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Healing TRAIL

COURTESY PHOTO
EVTA volunteers work on the new
Healing Trail at Hugh Chatham Health.

BRINGS PEACE AND COMFORT AT HOSPITAL CAMPUS

KITSEY BURNS HARRISON | kburns@yadkinripple.com

Designed to be “an opportunity to enrich the hospital community by providing a restorative outdoor space that complements medical care with nature-based healing,” Hugh Chatham Health’s on-site nature trail, known as the Healing Trail officially opens this spring.

Open to the public, the trail is meant to “serve as a therapeutic respite for patients, team members and caregivers by leveraging nature’s innate ability to reduce stress, lower blood pressure and alleviate anxiety.”

The trail is a community supported project provided by the Elkin Valley Trails Association. The idea for the trail came from longtime EVTA member Bob Hillyer.

Hillyer recalled a few years back, as his wife’s caregiver, when she spent 52 days in intensive care in a hospital.

“I was down there every day, but there are many times you’re just sitting there, so I’d go out and walk,” he said.

He’d walk, in the only spot available at that hospital, in the parking garage.

“It made me realize that hospitals are very very stressful and that people really need some place to go and decompress. One of the best places that I know is through nature, out in the woods and forest.”



COURTESY PHOTO
Volunteers with the Elkin Valley Trails Association work on the new Healing Trail on the hospital campus of Hugh Chatham Health in Elkin.

While many city hospitals may not have that environment as an option, Elkin’s hospital campus at Hugh Chatham Health has a lovely 100-year old forest right on the property. Hillyer then began the process with the EVTA and hospital support to create a place where hospital staff, caregivers, and even patients could get out in nature.



KITSEY BURNS HARRISON

A view of the lake from the Hugh Chatham Health Healing Trail located on the hospital campus.

The Healing Trail, which is around 3/4 a mile long, has a wide gravel pathway and winds its way around the 2.5 acre lake on the property. The trail opens with a stunning rock archway called the Moon Gate. The entry way and its unique design, Hillyer explained, is meant to give visitors a sense of being transported to a place away from stress and anxiety.

“You’ll get a sense of leaving this hectic hospital world and entering the tranquil world of nature,” Hillyer said.

Along the trail there are multiple meditation coves where walkers can stop to rest, reflect and just be still and enjoy nature. Each cove, sponsored by various community groups, is unique in design and will have names such as the Sanctuary Cove.

The new trail will officially open with a ribbon cutting ceremony planned for May 29.



KITSEY BURNS HARRISON

The Healing Trail on the Hugh Chatham Health hospital campus.

The trail is also considered phase one of additional projects that will create a loop of trails around the town of Elkin.

For Hillyer, he said it was “very exciting” to see this vision of a place in nature for people to escape to in times of stress come to fruition on the hospital campus.

“It has special meaning,” he said.

For more details on the Healing Trail and the other trails in the Elkin area, visit elkinvalleytrails.org

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Stage 4 LUNG CANCER

a death sentence?

Today he's hiking and loving life

AMBER PADDOCK | contributing writer

In the space of a year, Chris Gordon was slammed by two shocking pieces of news.

The first came when the 52-year-old Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, resident was in the ER. The pains that brought him to Novant Health Forsyth Medical Center turned out to be a simple case of acid reflux. But while he was there, a scan showed something far more sinister: Inside Gordon lurked an utterly silent Stage 4 cancer.

Gordon soon learned there were tumors in his lungs, lymph nodes and brain. In that moment, he gave himself up for lost.

And that's when Gordon got his second shock. Because while he figured a Stage 4 cancer was an automatic death sentence, his oncologist, Dr. Garrett Sherwood, had other ideas. With advanced treatment options, there's now real hope for healing, he told Gordon.

Turns out, Sherwood was right.

A SCAN THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Smoking was considered cool when Gordon started at age 15. Though he quit sporadically, for most of his life, he averaged a pack a day and, he said, never experienced a single side effect. No wheezing, no coughing, no blood.

His habit was still going strong in 2024 when sharp pains in his chest sent Gordon to the ER. You just have a bad case of reflux, the care team told him. But then they added: We saw something else on your scan.

"The scan showed small tumors in the upper right lung," Gordon said. A follow-up exam and biopsy revealed the tumors were malignant — and that they had spread. "I was shocked," he said. "I jogged, I ran, I hiked. I had no big shortness of breath."

He quit smoking the day he got his diagnosis, cold turkey. But he was stricken by dread. Gordon had watched his parents die from lung cancer — his mother within 10 months of diagnosis and his father within 13. "I thought, 'I'm going to be dead within nine months,'" he said.

The extreme anxiety from the news, coupled with



SHERWOOD GARRETT

the cancer finally making its presence known, changed Gordon's body. The avid hiker rapidly lost 60 pounds and found himself unable to walk.

"I was in a wheelchair. I think some of it was stress," he said. "I could not get off the couch unless someone helped me. I went and met Dr. Sherwood. He told me and my wife that he hadn't given up on me — that we were going to try to beat it.

"I said, 'But it's Stage 4.' He said they'd come a long way in cancer treatments and that it is treatable."

Sherwood started Gordon on chemotherapy, and Gordon said he had few side effects. Treatment also included an immunotherapy drug, Keytruda. Immunotherapy, said Sherwood, is what is changing some Stage 4 cancers into chronic, but manageable, conditions — and even causing others to go into remission.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Chris Gordon out hiking.

get cancer," Sherwood said. "But cancer cells are very smart. They are actively disguising themselves and hiding from the immune system." Immunotherapy drugs "reverse specific tricks the cancer uses to hide from the immune system. The drug enables your immune system to kill the cancer."

Here's what Sherwood wants everybody to know: "Because of advancement in treatment like immunotherapy, even people with advanced cancers are treatable."

SEE **CANCER** ON PAGE 10 

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FINDING STRENGTH IN THE CLIMB

Today, Gordon is done with chemo, hiking 45 miles a week and feeling good. His tumors have shrunk and are stable. In fact, Sherwood said, Gordon isn't alone.

"What I tell people is in a lung cancer practice like mine more than half the patients have Stage 4 cancer when we meet them," Sherwood said. "But I have a large and growing group of patients in my practice like Gordon who are doing well — either in remission or nearly in remission."

For Gordon, life after successful cancer treatment means hiking up his beloved Pilot Mountain, often multiple times a week. He and his wife Artesia — they've known each other since middle school and got married in 2025 — often walk together. When he's alone, he takes his music with him — songs like Sia's "Unstoppable," or Rachel Platten's "Fight Song."



Chris Gordon at Pilot Mountain.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gordon's also sharing his story with as many people as he can, through a Novant Health Cancer Institute support group, his social media circles and in-person. He wants people to know that just like he did, they can have lung cancer without showing symptoms.

"I want to become more involved in helping people get out there and get checked for cancer," he said. "It's not just smoking that causes lung cancer. Nonsmokers need to worry about it too."

Sherwood echoed the thought.

"People need to advocate for themselves. If they feel in their gut something is not normal for them, they need to push," he said. "Go to your doctor and say what you're concerned about, (like) 'I've had this cough for months.'"

DETERMINED TO KEEP GOING

Gordon still recalls the moment he moved from despair to determination. He was at home not long after his diagnosis, thinking about his situation. And about losing his parents. Suddenly he told himself his future could be different. "I wasn't going to go out like that," he said.

Today, that determination continues. "I'm basically going to keep pushing, keep hiking, and keep trying to get the word out about cancer awareness," Gordon said. "I'm going to live for today — and take time to enjoy everything."

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Can cataracts be **PREVENTED?**

Vision should be cherished at every stage in life.

However, as one ages and vision changes become more profound, it is even more important to stay abreast of what can be done to care for the eyes in the hopes of preventing certain conditions, including cataracts.

Cataracts are the clouding of the eye's natural lenses. The World Health Organization estimates that cataracts affect more than 94 million people globally. Cataracts also account for nearly 45 percent of all blindness cases.

Even though cataracts are considered an unavoidable part of the aging process, some people wonder if they can be prevented. Reedsburg Area Medical Center says that, while one cannot entirely stop the biological aging of the lens, delayed onset and reduced severity of cataracts is possible through targeted lifestyle choices.

According to EyeHealth Northwest, by age 80, more than 90 percent of adults will either have a cataract or have already undergone surgery for them. Technically cataracts cannot be prevented, but these steps can help push cataract development further into later life.

- **Wear sunglasses with UV protection.** The consensus among experts is that prolonged exposure to ultraviolet B rays accelerates the breakdown of lens proteins. Consistent

use of sunglasses that offer 100 percent UV protection can greatly slow this protein degradation. Wraparound frames will block light from the periphery as well as the front.

- **Lower oxidative stress.** Preventing oxidative stress, a primary driver of lens opacification, can be achieved through diets rich in antioxidants, says Premier Eye Care of Eastern Idaho. Lutein, zeaxanthin and vitamin C act as shields for the eye. Eye Physicians of Long Beach says the risk of age-related cataracts reduces by around 26 percent for every additional 10 mg of carotenoids added to a person's diet.

- **Manage diabetes.** The National Institutes of Health says individuals with diabetes face a 63 percent higher likelihood of requiring cataract surgery compared to those without the condition. Managing high blood sugar will prevent sorbitol from depositing in the lenses and causing cloudiness earlier in life.

- **Quit smoking:** Smoking is a key factor in cataract development, says Optometrists.org. Smokers have a 1.66 times greater risk of developing cataracts than non-smokers because the toxins in tobacco smoke can deplete the body's natural antioxidant stores.

Although it may not be possible to turn off aging and prevent cataracts entirely, cataracts can be delayed and made less impactful through lifestyle changes.

How seniors can remain physically and mentally

ACTIVE

Growing older is often equated with slowing down.

Aging may be characterized as a period of decline marked by an inability to do the things you once did, but recent data indicates otherwise.

According to a report in the journal *Geriatrics*, a far more optimistic reality awaits seniors. Nearly 45 percent of people age 65 and older show measurable improvements in brain health, physical function or both over time when they take certain steps to promote physical and mental wellness.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, supplemented by at least two days of muscle-strengthening exercises. Brisk walking or swimming can improve cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of stroke and hypertension, says the Massachusetts Council on Aging. Incorporating yoga or Tai Chi is vital for fall prevention, as it targets balance and flexibility. The CDC says improving joint mobility and balance can significantly extend the amount of time seniors can live independently. In addition, lifting light weights or using resistance bands helps combat age-related muscle loss, which is essential for maintaining metabolic health.

COGNITIVE ADVANTAGES

Mental fitness is just as vital to seniors as physical fitness. According to the World Health Organization, routine cognitive stimulation enhances “brain capital,” delaying the onset of dementia and Alzheimer’s. Strategies for effective mental engagement include:

- **Learning:** Lifelong learning techniques include picking up a new language or learning an instrument. This helps strengthen neural pathways that allows the brain to reorganize itself even in later decades.
- **Play games:** Play isn’t just for kids; games like chess or complex puzzles improve problem-solving and memory retention, according to Nixon Adult Daycare in Houston.
- **Socialize:** Isolation is a leading risk factor for cognitive decline, says the National Institutes of Health. Group activities like book clubs or community volunteering can offer emotional fulfillment and mental stimulation.

POWER OF POSITIVITY

Findings from a recent Yale University study indicated



Nearly 45 percent of people age 65 and older show measurable improvements in brain health, physical function or both over time when they take certain steps to promote physical and mental wellness.

seniors with a positive outlook on aging were significantly more likely to show physical and mental improvements compared to those with negative perspectives. Psychological resilience is an important tool for seniors to stay healthy.

Movement, social interaction, stimulating activities, and a positive attitude can help seniors maintain overall health.

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Safe ways seniors can lose **WEIGHT**

The prevalence of obesity among adults 60 and older is significant. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 39 percent of adults 60 and over met the criteria for obesity over a two-year period between August 2021 and August 2023.

The National Council on Aging notes the importance of maintaining a healthy weight as you age. Seniors who qualify as obese, which occurs when a person's body accumulates and stores excessive amounts of body fat, carry a higher risk of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. The NCOA also notes that excess body weight puts a strain on the joints, increasing the risk for osteoarthritis and making daily movements more difficult. People with obesity also are more likely to develop asthma and sleep apnea.

Seniors diagnosed with obesity are urged to seek safe and healthy ways to lose weight. Fad diets and other means to quick weight loss can be dangerous, but the NCOA notes simple lifestyle changes and healthy habits can help seniors safely lose weight.

- Consume nutrient-dense foods. Lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables offer plenty of vitamins, minerals and fiber but tend to be low in calories. That makes them ideal options for people looking to lose weight, as they contribute to feelings of fullness without consuming a lot of calories.

- Incorporate physical activity into your daily routine. Exercise can pose problems for older adults who qualify as obese. The joint issues that can affect older adults with obesity can make traditional exercise regimens that incorporate strength training and moderate to vigorous aerobic activity very difficult, and maybe even dangerous. But the NCOA notes that exercise need not be intense to be effective. Walking is a great physical activity for older adults. Swimming also is excellent, as it provides a full-body workout that's easy on the joints. Seniors are urged to speak with their physicians about physical activities they can handle.

- Don't sleep on sleep. Sleep can be an effective ally for seniors looking to lose weight. The NCOA notes that seven to nine hours of sleep per night helps support a healthy metabolism and regulate hunger. Seniors who have trouble falling asleep at night can try various strategies, from avoiding caffeine from the afternoon on to avoiding screens after dinner, to prepare their bodies to get better rest at night.

- Work to combat stress. The NCOA reports that stress is a contributor to weight gain. And stress and disorders linked to it are perhaps more common among adults 60 and over than people realize. In fact, according to the



Simple lifestyle changes and healthy habits can help seniors safely lose weight.

Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders, which are a notable source of ongoing stress, are the most widespread mental health condition among older adults. Sufficient sleep, meditation and deep breathing exercises can help seniors combat stress, and that in turn may help older adults avoid excess weight gain.

Obesity is a problem among older adults. Finding safe ways to lose weight can have a profound effect on seniors' short- and long-term health.

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SKIN CANCER

prevention for seniors

Wisdom and age frequently go hand in hand. But when it comes to knowledge of the latest medical advancements, some older adults may not be up-to-date.

Medical recommendations evolve over time. After all, it wasn't too long ago people were told to avoid foods containing high amounts of dietary cholesterol because it would raise their own blood cholesterol levels. Now MedlinePlus says the general consensus is that eating dietary cholesterol has a minimal impact on blood cholesterol for most people. And people in their 70s may have raised children thinking it was fine to lay the child in the crib on the baby's stomach. Now the advice is "back is best."

Medical professionals now know that exposure to ultraviolet rays of the sun and tanning beds can contribute to the development of skin cancer. But just a few generations ago people were slathering on baby oil and using suntan reflectors to accelerate tanning. The risk of skin cancer is raised for those who have had cumulative exposure to the sun. So it is essential that seniors practice sun safety every day so they are not adding to the damage that already may have occurred. It's also foolish to think, "I've made it this long without skin cancer, and it takes decades to develop, so I'm never going to get it."

No one knows how long they will live and it's important to take care of oneself to live as strong, healthy and long as possible. To that end, seniors can employ these sun safety tips, courtesy of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

- Learn the facts. Suffering just five sunburns over your lifetime more than doubles your chances of developing melanoma, and each successive tan or sunburn raises the risk even further. Suntans damage the skin's DNA and age it before its time. Also, skin undergoes changes that reduce defenses against disease and healing. One bad burn as a senior may be the final straw.

- Use sunscreen. Sunscreen may not have been widely used when today's seniors were young. Just because that was the norm then doesn't mean things can't change now. It's never too late to reduce your skin cancer risk by lathering on sunscreen daily — even when the sun doesn't seem particularly strong. Seniors should look for a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 for daily use.

- Wear protective clothing. Choose tightly woven, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and wide-brimmed hats to protect you. You can purchase clothing that has sun protection built right in.

- Avoid being outside during certain times of day. Stay



Seniors can employ these sun safety tips, courtesy of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

out of the sun when it is at its peak. Radiation is typically the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. That's when the risk for skin damage is highest, says the American Cancer Society.

- Seek shade. When spending time outdoors, seek shady spots, whether you're under an umbrella or in tree-lined areas.

Sun safety for seniors is generally the same for people of all ages. But it becomes a more urgent necessity due to cumulative sun exposure that comes with age.

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THE LEGACY CENTER
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The advertisement features a purple and teal color scheme. At the top left is a logo for 'THE LEGACY CENTER Resource Center' consisting of two overlapping hearts. Below the logo is a list of services. To the right of the list is a circular photo of a family: a man, a woman, and a young child. The woman is pregnant. The background of the ad has decorative dotted circles in teal and purple.

Surviving seasonal **ALLERGIES**

Rising temperatures and the reemergence of wildlife make spring a popular time of year. But the blooming flowers and blossoming trees of spring may not be a wonder to behold for seasonal allergy sufferers. Trees, flowers and grasses are ripe with pollen this time of year, which can produce a bevy of symptoms for people with seasonal allergies.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America says more than 106 million people in the United States have allergies and/or asthma. Coping with allergies often comes down to a multi-pronged approach that may involve medication and lifestyle changes.

The Mayo Clinic says that oral antihistamines (particularly non-drowsy, second-generation options) combined with nasal steroid sprays can reduce inflammation and congestion and alleviate sneezing, itchy noses and eyes. Decongestants can offer temporary relief of nasal congestion, while saline nasal sprays and rinses can help wash out pollen and mucus.

Individuals can modify their activities by avoiding the outdoors when allergens are very high. When coming



Trees, flowers and grasses are ripe with pollen in spring, which can produce a bevy of symptoms for people with seasonal allergies.

in from outdoors, remove clothing and launder it right away to keep allergens from transferring to furniture and bedding. When pollen counts are high, windows and doors should remain shut and HVAC systems should be run with a fresh filter to help mitigate any allergens already in the air. Allergy sufferers also can look into a HEPA room air filter to clear indoor air even more.

Should over-the-counter options and lifestyle changes prove ineffective, seek medical advice. This is especially true if allergies cause intense sinus pressure, difficulty breathing or wheezing. Long-term or prescription treatments like immunotherapy could be the next step to find relief.

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