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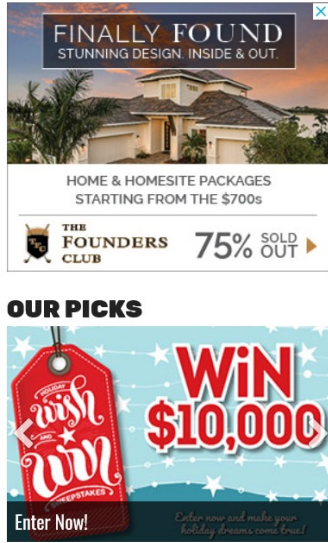


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Aging in the Right Place: Creativity can set you free



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Article by **Michael Moore Jr.**
Staff Writer, **Herald-Tribune**
Monday, November 25, 2019

Kimberly Macuare, co-director of the Innovation Labs at the Dali Museum, went over a variety of creativity exercises at the Reinvention Convention, which focused on the subject of creativity and how it can help you age well. Some of the keys to engaging in the creative process included being open-minded, being willing to learn and engaging in stream-of-consciousness free thinking. [PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE DALI MUSEUM.]

The Reinvention Convention, which is a collaboration between The Senior Friendship Centers, The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Ringling College and the Jewish Family and Children’s Services of the Suncoast, seeks to promote a lively discussion surrounding aging each year as part of a six-year series. Next year’s convention will focus on the brain.

There are more than 915,000,000 ways to build a duck.

At least that’s what we were told at the third annual Reinvention Convention, after being handed a plastic sandwich bag filled with six Legos. We each had 60 seconds to complete our masterpiece. A quick glance around the room confirmed what Kimberly Macuare, co-director of the Innovation Labs at the Dali Museum, had told us: No two ducks were the same.

Sometimes life imitates art. Turns out, what’s true for Legos can be true for people. This year’s theme for the convention, which focuses on hosting a provocative series of discussions centered around aging over a six-year-period and is a collaboration between The Senior Friendship Centers, Jewish Family and Children’s Services of the Suncoast and Ringling, was “Life Creativity: Practical Tools for Living Long and Aging Well.”

But wait, what does living creatively have to do with aging well? Turns out, quite a lot. In fact, embracing your inner Lego builder and discovering all the different ways you can build your own “duck” could be the difference between sputtering into retirement or making a splash.

“The fact that you’re here and the fact that you’re engaged means you want to learn how to be creative and what creativity will mean for your future,” said Larry Thompson, president of Ringling College of Art and Design, to a room full of people at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Ringling College. “Study after study shows that engaging with creative efforts and lifelong learning not only increases your lifespan, but it also makes it so much better.”

Turning toward creative endeavors later in life isn’t a new idea — experts have championed the idea of art therapy for years as a way to cope with loneliness, depression, anxiety and more.

A review published on the National Center for Biotechnology Information that examined 15 studies on the benefits of art therapy found that the majority of studies yielded significant improvements for participants in at least one of the following categories: depression, anxiety, mood, trauma, distress, quality of life, coping, cognition or self-esteem.

Another 2014 study originally published in *The Gerontologist*, part of Oxford Journals, found that older adults who participated in dance, music, theater, visual arts and autobiographical writing reported a number of health benefits, including reduced doctor visits.

Luckily for us, it's never too late to incorporate a little bit of creativity into our lives. And thankfully, you don't have to be Salvador Dali to experience its benefits. You don't even have to paint.

Hank Hine, executive director at the Dali Museum, said that a simple shift in perspective is sometimes all that's needed to get the creative process rolling. He points to, for instance, what is called the "big toe exercise" at the innovation labs. People tend to start with the head first when drawing a portrait. This, according to Hine, brings out all of the bad habits and incorrect assumptions about the human anatomy. But by starting with the big toe, you can shift your perspective and change the way your thinking is organized.

How many assumptions and bad habits have made their way into your routine as you've gotten older? Maybe it's time to start with the "big toe?" Think about what makes you creative, Macuare said. Think about how it makes you feel. Do that.

After all, aging in the right place could come down to how many different kinds of "ducks" you can build.

Find more Aging in the Right Place stories online at heraldtribune.com/aging-in-place. If there are aspects of aging in the right place you would like us to explore, send ideas to mmoore@heraldtribune.com.

This story comes from Aspirations Journalism, an initiative of The Patterson Foundation and Sarasota Herald-Tribune to inform, inspire and engage the community to take action on issues related to Age-Friendly Sarasota, Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, National Council on Aging's 100 Million Healthier Lives and the Suncoast Nursing Action Coalition.