



A Community #ForAllAges

Age-Friendly Sarasota

December 2020



### Sarasota-Manatee residents adjust to digital tools to overcome isolation during COVID-19

By Justin Garcia, Sarasota Herald-Tribune



The Aging Rebels

Nancy Schlossberg logs into her Zoom chat and greets ten of her peers from The Aging Rebels discussion group. She loves being able to look into the eyes of her friends, even though they aren't meeting in person because of COVID-19.

The group, ranging from 60-91 years of age, addresses an array of topics related to growing older, such as loneliness, loss of a spouse, relationships, anxiety, and physical limitations. Today, they're discussing the effects of their environment on aging.

They talk about how their moods are affected by the outside world and how people perceive their bodies. They're sometimes written off or dismissed by younger people, health care providers, and physicians in their daily lives.

Laughter, smiles, and jokes intersect the serious subjects, and there's a joyful camaraderie between them.

Schlossberg, 91, is co-leader of The Aging Rebels, along with her friend Michael Karp. She's a professor emerita at the University of Maryland, a professional counselor, and an author. Helping lead the group for the

### STRONGER ME, STRONGER WE

**CALLING ALL PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, CAREGIVERS, TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS...**

The Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (SCGLR) is offering personal development opportunities to the public through Stronger Me, Stronger We (SMSW) at no cost, as a gift from The Patterson Foundation.

SMSW gives community members and their families the opportunity to virtually come together in small groups, connect, and build knowledge and skills. Each SMSW offering is comprised of five one-hour Zoom sessions.

In the spirit of "our children, our community, our responsibility," Mind In the Making and The Power of Presence are for all ages. The virtual-session participants have found multi-generational interaction to be quite engaging!

Registrants will be sent a Zoom link prior to each meeting and must have a computer, tablet, iOS, or Android phone to participate. If you do not have a device, please contact John Ferguson at [JFerguson@thepattersonfoundation.org](mailto:JFerguson@thepattersonfoundation.org).



past two years is deeply meaningful for her.

When COVID-19 arrived in Florida in March, The Aging Rebels had to move their meetings online, like millions of people worldwide, but a gap in digital skills presented obstacles.

"Myself and others in the group were running into problems with how to use Zoom and other programs," Schlossberg says. "We realized we needed help adjusting to this new world."

A Pew Research study from 2017 revealed that 73% of Americans who are 65 and older said they need help setting up electronic devices such as computers and tablets. 23% said they were only a little confident when using electronic devices, while 11% said they were not comfortable.

Senior Friendship Centers, where The Aging Rebels formerly met in person, stepped in to help the group set up Zoom meetings and invite members to a program that teaches older people how to use new technology. Crystal Rothhaar, communications director for Senior Friendship Centers, believes it is crucial for people's health to have access to digital communication.

"When our centers were closed from March through May, we had so many people suffering because they were isolated," Rothhaar says. "We wanted to have a digital option for people, because mental health is so important in a time like this."

Rothhaar points out that the effects of isolation can be severe, especially on older people. A report out of Brigham Young University shows that "lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having alcohol use disorder."

Senior Friendship Centers Manager April Moschini says the organization had around 700 in-person visitors per week before COVID-19. Now, an estimated 100 visitors come to SFC a week, and strict precautions are in place.

Moschini says that many of the older people who arrive in person don't have access to devices, and they show up to have communication and break their isolation. By venturing into public places for these needs, older people are taking a risk.

That's where organizations like the Sarasota Technology Users Group (STUG) come in, providing access to technology for those in need.

STUG's volunteers rely on donations to refurbish computers, webcams, and other types of equipment. Those donations have been down this year due to COVID-19, and they're asking people with extra technology to visit the organization's donation page and contribute.

Beyond working to provide access to technology, STUG also hosts web trainings, where session leaders discuss new internet tools and apps available, along with providing tutorials on YouTube, converting files, and more. In late November, 88 participants logged in to a STUG Zoom meeting to sharpen their digital literacy.

Suncoast Technical College offers technology classes as part of its Adult & Community Enrichment Center; State College of Florida has an "absolute beginners" introduction to using a computer; and the Osher Lifelong Learning Center at Ringling College has a variety of courses to help people adapt to new technology.

Public libraries have been priceless assets during the pandemic for those

## The Power of Presence

Explore the seven presences -- Mind, Heart, Faith, Courage, Financial Freedom, Values, and Connectedness -- in Joy Thomas Moore's book, *The Power of Presence*.

Through five 1-hour guided conversations, you will take a journey that will give insight into improving your ability to be present with your family and community.

[Click here to explore current opportunities.](#)



## Mind in the Making

Based on the book, *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child*

*Needs*, successful children can focus on their work and control their behavior, figure out what others think and feel, explain what they are thinking, use what they learn creatively, search for reliable information, take on challenges, and engage in learning.

During five 1-hour, facilitated workshops, parents, grandparents, and community members will learn how to strengthen these essential skills and teach them to the children they love. If you're looking for fun and constructive ways to connect with the children in your life, this interactive experience is right up your alley!

[Click here to explore current opportunities.](#)

## BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND!

Due to high interest locally and from across the nation, a second *Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: A Walk to Respect* virtual screening and panel discussion has been added for Thursday, January 28.

in need, providing mobile hotspots, digital training, and resources for residents. Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and DeSoto county libraries offer various services, including training and links to resources that can help increase digital competency.

While Schlossberg talks about the bonding and fun that The Aging Rebels brings to her life, she also stops to recognize that there's a certain privilege in being able to connect, have discussions, and avoid isolation during the pandemic. A woman who came to their in-person meetings has been absent at their Zoom meetings because she lacks the necessary technology and training.

"For people who are on the other end of the divide, it's a different story," Schlossberg says. "The challenges are enormous, but it's great that people are working to address them."

#### Resources

- [Senior Friendship Centers](#)
- [Sarasota Technology Users Group](#)
- [ACE at SCTI](#)
- [SCF](#)
- [Osher Lifelong Learning Center](#)
- [Sarasota County Libraries](#)
- [Manatee County Libraries](#)

This story comes from [Aspirations Journalism](#), an initiative of The Patterson Foundation and the [Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#) to inform, inspire, and engage the community to take action on issues related to digital access.

## TOGETHER APART

TOGETHER APART  
**Holidays at Heart**

Stay virtually "Together Apart" with family and friends this year.

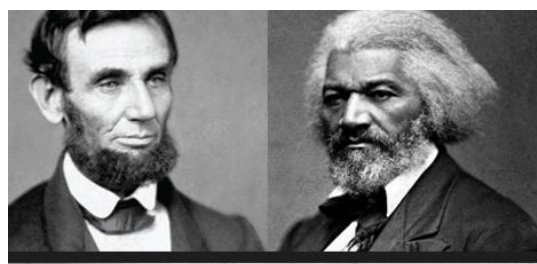
Area Agency on Aging  
FOR SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

**HOLIDAYSATHEART.ORG**

Although many families must be "Together Apart" this holiday season, stay connected virtually while staying safer at home. If you suspect someone you know may be struggling emotionally, reach out and let them know you are thinking of them.

Depression is NOT a normal part of growing older nor a part of the holiday spirit. Did you know depression is the #1 leading cause of disability? Experiencing feelings of loneliness during the holidays doesn't have to be normal. Talking to someone may help. If you are concerned about a loved one, it's ok to ask for help. Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida raises awareness of mental health resources to combat loneliness. Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) to talk to a trained counselor today.

*continue scrolling*



### Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: **A Walk To Respect**

Join The Patterson Foundation for a virtual screening of this powerful, one-act play produced in early 2020, in partnership with [Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe](#). In

this moving production, Frederick Douglass, the black abolitionist leader and former slave, and Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States of America, clashed in their ideologies regarding race, politics, and slavery.

Frederick Douglass, a true radical with a fiery spirit, believed in racial equality for everyone. Douglass dedicated his life, writings, and career to abolishing slavery everywhere. Abraham Lincoln, cautious and considered, while opposed to slavery, was first and foremost a patriot intent on preserving the Union at all costs.

At a time when our divided nation faced annihilation, these two self-made men faced their differences with courage and compassion, forging a friendship that helped to end the Civil War and reunite our nation.

[Click here for more information.](#)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

**This taped one-act play by award-winning playwright, Beth Duda, with original material by celebrated spoken-word poet, Cedric Hameed illuminates the importance of human connections, active listening, and civil discourse.**

**Featuring (L-R) nationally known actor and historical impersonator, Michael Krebs as Abe Lincoln, award-winning actor, Joel PE King as Frederick Douglass, and Spoken-word Poet, Cedric Hameed.**



## The CV19 CheckUp!

The [Florida Department of Elder Affairs](#) (DOEA and [Age-Friendly Sarasota](#)) are driving participation in the Florida Safe Survey by connecting residents with the survey and its resources. The Florida Safe Survey allows older adults to make important self-assessments on their COVID-19 behaviors.

Learn your personal COVID-19 risk for FREE with the [online CV19 CheckUp](#). You'll get an assessment that will help you understand what your risks are. The CV19 CheckUp also provides tips about how to stay safe and healthy.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR  
COVID-19 RISK:  
COAST TO COAST



To share news or information, contact the editor at [sssternberg@thepattersonfoundation.org](mailto:sssternberg@thepattersonfoundation.org).