

# A matter of balance: overcoming the fear of a fall

By Sophie Braccini



Lamorinda Village volunteers and members.

Starting Jan. 12, Lamorinda Village is offering the senior community an innovative eight-week fall prevention program: “A Matter of Balance.” What makes this program different is that it addresses the fear of falling and aims at changing the perceptions as well as the material elements and empowers seniors to live a safer and more active life.

Anne Ornelas, the executive director of the Village, first heard of the program through Meals on Wheels’ fall prevention program. She says that she was interested to see an approach that would combine overcoming feelings of negative helplessness, the fear of falling, with material strategy and physical exercises. Lamorinda Village volunteer Cynthia Robey was trained in the program and will start the first Lamorinda session along with Skip Bradish, another volunteer.

Robey, a Lafayette resident and long-term Village volunteer, was convinced that an approach simply focusing on balance was not enough and that this program fits the bill. She was trained by master trainer Alayne Balke, program manager for fall prevention at Contra Costa Meals on Wheels. Robey says that fall prevention has been an important concern for her; she believes that her father died as a result of a fall at age 92. She explains that she was enthused by the fact that the program uses a cognitive behavioral approach to retrain the

brain. “If you think that you are going to fall, then it will happen,” she says. Ornelas adds that the program is effective because it helps retrain the brain, helping seniors become more in control of their health and physical activity.

Balke, who became a trainers’ trainer in Maine, says that “A Matter of Balance” is a nationally recognized program that has been evaluated for its efficacy at preventing falls. It was born from combined efforts of Maine’s therapists in the ‘90s and taken over by that state’s association for healthy aging in 2003. It includes a detailed eight-lesson plan that participants follow. She adds that the group training is restricted to 12 to 15 participants, because one of the important elements is the connection and support that form during the two-month program.

Fighting the fear of falling and taking charge of preventing fear is done through the sharing of stories and strategies in the home and around town, and also includes physical exercises. Robey notes that the physical activity presented is not just for the legs, but addresses the whole body.

The first session in Contra Costa County were led in Rossmoor and Pleasant Hill. The eight weeks starting in January will be the first in Lamorinda. Ornelas says that hundreds of trainings have been conducted all over the

country and that 97 percent of participants reduced their fear of falling after the training and felt comfortable increasing their activity.

The program is offered to the entire community, not just Lamorinda Village members. Ornelas adds that the organization charges \$15 for the eight weeks to cover the cost of refreshments. Lafayette Orinda Presbyterian Church, 49 Knox Dr. in Lafayette has offered the location, and Meals on Wheels provides the manuals. The participants should be available for eight consecutive Fridays, from 10 to 12 a.m. starting on Jan. 12.

Lamorinda Village is a local nonprofit that actively builds a community that embraces connections, caring, and choices in how seniors live and thrive. Registration for the training can be done on the Village’s website at lamorindavillage.com.

Photo Lily Dong Photography



# Window opens for local filmmakers to compete in Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest

Submitted by Christy Mack



Award-winning local documentary filmmaker Reka Pigniczky will serve on the Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest production committee this year. Photo provided

Lamorinda Arts Council will host its 3rd Annual ShortDocs Film Fest at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center at 3 p.m. Feb. 11. This documentary film festival provides local filmmakers an opportunity to create new work as well as showcase it at a community screening.

Entries for the Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest will be accepted from now until Jan. 14. The competition is open to anyone 5 years of age or older who

is living, working or attending school in Orinda, Lafayette or Moraga. Film submissions will be judged in one of four categories: elementary school, middle school, high school, and adult. One student-made film will also be selected as an Audience Favorite.

Previous Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest judges – filmmaker Julie Rubio (“East Side Sushi,” “Too Perfect”) and TV Producer Joel Patterson (“Pawn Stars,” “The Unknown Flag Raiser of Iwo Jima”) – will be joined by other judges new to the 2018 festival. Award-winning local documentary filmmaker Reka Pigniczky will also serve on the Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest production committee this year. Pigniczky was the winner in the adult category of the 2017 festival and her son, Lukacs Gero, won the elementary school category.

Pigniczky looks forward to working on the 2018 festival with the hope of providing guid-

ance to more novice filmmakers. “In the 21st century, you really have a powerful tool if you can tell a visual story, and I’m looking forward to coaching some of the more novice filmmakers who need that support to take an idea and turn it into a watchable film,” Pigniczky said.

The Feb. 11 community screening will feature selected films and accompanying award presentations. To learn more about the Lamorinda ShortDocs Film Fest competition and to enter go to <http://www.lamorindaarts.org/shortdocs>.



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