Wild blue yonder
WWII pilot enjoys new airborne adventures

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Garden Club celebrates 90 years of flowers and friendship
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Los Altos resident Charles “Chuck” Baker marks his 100th year with adventures in the sky.

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Deep roots

Garden Club of Los Altos thrives for 90 years

By Tanya Kucak
Special to the Town Crier

“Wonderful friends” and “lasting relationships” are the first things many active members of the Garden Club of Los Altos mention when asked what keeps them coming back. Celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, the club is thriving with nearly 200 members.

Members meet the fourth Tuesday afternoon of every month except July, November and December.

“Our meetings are always informational and a great way to meet fellow gardeners,” said Susan Moss, who joined after retiring in 1995 because she had always loved gardening.

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Moss added that the club has “such wonderful programs,” with speakers who publish books on pruning, landscaping and arranging floral designs, as well as local horticulturists who know the best plantings for the area.

“I wanted to be with others who have a passion for creating beauty in their gardens and filling their homes with plants and floral arrangements,” said Betty Ward, another member who joined after retiring in 2006. The club has “afforded opportunities to develop some wonderful friendships, learn horticultural tips and benefit from many outstanding, inspirational speakers.”

Semiannual plant and bake sales and a plant exchange are open to the community. “Plants started by members are my favorite memories when I see them flourishing in my garden,” said Moss, who has coordinated the plant sale for years and loves to propagate plants and share them with members.

Annual members-only events include a garden tour and a garden treasures sale. Members enjoy a spring salad luncheon, a fall tea party in recognition of new members and several field trips.

“I love our field trips to local gardens and interesting sights near and far,” Moss said.

Changes in gardening
Some members had enjoyed gardening for some time but found out about the club only when they accompanied someone else to a meeting. As longtime members, they also noted how gardening has changed over the
Jean Gillette, the current president, said she “loved flowers and loved digging in the dirt.” Attending a men’s night meeting in 1968 with her husband and a friend, she was offered a job on the board at that first meeting. She has held every other job since then and considers the club “one of the great loves” of her life. Like anything else, she said, “you get out of it what you put into it,” and it’s rewarding “to give to the community and to each other.” Fifty years ago, Gillette got horse manure at a horse stable and mushroom compost at a mushroom farm.

“They didn’t have all the hybrids and fertilizers they do now,” she said.

Marguerite Appling first went to a Garden Club meeting 48 years ago and said she found it “interesting and up my alley.” She enjoys the atmosphere and being with friends. She made coffee and tea for members for 30 years and arranged flowers for the veterans’ hospital. Growing up, Appling learned a lot by gardening with her father in his large vegetable garden. In recent years, gardening has changed drastically because gophers and squirrels take everything that’s not protected. She said she has “lots of pots on the deck with bulbs” and grows her vegetables in a structure like an aviary.

Judy Hogan attended her first meeting in 1990 only so she could read our reviews on Yelp to see how we can make a difference.
could drive her mother-in-law, Loretta, an active member who had encouraged her to join for years. Hogan loved it right away and has been a committee member or board member ever since.

“Our club members are the nicest people in the world,” Hogan said.

Over the years, she said, she has “learned that you won’t be too stressed if you are in the garden.” Gardening is much more organic than in the old days, she noted, adding that perennials are also more popular than they used to be.

Pat Ley gardened for 40 years in Northern Europe and had to learn what to do and when to do it all over again when she moved to Los Altos, so she joined the Garden Club approximately 25 years ago. As a painter, potter and gardener, her interests melded well. The Garden Club, according to Ley, is “very worthwhile, and does a lot for the town.” She has noticed a greater interest in native plants than even 10 years ago. Another change over the years has been the closing of small nurseries, she said, “the only places that had land that could be built on.”

Ward, chairwoman of 90th anniversary exhibits and events, learned from the archives that “even in the early years, the club’s beautification projects in Los Altos included planting drought-tolerant perennials.”

As Appling noted, “it’s a good, good group to be associated with. Some people live in apartments and come to enjoy the atmosphere. It’s a pleasure and you learn to garden.”

Garden Club members, from left, Jean Gillette, Jean Ichnowski, Susan Moss and Betty Ward enjoy the club’s “April in Bloom” opening reception April 14.
Adventures

By Mary Larsen
Staff Writer/maryl@latc.com

To celebrate his 100th birthday earlier this year, World War II B-17 pilot Charles “Chuck” Baker took flight above Hollister April 7 for a skydiving adventure.

Fellow Los Altos resident Paul Hollingworth, who connected with Baker after reading an article about the centenarian in the March 20 Town Crier, went along to watch the jump from his gyroplane, “near (but not too near) the drop zone,” Hollingworth said. According to Hollingworth, Baker wore his WWII flight jacket, and “his headgear was the pneumatic intercom he used for initial training.”

It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s Chuck Baker!

Local senior takes to the skies

By Mary Larsen
Staff Writer/maryl@latc.com

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“From the first day in the Air Force, every time I sat in the cockpit of the plane I would fly, I buckled on a parachute,” Baker said. “We were given instructions of use, but I never had to abandon an airplane. So finally Sky Dive Hollister tickled my enthusiasm to ‘just do it.’”

Baker added that the skydiving company set a new personal record, as he was their first 100-year-old jumper.

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He was buckled up to Sky Dive Hollister’s “Goose,” an experienced tandem jumper, for the aerial trip.

Baker described the jump: “(The door) was opened at about 10,000 feet, and at 13,000 feet, Goose and I just rolled out. Immediately, there was a tremendous wind as we free-fell 5,000 feet, just a bit short of a mile. … Finally, at 8,000 feet, there was a jolt and everything came to a stop as the chute was deployed (and) we were just floating in air. (Goose) turned the direction of the chute by pulling the shrouds and pointed to where we would land. … Finally he turned into what little wind there was and we landed – a very soft landing it was. … We detached the harness and soon a car came to pick us up to return to the compound.”

Proof of a good time in the air, the day flew by. “I made a vow,” Baker said. “This will be an annual event.”

The adventures continue

After the success of the jump, Hollingworth invited Baker to take a tour in his gyroplane – another new experience. Not surprisingly, the adventuresome Baker accepted the invitation; the two enjoyed a flight out of San Martin Airport April 14.
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Poetic get-well card

Laughter is the best medicine

By Bob Simon

We’ve all been there. A relative or friend is ailing – yet on the mend – and we want to send a greeting we hope will cheer up the patient.

A while back, a male cousin about my age had undergone surgery “down there,” and I elected to try for a rhyme that might bring a smile.

Over the years, this cousin had developed something of a reputation on the dance floor. Yet I found his style unusual: He and his partner (invariably a well-rehearsed family member) would periodically collide in a gentle sashay, all nicely in time with the music. I once asked his daughter if there were a name for what struck me as an unusual step (I lead a very sheltered life). She said yes, and she told me what it was.

That was all I needed as I composed a poetic get-well card I considered suitable to the occasion. Feel free to share it when appropriate, unless the patient says, “It only hurts when I laugh.”

Bob Simon is a Los Altos resident. For more information, email bob@logotogo.com.

The Old Soft Shoe

There’s been a hiatus
In the smooth ballroom prancing
Of the man who’s renowned
For such gracious butt dancing.

He’s laid up with stitches
Where once he was plain.
And he just might admit
To a twitch of a pain.

Yet ...

When the scar has healed nicely
And he’s no longer numb,
You can bet he’s the guy
With the slow-dancing bum.
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Let’s get busy!

The following events are scheduled through the Los Altos Senior Program and Avenidas.

**Caregiver Workshop**  
11 a.m. to 2 p.m. June 1  
Avenidas Rose Kleiner Center  
270 Escuela Ave., Mountain View  
“Caregiving Conversations About Quality of Life and Treatment Options” is part of an ongoing series of free workshops targeted toward family members caring for seniors. To register and for more information, call Avenidas at 289-5400 or visit avenidas.org/conferences-events/2019-avenidas-care-forum.

**Trip to Gamble Garden in Palo Alto**  
11 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 12  
Participants will eat lunch and tour the grounds of the Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden, a nonprofit community horticultural foundation. Tour-goers will meet at the Los Altos Youth Center, 1 N. San Antonio Road, by 11 a.m. for an 11:15 departure. Cost – $60 for Los Altos Senior Program members, $65 for nonmembers – includes lunch, tour, transportation and gratuity. To sign up, call 947-2797.
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