COVID-19

By Vera Kochan



This Lafayette resident, who lives alone, is grateful for her apartment's garden area. Photo J. Wake

to keep busy. "I keep in contact with people and talk to more people now than I used to all across the country." He added, "I do a little more telephone socializing." Fortunately, he has daughters close by who have made him masks and bring him groceries, but he says he still heads out to the grocery store if he really needs something.

An 81-year-old Lafayette resident who lives alone uses her iPad to connect with family in other states and with friends who also find themselves home alone. She has scheduled regular weekly FaceTime appointments with friends, which she says helps her keep track of the days as they turn to weeks. "On Sundays I talk to my friend in Mexico, on Tuesdays, another friend at Rossmoor, and I get one or two video chats in a day from my daughter-in-law in Alabama," she says. She misses going out to group lunches, and to her church, but is grateful for the friends she has and the different ways they've found to keep in touch.

For anyone living alone, Gov. Gavin Newsom has recently expanded the Friendship Line California 1-888-670-1360. The line provides a warm voice, a listening ear and human connection to those feeling alone throughout California.

One 60-year-old independent contractor from St. Louis who typically flies all over the United States for his job is using his shelter-in-place time to "improve my cooking skills a hundred times more than they were before. I've also used my dishwasher more in one week than I could have in a month."

He has become quite the Mr. Fix-it. Besides de-cluttering drawers and closets, "I'm doing all the projects I've never had time for - touch-up painting, putting a new tile floor in a bathroom, replacing broken screen doors, tons of yard work and planting seeds - stuff you never get around to." He's also fixed four broken computer printers located in various rooms throughout the house.

A 90-year-old widow who lives in Vero Beach, Florida doesn't own a computer, and doesn't seem to miss having one. She keeps in touch with family and friends by telephone and watches the news on television to stay abreast of the COVID-19 situation. Experts recommend limiting the amount of time watching the news. In a recent study by Pew Research Center four in 10 Americans say they feel worse emotionally as a result of following the news.

But like others across the country, recreational facilities in the 90-year-old's retirement condominium complex are closed for now. "Nothing is going on. The club house is locked and the pool is closed, so I can't use those," she said. Luckily she has a neighbor in the complex with whom she plays rummikub or mahjong. "We used to take turns going to each other's place for dinner every day, but the longer this goes on we decided to only do it a couple of times a week," adding, "It's too hard trying to plan a menu each night."

According to the National Institutes of Health, research has linked social isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death.

With 80 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the three Lamorinda cities as of May 5, according to Contra Costa Health Services data, and new infections being reported in Contra Costa County, finding new ways to interact and stay busy has become imperative for many older residents who are stuck at home alone during this shelter-in-place order.

One 88-year-old Moraga widower, who asked that we use his initials, DB, for this story, misses going to the gym. Besides getting a workout, he always looked forward to the human interaction. Instead, he has found exercise apps that he can follow at home. "I also walk around Moraga a lot," DB said. "When you pass someone on the sidewalk, some people start to walk in the street to keep their distance. They don't even care that cars are driving down the road."

DB uses his cell phone to see and talk with family and friends, listens to music stations on the TV, and gardens

When asked if she has taken to cleaning out closets, like so many others have while sheltering in place, her response was, "Are you kidding!?"

For those feeling emotional or psychological distress, contact the Contra Costa Crisis Center at 1-800-833-2900 for free support and counseling.

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