

The Capital Opinion

AWARDED THE PULITZER PRIZE'S SPECIAL CITATION 2019

In Annapolis, water safety is always a top concern



Roslyn Johnson

May is National Water Safety Month. Throughout the month, a variety of organizations (the American Red Cross and the National Recreation and Park Association, among others) focus their efforts on raising awareness about water safety and highlighting the importance of public education.

In Annapolis, we have a special obligation to our residents to focus on water safety. With nearly two dozen miles of shoreline, there isn't a child in this city who can't easily get to the water.

The bad news is that drowning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is one of the three leading causes of "unintentional-injury death" among people under the age of 29. The worse news is that disparities in drowning death rates between Black and Hispanic youth and white youth increased in the most recent years that data was reported, 2005-2019 (CDC).

The good news is that drowning is

preventable.

Water Safety Month places an emphasis on "drownproofing," through layers of protection that include: 1) preventing unsupervised access to the water; 2) providing constant attention to children in or near the water; and 3) keeping an eye out for water dangers around the home and in the community (including boats, splash pools, spas, bathtubs, and buckets). Because Annapolis is special, we at Annapolis Recreation and Parks want to go further and help teach a lifesaving skill that will last a lifetime — swimming! No matter how old you are, it's never too late to learn.

The Annapolis Recreation and Parks Department can help families with prevention strategies, including ensuring children have the opportunity to be exposed to the water early, and providing lessons so that they have strategies to avoid danger and are prepared if the unexpected happens. Avoiding a panicked response is the goal.

The Kenneth R. Dunn Municipal Pool at Truxtun Park offers beginner swim

lessons to learn basic water adjustment skills, including front and back floating, blowing bubbles, and how to get in and climb out of a pool. The pool also offers classes for teens and adults.

As we move forward in seeking accreditation for the Annapolis Department of Recreation and Parks, delivering this kind of quality programming for residents is a key goal. Our plan to activate the pool and use it as an asset to improve water safety in our community is one important step in this process.

The pool will open on Memorial Day weekend, and space is available to sign up for swimming lessons for beginner, intermediate or advanced levels. We have more than 36 options to choose from. In addition, the Truxtun Park Penguins Swim Team has agreed on arrangements for the 2023 season. The team will swim Monday through Thursday evenings and share the pool; three lanes for the public and three lanes for the swim team until 7 p.m., when the pool will close. The Penguins will be permitted exclusive use of the pool for an hour or so after that.

Ahead of the boating season, recreation and parks recently held the eight-hour Maryland Safe Boating Course at the "Pip" Moyer Recreation Center. This was a great parent-child opportunity to learn the "rules of the road" on the water. Remember, even if you are a good swimmer, all vessels are required to have a wearable life jacket for each passenger onboard, and children under 13 years of age must wear the life jacket.

If you want a superb additional layer of preparation, consider taking a CPR class, including "Your Life Matters" presented by the Annapolis Fire Department. I thank my colleague Fire Chief Doug Remaley for encouraging our residents to learn CPR by providing this training.

Regardless of these protections, remember to always actively supervise your children in and around water. Have a great summer of swimming and we hope to see you at the pool or out on the water.

Roslyn Johnson is the director of the Annapolis Department of Recreation and Parks.

Power and pull of human connection



Heidi Stevens
Balancing Act

I've spent the last few weeks, maybe like a lot of you, scrolling through happy Facebook photos from friends and acquaintances: Final school plays. Graduations. Proms. College decisions.

Here, the posts say, in so many words, is my love and labor and unfathomable luck and endless worry and whole heart. Dressed in a gown. Walking across a stage. Finishing something she started. Starting something he'll adore. (We hope.) It's such a beautiful leap of faith.

As consistently as we humans betray each other, disappoint each other, break each other, fail each other, we still feel pulled to share what's precious with each other. To connect our lives to each other's.

That beautiful leap was on my mind recently when I drove to a service at the Lake Shore Unitarian Society in Winnetka, Illinois, a half-hour north of my home. The group invited me to speak about the power of storytelling, and I was eager to share some of the ways that collecting and telling stories in this job has shaped my understanding of the world.

"Stories simplify the complicated," lay leader Nancy Prial told the congregation. "And they also complicate the simple."

I love that. I remember when COVID-19 first arrived, I had such a strong desire to talk to people who had lived through times of great difficulty.

We were suddenly, for safety, being encouraged to do life in isolation. Those connections that sustain us could also, suddenly, endanger us.

I was craving perspective and hope, probably. Wisdom. Something to simplify the complicated and complicate the simple.

I ended up interviewing a woman named Wanda



As consistently as we humans betray each other, disappoint each other, break each other, fail each other, we still feel pulled to share what's precious with each other — to connect our lives to each other's, writes Heidi Stevens. **DREAMSTIME**

Bridgeforth, who was 98 at the time. She had lived through polio, the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement. She was 16 when a polio outbreak swept through Chicago in 1937. Schools were closed. Kids learned their lessons through 15-minute segments on participating radio stations.

A good friend of hers contracted polio. She was hospitalized in the basement at a South Shore hospital because she was Black. (Her friend survived and lived to be 80. She walked with a limp.)

Bridgeforth was part of the first class of freshmen at DuSable High School when it opened in Bronzeville on Chicago's South Side in 1935. She knew Nat King

Cole when he was just Nat Cole. She knew Dinah Washington as Ruth Jones and Redd Foxx as John Sanford. They were all her classmates.

Her dad was a chemist and moved around the country trying to find work during the Depression. Her mom worked as a maid "in-family," which meant living where she kept house. Bridgeforth was left to bounce from home to home. She estimated she moved 40 times as a kid.

But the joyful parts of her life stood out more than the struggles, she told me. Playing tennis in the street after school. Jumping rope while the grown-ups headed to work. Walking to school with all the neighborhood kids. Starring in musicals at

school.

A good life doesn't have to mean a life free of hardships, she said.

"I'm not Pollyanna, but find something to be happy about," she told me. "Or if not happy, contented. I feel a lot of times while you're out there struggling to find something great, something else comes along and you miss it because you're so busy looking at the end, at the finish."

Bridgeforth passed away in 2022. She was 101. I've thought about her words countless times, and I shared them with the Unitarian group that day.

When I finished my talk, about the power of stories and the pull of human connection, a woman in the back raised her hand to

ask a question. As soon as she started speaking, I got chills.

And when she was done with her question, I asked, "Are you Dr. Orelind?"

And she said, "I used to be. Now I'm Dr. Oldson."

And I said, "You told me I was pregnant with my daughter. You gave me the best news of my life." She was my general practitioner when I first moved to Chicago. I tried for years to get pregnant. I was in her office one day to hear some other dumb reason for my fatigue and nausea and all the rest and she ran some tests and came back into the little office and said, "Heidi, you're pregnant."

I will never forget her voice. I hadn't heard it in almost 18 years. (She left

the practice shortly after that.)

And there she was in the audience. She told me she has followed my work for years and felt some kind of kinship but didn't know why. ("Did we go to college together?") And that day we figured it out.

Her words changed my life. How often do we do that for each other? The pull of human connection. A beautiful leap of faith. And when we land well, well ... it's everything.

Heidi Stevens is a Tribune News Service columnist. You can reach her at heidikstevens@gmail.com, find her on Twitter [@heidistevens13](https://twitter.com/heidistevens13) or join her Heidi Stevens' Balancing Act Facebook group.

WE REMEMBER JUNE 28, 2018



Gerald Fischman



Rob Hiaasen



John McNamara



Rebecca Smith



Wendi Winters

"Remember me in your heart, your thoughts, your memories of the times we loved, the times we cried, the times we fought, the times we laughed. For if you always think of me, I will never be gone."

An excerpt from "Remember Me" by Margaret Mead

Today and forever, we remember our colleagues who were murdered in the targeted attack on the *Capital Gazette* office.