

Danville Today News

February 2016

Serving Danville

The Crayon Initiative: As Innovative as Child's

Play By Jody Morgan

What's cooking in the Ware family's Danville kitchen? Fuel for the imagination generated by a recipe that keeps a non-biodegradable product out of the landfill. Bryan Ware, Founder and President of The Crayon Initiative (TCI), leads his team in remaking unwanted crayons into new 8-color boxes specially designed for pediatric hospital patients across the nation. From collection to distribution, TCI makes a complex process proceed as innovatively as child's play.

In 2011, while celebrating his 40th birthday at a family-friendly establishment, Ware wondered what would happen to the crayons the restaurant had given his two young sons if they didn't take them home. Restaurants, he discovered, fearing contamination and being risk averse, dump even unopened boxes of crayons from patrons' tables into the trash. Five hundred thousand pounds of crayons reach landfills every year. Made of a combination of petroleum-based paraffin wax and pigment, crayons don't biodegrade in a decade or even a century.



Crayon sorting is fun for all ages. The next Danville sorting date is March 12. Photo courtesy of TCI.

Ware wanted to rework that intolerable waste into a valuable resource. "Being a supply chain guy," Ware explains, "I knew there had to be something we could do with the endless supply of crayons. I knew it was going to be big, and now we've proven that crayon recycling is making a difference in children's lives. This isn't a small operation anymore. We are on track to donate 100,000 packs of crayons to hospitalized children across the country this year. This is just the beginning."

What began as a moment of inspiration took two years to turn into a viable operation. After incorporating in May 2013, TCI finally achieved non-profit 501 (C) (3) status in January 2014. Along the way, many problems had to be solved.

How do you turn big batches of wax into crayons in a home kitchen? How do you remove the paper? How do you manufacture a product that's what pediatric hospitals want? Step by step, Ware answered each question.

Manual scraping and solvents don't work, but crayon wrappers can be easily removed from the melting pot with tongs. Any residue is strained out when the wax is poured into molds. Now TCI is working on turning that waxed paper by-product into useful commodities such as fire-starters or synthetic logs.

Extensive testing proved the melting process kills germs. A physical therapist helped design a mold, shaping 96 crayons per batch into a chunky, easy-to-grip triangular shape that doesn't roll off hospital trays. Ware tested various shipping methods and found an inexpensive way for collection points to ship crayons to TCI.

Each of the custom-made molds produces enough crayons to supply 40,000 pediatric

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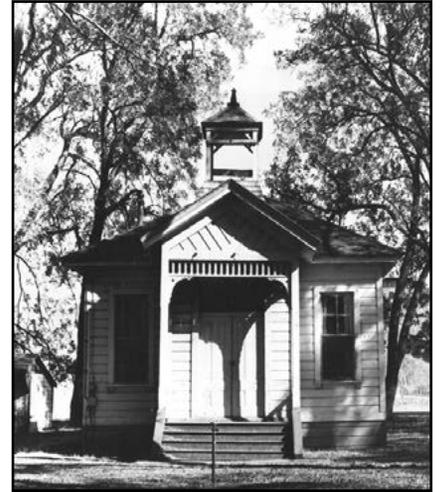
Historic Icons of the San Ramon Valley

By Beverly Lane

Calling buildings "icons" may be a stretch, but in the case of five buildings in the Museum's new Historic Icons of the Valley exhibit, the word fits. Featured this month are the Tassajara Grammar School, Southern Pacific Depot, and Diablo Country Club's Red Horse Tavern.

Tassajara Grammar School

The Tassajara Grammar School at 1650 Finley Road was the second school in that community, and what a beauty it still is. There were six grammar school



Tassajara Grammar School

districts in the greater San Ramon Valley, and only this 1889 school house from any district remains. Today it is owned by the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and hosts a popular living history program for third graders from the San Ramon Valley's School District.

It schooled Tassajara students for over 50 years, drawing many Portuguese and Danish children to learn their basic education. For most, it was all the schooling they received. It closed in 1946 with the remaining students traveling by bus to the modern Danville Elementary School. For decades it was used for meetings, as a polling place, and for annual community picnics.

The Tassajara community, led by Rasmussens and Reinsteins, helped save the school house in the 1960s and 1970s by putting down a foundation and constructing a new roof. Other improvements were made by the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District (an owner for years), Shapell Homes, and the Museum. Picnic tables surround the school, and ancient walnut trees (many planted by the children) grace the property.

Danville Depot

In 1891 Southern Pacific built four of their "decorative" two-story combination depots along the San Ramon Branch Line. Only the Danville depot remains as a restored building which is now the Museum of the San Ramon Valley. The Concord and San Ramon depots



Danville Depot

are gone, and the Walnut Creek depot is a restaurant on Broadway near the Iron Horse Trail.

The current exhibit will focus on the period when the depot was owned by Joe Ramos Sr. and Jr. They purchased it from Helen Benn as

See **Icons** continued on page 21

Grad Night: Plea to "Pay It Forward"

By Lisa Olson, SRV Grad Night

Since 1978, San Ramon Valley High School (SRVHS) senior parents have put on a Grad Night celebration for their graduates. Every year, these parents rely on someone in the community to donate storage/workspace to design and build for Grad Night. Over the years, this has become increasingly difficult with the real estate market volatility. Further, SRVHS will be undergoing massive campus renovations next year, and in preparation, the

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Is Your Living Trust a Bomb Ticking Silently?

By Robert J. Silverman, Attorney at Law

You may recognize the title of this month's piece. I used it in my July 2014 article. I'm writing about the topic again because it is so important.

Major new Federal Estate Tax legislation was enacted in January 2013. As I warned previously, these newer rules may have transformed your existing living trust into a bomb ticking silently.

This article focuses on married couples who have a type of living trust that was very commonly drafted for decades - generally referred to as a formula "A-B" or "A-B-C" trust.

The bad news: Your A-B trust bomb is set to explode when the first spouse dies. During the last three years, I have had to explain to too many widows and widowers why their trust exploded and how I needed to help clean up the damage.

The good news: It's fairly easy for you to avoid the explosion and thus the damage, but you must change your A-B trust (assuming it is advisable upon advice from legal counsel) **before the first spouse dies.**

Prior to January, 2013: A-B trusts have been extremely popular for many years and for good reason. This structure enabled married couples to legally eliminate or minimize Federal Estate Tax liability (with a top tax rate of 55% during much of the last few decades) that would otherwise be imposed upon the death of the surviving spouse - assuming he or she died with more than a certain threshold amount of net assets. This threshold - the amount exempt from Federal Estate Tax liability ("exemption") - has varied greatly over the years, but was as low as \$600,000 through much of the 1990's. Accordingly, many couples had estates that were vulnerable to this "death" tax.

A-B trusts were designed primarily to mitigate Federal Estate Tax. By segregating the assets into two separate (A & B) sub-trusts after the death of the first spouse, the couple could use two Federal Estate Tax exemptions - one applicable to the deceased spouse's assets and one applicable to the surviving spouse's assets.

Alternatively, with a "one pot" trust, in which all of the assets of the first spouse to die and the assets of the surviving spouse remain in one pot, only one exemption (that of the surviving spouse) is available; the exemption of the first spouse to die is lost. So, unless a couple had an A-B trust, the children and/or other loved ones were potentially exposed to tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in unnecessary Federal Estate Tax liability.

After December, 2012: The new law passed in January, 2013 was a "game changer." The exemption is now \$5.45 million, indexed annually for inflation. More importantly, a new feature called "portability" enables married couples to use two full exemptions without splitting the assets into two separate pots (A-B) after the first spouse dies. Consequently, **a huge number of married couples no longer need an A-B Trust for Federal Estate Tax reasons!**

Nevertheless, you might ask: what is this bomb that's ticking? What harm is there in just keeping your old A-B trust? Unfortunately, there are substantial, yet not commonly understood, disadvantages of an A-B trust, including these primary ones: a) they are more expensive and inconvenient to administer after the first spouse dies; b) an attorney is generally needed to help the surviving spouse allocate and transfer assets into the respective sub-trusts; c) separate accounts must be maintained for each sub-trust; d) a separate tax return must be prepared and filed for the 'B' Trust *every year of the surviving spouse's life*; and e) the future sale of certain assets in the 'B' sub-trust (that appreciate after the first spouse dies) may trigger income tax that would not have been payable if the assets had been kept in a one pot trust.

NOTE: Some non-tax reasons may still warrant a two pot trust, particularly for many blended families; however, current strategies other than an A-B trust are often more advantageous. In any event, the newer Federal Estate Tax rules provide a golden opportunity for married couples to seek counsel from an experienced estate planning attorney about the pros and cons of keeping or revising their existing trust structure.

I offer a complimentary Estate Planning Primer and/or a free, introductory meeting.

Mr. Silverman is an attorney with R. Silverman Law Group specializing in estate planning, trust administration and probate, real estate, and business taxes. They are located at 1855 Olympic Blvd., Suite 125, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; (925) 705-4474; rsilverman@rsilvermanlaw.com.

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Crayon *continued from front page*

patients a year. A fundraising campaign to purchase additional molds costing \$10,000 apiece (plus another \$1,500 for accessory apparatus) is currently underway. Moving the manufacturing operation to a space able to accommodate a large induction range for melting wax is another goal.

Ware notes, "Early on, we asked hospitals, 'Do you have a need for these crayons?' Now hospitals who are part of the Children's Hospital Association ask us, 'When can we get more crayons?'"

Kellye Carroll, Director, Chase Child Life Program Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA, writes of her initial contact with TCI: "I have to be honest and say I literally rolled my eyes at my computer when I read the email because I was so skeptical of anyone figuring out how to recycle crayons - without infection control being an issue - AND seriously being able to produce enough that it would make a difference." She is happy to report that not only does TCI keep the crayons coming, but they also deliver as needed, minimizing the significant storage problem posed by other donated art supplies.

The design of the crayons is ideal. Carroll says, "The fact that these don't roll is fantastic. The kids don't lose them in the bedsheets and - a huge infection control piece - they don't hit the floor! Many of our kids have limited mobility, and to try to find a crayon that's rolled off the table when you're alone in your room can be really frustrating." Kellye has tested TCI crayons with her own children and found that whether in the car, on vacation or at home, they don't break. **See Crayon cont.on pg. 23**



Sorted by color, crayons are melted over induction burners. Testing has proven the process kills germs. Photo courtesy of TCI.



Four Financial Planning Tips for Divorcing in 2016

By Robert Cucchiaro, Certified Financial Planner

For a variety of reasons, studies have shown that January sees more divorce filings than any other month¹. If you are planning to divorce in 2016, here are the four things you can do to make the process go more smoothly and save yourself some money.

1. Gather Year-End Financial Documents –

Now is the time when all of the year-end financial statements from your various investment accounts, retirement plans, pensions, and life insurance policies should be arriving. Scan these or leave a copy with a friend or trusted advisor. Email us if you want a copy of our financial checklist document so you'll know what to look out for in the mail.

2. Get a Credit Report – While this may not be something you paid a lot of attention to in the past, having a good credit report will become necessary the minute you start applying for loans/leases, etc. in just your name. Cleaning up an erroneous credit report or even improving your credit score can take time so start the process now.

3. Build your Team – In order to maximize the odds of a successful divorce (from a financial perspective) you will need the following members on your team:

- A divorce attorney
- A financial advisor
- A CPA

This team will work together on your behalf to assess your current financial situation, analyze your options, and negotiate a preferential agreement that will serve you for the rest of your life. Now is not the time to “wing it” or settle for a team full of B players. You need A+ players on the team so you can win!

4. Expect the Unexpected – Every client I have ever worked with that was going through a divorce was surprised at how long the process took, how much the legal fees were, and how many surprises came up. I've seen cases where a spouse planned ahead for years for an impending divorce and did everything from hiding assets to artificially making his business look unprofitable, all with the goal of giving his ex-wife as little as possible in the divorce settlement. Fortunately for her, she had a team of A+ players on her side, and we helped her negotiate a settlement that will allow her to maintain her current lifestyle for the rest of her life.

If a divorce is on the horizon in 2016, start the process today by sending us an email or giving us a call. We can act as your financial quarterback and recommend divorce attorneys and CPAs for you to interview as well.

¹<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/divorce-filings-jump-by-one-third-in-january-2015-01-05>

Robert Cucchiaro is a Certified Financial Planner and a registered tax preparer. He is a Partner and owner of Summit Wealth & Retirement, a financial planning firm that has been serving business owners in Danville for almost 30 years. Rob specializes in retirement, investment, tax, and estate planning. To learn more or read more articles like this one, visit www.summitwealthandretirement.com.

Advertorial



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The shape also naturally encourages a correct pencil grip rather than a fist grip. “Many of our patients have never been to school, so the simple art of holding a writing instrument is not something they’ve been exposed to.”

The TCI 8-color box includes pink. Carroll quotes her favorite comment from an ED specialist: “With these colors a kid can make a whole superhero or a whole princess.” Describing the therapeutic value of art, Carroll remarks, “And there’s something magical about a new box of crayons – it inspires you to create. Many of our kids will express fears and concerns through their art - which they won’t do verbally.”

Crayons are an important way to balance a child’s hospital stay with a normal activity that reduces anxiety and relieves stress. Ware relates, “A huge percentage of kids – maybe even 98% - take their crayons home when they leave the hospital. Their eyes light up when they are told they can keep their crayons. It is one positive memory from their stay.”

Convincing restaurants to donate their unwanted crayons required understanding how to streamline the collection operation. “When we first approached a few local restaurants,” Ware admits, “we gave them a small collection box and they asked, ‘What do we do with this?’ Now restaurants from all over the country are contacting us for our collection displays so they can become a part of The Crayon Initiative.”

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Sunscreen in Winter?

By Dr. Jerome Potozkin

It might sound like a strange question. I often ask my patients if they are using sunscreen every day. Most people only think of putting sunscreen on when they are “going out in the sun.” For most of us, we are exposed to the sun’s rays on a daily basis. We tend to underestimate how much sun exposure we actually get. However, we are exposed when we are walking to our car or when we are out running errands. The exposure to the sun is cumulative and can result in increasing your risk of skin cancer as well as premature ageing of the skin. I recommend incorporating the application of sunscreen into one’s daily routine. I apply a broad spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen after I shave. Since I shave everyday it is automatically part of my routine, and I don’t even have to think about it.

There are many sunscreen products available. I suggest you find a broad spectrum sunscreen that you like and will use everyday and which blocks out both UVA and UVB rays. For everyday use I recommend using an SPF of 30 and up. If you are going to be on a boat or exposed for extended periods of time, I recommend an SPF of 50 and up. Some people prefer chemical free sunscreens. The term is somewhat inaccurate as these products can contain chemicals, but the active ingredient is not considered a chemical. The active ingredients in these “chemical free sunscreens” are usually zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. As long as you’re using a broad spectrum sunscreen, I think it is personal preference. Don’t worry about getting enough Vitamin D as you can always take a daily supplement.

This year El Niño has blessed the Tahoe ski resorts with some of the best snow in years. When I’m skiing do you think I use sunscreen? You betcha! You might not think you’re getting much sun exposure when you are in the mountains, but you would be very wrong. At higher altitudes there is less filtering of ultraviolet light. The sun also serves as a giant reflector directing the ultraviolet light so you get almost double the dose. Because of these factors, it is important to protect your skin.

Many of our patients benefit from a customized skin care regimen year round. The foundation of this is sun protection with a broad spectrum sunscreen. We also recommend topical anti-oxidants such as Vitamin C. Lastly, we recommend a topical retinoid. Call us today so that we can design a customized regimen that fits your needs.

Dr. Potozkin is a board certified dermatologist who has been serving the local community since 1993. His fully accredited dermatological and laser facility is located at 600 San Ramon Valley Blvd, Suite 102 in Danville. Dr. Potozkin is a fellow member of the ASDS. He is accepting new patients. Please call (925) 838-4900 or visit Potozkin.com for more information.

Advertorial

Based in Colorado, with locations in California and Arizona (and soon Texas), Snooze Eatery A.M., serving breakfast and lunch, has been contributing crayons to TCI since March 2015. As of December, they had recycled 1,400 pounds of crayons, producing about 8,375 TCI boxes. Sustainability Coordinator Megan

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The Eye Opener By Gregory Kraskowsky, O.D., Alamo Optometry

Ocular Aura and Ocular Migraines

Many patients have experienced an ocular migraine in which you typically see a wide range of visual phenomena that is often followed by an actual headache. There are some different terms for this condition including aura, ocular migraine, ocular aura, and retinal migraines. Even though they have slightly different meanings, I will lump them into one for the purposes of this article. Initially, these can be very scary as patients are concerned that they are losing their vision and/or possibly having a stroke. Thankfully, neither will happen just from having an ocular migraine; however, depending on the exact symptoms, some eye and health conditions need to be ruled out.

An ocular migraine has the same origin as typical migraine; it is caused by a blood vessel disturbance. There is an initial blood vessel constriction followed by a vessel dilation (widening). This can be caused by many things such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and physical exertion. However, it is very common that these “just happen.” It usually occurs without any triggers and happens when people are at work, watching TV, or driving. The visual aura that people usually see is similar but can be variable, and it can affect one or both eyes. Most patients report seeing bright or shimmering lights, zigzag lines, cloudy vision, tunnel vision, or that it is like looking through a kaleidoscope. Even though there is a wide range of visual imagery that people see, having a portion or all of your vision go black is not typical. This could still be a visual migraine, but a full medical workup is necessary as this can be a result of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or high cholesterol.

During the visual disturbance your central vision usually isn't compromised, but it could be a little blurry. These visual disturbances last anywhere from a few minutes to about 30 minutes. If there is continued decreased vision, floaters, flashes of light, red eyes, etc., then an ocular migraine is not the diagnosis. The symptoms go away as quickly as they came with no prolonged visual changes and have no lasting visual or ocular consequences. These are commonly followed by an actual migraine about one hour after the aura starts. It is possible to not get the headache, but it is more likely that a migraine follows the aura. Initially these can be very scary, and patients usually call the office to schedule a visit. This is advisable as there could be other causes and other conditions that need to be addressed depending on the symptoms, age, and medical history of the patient.

Unfortunately, there is no treatment for ocular migraines. However, I always recommend for patients to take their normal headache medications at the onset of the visual disturbances, since it is common to get an actual migraine about an hour after the onset of the visual aura. These headaches are usually severe and could last several hours. Taking Tylenol, Excedrin, etc. for the headache will not prevent it from coming, but it will blunt the severity. In addition, caffeine can help shorten the duration; drinking soda, tea, or coffee can also have some benefit in lessening the severity and length of an ocular migraine.

It is more common for normal migraine sufferers, women, and patients with diabetes, high blood pressure, and auto-immune diseases to get ocular migraines. There are no strong medical studies explaining the etiology of this condition. Even though there is no treatment, it is important to make sure that there is no medical reason for the ocular disturbances. The aura can easily be mistaken for symptoms of a retinal hole or detachment, stroke, or other neurological issues. Granted these conditions are pretty rare, but they do happen. An office visit to go over your personal medical history, exact symptoms, and an eye evaluation will help differentiate an ocular migraine from other potentially sight-threatening conditions.

Dr. K. at Alamo Optometry is your hometown eye doctor for outstanding service, vision care, and designer eyewear. He can be reached at (925) 820-6622 or visit his office at 3201 Danville Blvd., Suite 165 in Alamo. Visit our website at www.alamooptometry.com, and join us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @Alamo Optometry.

Advertorial



A New Way of Managing BPH

By Wei Zheng, MD

Benign enlargement of prostate (BPH) is one of the most common diseases that affects American men. It has been estimated that 70% of all men have enlarged prostate by the age of 60. By age of 80, 90% of men are affected. In other words, every man will have BPH if he lives long enough!

Symptoms of BPH can be divided into two categories: obstructive and irritative voiding symptoms. Obstructive urinary symptoms consist of difficulty in initiating the urinary stream, intermittent and slow stream, and post void dribbling. Irritative voiding symptoms include sensation of not being able to empty, urinary frequency, urgency, urgent incontinence, burning upon urination, and urge to get up at night to urinate.

There are many treatment options for BPH. When the symptoms are mild, watchful waiting is often recommended. When the symptoms become moderate or severe, they can be treated with medication, minimally invasive office procedures, or surgeries.

There is a new procedure called UroLift System which was approved by the FDA within the last year. The UroLift System is a minimally invasive procedure to treat BPH. It consists of a delivery device and tiny permanent implants which, once deployed in the prostatic urethra, can lift and hold the enlarged prostate tissue out of the way, alleviating compression on the urethra. No cutting, heating, or ablating tissue is involved in the UroLift procedure, making it a unique treatment that does not remove prostate tissue and does not negatively impact a man's sexual function.

The UroLift is done in an office setting under local anesthesia. It takes 20-30 minutes to perform. Patients can expect symptoms to improve within the first week and continue improving up to three months. Patients may have some mild pelvic discomfort, small amount of blood in the urine, and mild urgency and burning upon urination after the procedure. Patients can return to pre-procedural activity level within a week.

UroLift System has been evaluated and used extensively in Europe, Australia, and Canada within the last 5-6 years. It has been proven as an effective way of managing BPH. It is an excellent option for patients with

BPH looking for an alternative to drug therapy or more invasive surgery.

Dr. Zheng is a board certified urologist with Pacific Urology and sees patients at offices in Concord, Walnut Creek, and Brentwood. For more information, call (925) 937-7740 or visit www.pacific-urology.com.

Advertorial

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Jorgenson concedes that prior to connecting with TCI, Snooze (although devoted to “composting, recycling, and using our resources responsibly”) simply trashed crayons. Programs Snooze tried previously to initiate proved impractical.

Jorgenson happily writes about the TCI experience, “Now that we can save all crayons, regardless of whether they ended up in a pile of maple syrup or a



Designed with the help of a physical therapist, TCI crayons don't roll off a hospital tray and don't break, making it easy for pediatric patients with limited mobility to exercise their creativity. Photo courtesy of TCI.

mug of hot chocolate, our recycling program is even stronger.” TCI has made the collection process simple. Megan is certain her personal pride in participating is shared by her co-workers. “The seemingly minimal shipping cost to our program

See **Crayon** continued on page 25



A Little Known Secret

By Jewel Johl, MD

It is hard to describe the physical and emotional stress people feel when dealing with cancer. Whether it is a patient, spouse, family member or friend, everyone can benefit from psychosocial support, but not all have the resources to pay for this valuable service. I would like to tell you about an invaluable resource called Cancer Support Community.

For over 10 years, my colleagues and I have referred our patients to Cancer Support Community in Walnut Creek. They provide comprehensive integrative care for people with cancer, their families, and caregivers. Their services are provided free of charge and include counseling, support groups, nutrition, and exercise and patient education programs. Through their programs, they enable cancer patients to achieve the highest possible quality of life.

All of their programs and services are evidence-based to positively impact cancer treatment outcomes and/or immune system functioning, and they are all delivered by professionals who are licensed or certified in their area of expertise. Their main center is in Walnut Creek. They also provide services in local medical centers and in several other community locations throughout the Bay Area.

They are the only organization of their kind in Northern California. While an affiliate of the international Cancer Support Community organization, they are structured to be an independent nonprofit corporation, so all of the funds they raise are used to underwrite programs and services in our local community.

The late Ted Kennedy stated, "As a cancer survivor, I understand the emotional and social impact of this disease. So does Cancer Support Community. The organization's work is critical as it helps optimize patient care by providing essential but often overlooked services that complete the cancer care plan."

Together we can help make sure that everyone impacted by cancer knows this resource is available to them at no charge. Please share this article with someone you know whose life has been affected by cancer.

Dr. Johl serves on the Board of Directors of Cancer Support Community in Walnut Creek. He is a Board Certified Medical Oncologist and Hematologist with Diablo Valley Oncology & Hematology Medical Group. His practice has offices in Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Brentwood and San Ramon and can be reached at (925) 677-5041. The Cancer Support Community can be reached at (925) 933-0107 or www.cancersupport.net.

Advertorial

Crayon continued from page 24

to keep these crayons out of the landfills and recycle them into new crayons for kids is worth every penny!" Darden Restaurants have recently joined the TCI family with LongHorn Steakhouse and Olive Garden sites featuring collection displays. Look for collection boxes in your favorite local family-oriented dining spots. Thank them for their participation or tell them about the program.

Sorting crayons is fun for families, scouts, youth groups, and neighbors. Corporations are also getting in on the action. The largest volunteer group TCI has handled to date had 375 participants. Sign up for the next Danville sorting day on March 12 at www.classy.org/TCIMarchSortDay.

For schools, TCI has created a detailed program guide integrating participation in crayon recycling with core curriculum at every grade level from Pre-K/Daycare – High School. Materials include a video, suggested activities, and books to read. As the introduction explains: "The Crayon Initiative believes that in order to grow and learn, children need to have the freedom to be creative and express themselves through art."

Although nobody knows what 19th century inventor created the first crayon, crayons have been an essential part of Early Childhood Education since the beginning of the 20th century. In 1903, Binney & Smith of Easton, PA answered teachers' requests for affordable art materials by releasing their original Crayola 8-color box priced at a nickel. Today Crayola alone makes three billion crayons annually.

A new board member, Carroll proudly states: "TCI is ultimately committed to promoting creative arts in hospitals – something that is so desperately needed and so underfunded."

Learn more including how to support TCI at www.thecrayoninitiative.org.



Healthy Outlook

Weight Loss Surgery an Option When Diet and Exercise Fail

By Irene Lo, MD, West Coast Surgical Associates

We all know that the ideal way to maintain a healthy body is through exercise and a sensible diet. But what if you can't lose weight? Sometimes it is more than a matter of willpower.

Obesity is common in the United States, and many struggle to lose weight for a variety of reasons, including physical limitations. As a result, they face a greater chance of life-shortening medical problems, such as diabetes or heart disease.

For people in danger because of their size, weight related medical problems, or inability to keep off weight by following other treatment plans, bariatric (weight loss) surgery may help.

Bariatric surgery is not a cosmetic procedure or a weight-loss scheme from a commercial. It involves altering the stomach or gastrointestinal tract, resulting in life changes that are not always easy.

There are several bariatric procedures, but all of them either restrict the amount of food the stomach can hold, or reduce the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food, or do both.

This kind of procedure is for patients who are very obese, in the medical sense. Doctors calculate obesity with the body mass index (BMI), which is a measurement of body fat based on height and weight.

People with high BMI scores are at higher risk for a number of medical conditions, such as diabetes, reflux, heart disease, cancer, arthritis and depression. People with a BMI score higher than 40, or 35 or higher with an obesity-related condition, may be good candidates for surgery.

Most patients lose weight quickly, maintain healthy body weight and feel comfortable with their new lifestyles, if they follow their plans. I have even had patients who stopped needing medication for obesity-related conditions, such as high blood pressure.

There are several bariatric procedures to consider, each with advantages. All of them are laparoscopic, meaning the surgeon uses special instruments that only need a tiny cut to see and work inside the body which results in fewer side effects and a shorter recovery time.

Gastric bypass surgery creates a small pouch in the stomach that restricts how much food can be eaten, and reattaches the small intestine so food passes without being broken down and absorbed.

A sleeve gastrectomy turns the stomach into a slender tube that limits the amount of food one can eat. Gastric banding, meanwhile, places an adjustable, inflatable band around the stomach to limit food consumption.

If you are thinking about bariatric surgery, talk to your healthcare provider about your options. Bariatric surgery is not easy, but it is an effective way to lose weight.

Dr. Irene Lo (far right) the author, Dr. Diane Kwan (center), and Dr. Aileen Murphy (left) are general and bariatric surgeons who comprise the 680Bariatrics team to promote weight loss and a healthy lifestyle -- part of West Coast Surgical Associates (formerly Walnut Creek Surgical Associates) with offices in Walnut Creek, Concord, and San Ramon and can be reached at 925-933-0984, or viewed at www.wcsurgeons.com or www.680Bariatrics.com.

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