



HOME > HEALTHY AGING > ACTIVE SENIORS LIVE (AND LOVE) TO WORK

HEALTHY AGING

Active Seniors Live (and Love) to Work

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Three active seniors scoff at the idea of slowing down after 60.

From cycling to weightlifting to literally climbing mountains, meet three seniors who have turned favorite pastimes into professions—and, in the process, been able to share their love for health and fitness with patients, travelers, bike enthusiasts and younger family members.

The Muscle

Shortly before he turned 60, [Jeffrey Life](#), physician and author of “The Life Plan,” “The Life Plan Diet” and “Mastering the Life Plan,” was told he had type 2 diabetes. He required regular medication, had high blood pressure and what Life calls



“a huge belly.” Rather than accept diabetes as part of aging, Life decided to try a new eating and exercise plan as part of a fitness contest.

After five months of resistance and strength training and a low-fat, low-glycemic diet, the family practice physician put on lean muscle mass, dropped a significant amount of body fat, sent in a photo and an essay—and won the competition.

After incorporating the principles into his medical practice, Life published a book about his transformation, “The Life Plan,” in 2011.

“Strength training makes all the difference in the world,” he says. “As people age, they lose muscle mass. The right kind of diet and resistance training prevents muscle loss and can actually increase mass.”

Now 76, Life has a bodybuilder’s physique, thanks to a low-fat, low-sugar diet, combined with cardio and resistance training four times a week. He’s also shared his dedication to healthy living with his family, including his 51-year-old son and grandchildren, ages 5 to 15, whom he encourages to be active.

His grandchildren were a somewhat easier sell than his children; one recently asked for an autographed copy of Life’s book for his ninth birthday.

“As for my kids—you know, I’m their dad,” Life says. “I had to write three books to get them to listen to me. But they listen to me.”

The Spokeswoman

After returning from a seven-week bike trip from San Diego, California, to St. Augustine, Florida, Pat Blackmon, then 60, knew she’d found the retirement project she’d been looking for.

Less than a year after completing the cross-country trip, Blackmon officially launched [Senior Cycling](#), which hosts about a dozen five- to 10-day trips a year around Washington, D.C, the Florida Keys and other locations.

“I gambled a lot of retirement money,” she says. “But it all worked out.”

Blackmon decided to only allow seniors on rides because she’s found many of the tours that attract young riders focus on daily distance. Logging the most miles “is not our goal,” she says. “The older riders tend to enjoy the ride and take their time; it’s a different mindset.”

Blackmon, now 76, has also shared her love for riding with a younger audience—her grandchildren, ages 11 and 14, during visits to Florida.

“I’ve had them on bikes since they were able to sit up straight on the back,” she says. “So they have a history of riding with me.”

Over the years, Blackmon has helped her grandchildren progress from training wheels to bike ownership—and the Virginia-based grandmother is proud of their cycling skills. “They are excellent about obeying traffic signals and signaling other drivers,” she says. “They’re really very good at being courteous on their bikes.”

The Rock Star

Stewart Green, 62, started rock climbing at age 12. By his 20s, he was supporting himself by working as a guide.

Over the years, Green has shown numerous new climbers how to scale Colorado peaks—including his two sons, now in their 30s. Green says both sons developed a “lifelong affinity for climbing” during their childhood just-for-fun family outings; one eventually earned a spot on the U.S. National Climbing Team.

“When you take kids climbing, there’s no pressure,” he says. “It’s just about seeing how high they can maybe climb, or climbing up small rocks.”

For the past decade, Green has utilized the same philosophy taking both youngsters and active seniors on local climbs as a senior guide at the [Front Range Climbing Company](#) in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Climbing can be a lifelong sport, Green says. When you’re older, the focus just changes from finding more challenging structures to having more fun—which can still be an invigorating experience, he says.

“Being afraid of heights and of falling are two basic human fears [that] keep us alive,” he says. “It’s a great thing to be able to open people’s eyes to some of the potential things they’re able to do, like rock climbing.”

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