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BY RHODA GOLDMAN PLAZA

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New Year and Holy Days



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Ira Kurtz,
Executive Director

Happy New Year

I wish all residents, their families, and RGP staff a healthy and happy New Year 5782. We have passed many trials since last New Year and we begin this year with more wisdom and experience.

Although COVID still exists, we are much safer and experienced than we were one year ago. I can say that the only constant the past year has been one of change: we have learned how to adapt quickly.

I thank residents for their continued adherence to masking requirements and their perseverance throughout the ongoing changes. We will get through these COVID restrictions together.

Of course, we all feel frustrated that the Delta COVID variant has forced the Department of Public Health to issue new guidelines restricting indoor dining, enforcing mask wearing, and limiting visitation. But this too will change.

The New Year offers us all an opportunity to reflect about the kind of community we want to have. I am confident that with our optimistic and energetic residents, outstanding and dedicated staff—all of us working together—we can create an inclusive, caring, and healthy community and 5782 will indeed become a Happy New Year. May we all go “from strength to strength”.

Resident of the Month—Bob Demchick

“Why wait to improve things?” Bob asked rhetorically. “Why wait for a new year? The time to improve things always exists—in business or one’s personal life.” He suggested that we often miss small changes that could make a job easier or life more pleasant.

And Bob’s life has been one of continuous change.

“The growth of my career wasn’t planned,” he said. “Things just seemed to happen. I adapted as interest and opportunity appeared. I was rarely hired to make changes. Typically, I observed inefficiencies or ‘mistakes’ and recommended fixes, occasionally in areas where I had no authority.”

Following four years in the Navy he married Phylis and began his career in the drafting department at RCA while finishing at Temple University. Shortly after the birth of the first of their four children, he transitioned to systems and procedures analysis. Several years later, switching to engineering administration, he joined the space program at GE as a facilities planner and continued his studies at Drexel. Following management positions with various organizations, he launched a property management firm. Phylis left her dental hygienist career to be his partner on a second level. Then, after years living on the East Coast, they decided to become nomads.

In Bob’s own words...

“Years ago, we read Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charlie* where he described roaming about the country with his dog, Charlie. As tent campers with our children for twenty years, we thought an RV would be a wonderful way to extend our love of the outdoors. Back



then, I doubt we considered living on the road full time but in the early nineties Phyl suggested that perhaps the moment had arrived. The kids had moved on so we certainly didn’t need a six-bedroom house. With no dog in the picture, she agreed to take me.

“We spent several summers on our boat on the Chesapeake. Our friends, docked two slips away, spoke of their being ‘full-timers.’ So, with their stories in mind we sold our house and hit the road. Just like that! We had been warned that if you’re going to live in 186

square feet of space you better like each other. Love is important, of course, but ‘like’ is much more significant. And not once in twelve and a half years on the road did we think we’d made a mistake.”

When asked where they went Bob replied, “Anywhere we wanted—US, Canada, Mexico. From one night in a Walmart parking lot or truck stop to two weeks at a campground, we rarely traveled more than two hundred miles a day. After a couple of years we began volunteering at state and national parks. That usually meant staying put for a couple of months or so. And, would you believe it? I often got involved in changing things. At a national park in Arizona I modified trash collection cutting the time by forty percent. At China Camp State Park in Marin County, I designed a mechanism which kept the raccoons from raiding storage lockers. I guess the urge to improve things is how I’m wired. I suspect it annoys some folks but that’s just the way I am. As the luckiest man alive, I’ve spent sixty-five years with the one person willing to accept my obsession.

Asked if he planned any changes for the new year, Bob paused, then answered, “For me, Rosh Hashanah is different. I learned from my grandpa that every day is the start of another year, a chance to seek improvement. But Rosh Hashanah is not just another day. It somehow symbolizes a paradigm that I never want to change. Aside from the religious aspect, Judaism’s moral and ethical ideals, while certainly not unique to Judaism, are perfect. Not to be preachy but our responsibility to others is clear. I like that just as it is.”

A New Year

What kind of New Year is this?

Two weeks ago, my son sitting on the deck of his home in British Colombia filmed via WhatsApp a huge fire raging not far away. He reported the heart of the fire was further south and there was no lake between it and his house. The Taliban have taken over Kabul, pushing the government over as if it had been a house of cards. What will happen to all the people who have resisted them? And closer to home, California's severe drought and fires are unprecedented and terrible. I feel helpless seeing the size and voraciousness of the fires, and helpless to help others suffering famine and war far away. It feels more like the end of times than a new year. Nonetheless, New Year will arrive, amid smoke, heat, drought, and fear.

Regardless of calamities, Jews go to synagogues to pray. We pray to celebrate the first day of creation, the beginning of the world, to praise G-d. People pray on Yom Kippur to avert suffering, to nullify stern decrees and punishments, ask G-d for compassion, benevolence, and for a merciful judgment. High Holy Days—New Year and Yom Kippur—elicit fervent prayer.

After Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, comes Shemini Atzeret and the prayer for dew is changed to the prayer for rain—a prayer that the earth will be renewed, that rain will return the lushness of the earth. In that simple greenness, I find hope for the future. According to JFCS' Rabbi Isaacson, "we wait until Shmini Atzeret for formal prayers because we don't want it to rain during Sukkot, which would diminish the joy of the holiday. However, I would say that informal prayers for an end to this drought cycle we are in, and for our natural world in general, are always a good idea...."

Informally, we can start praying now.

When I spoke with my son this week, he said that it was raining



High Holy Days Schedule

We will not offer live High Holy Day services at RGP; virtual services at a local synagogue will be streamed in the Activity Room.

Residents who want to attend services at local synagogues will be offered transportation.

However, attending crowded services during the on-going Delta COVID surge, may not be a wise decision. Synagogues vary widely in their COVID levels of protection; residents are encouraged to check COVID protocols before attending. Some synagogues require vaccination, enforce masking and 6-ft distance. Others do not.

Residents must sign up in advance for transportation at the front desk.

September 6	Erev Rosh HaShanah Synagogue Transportation, last pickup at 7 pm
September 7	Rosh HaShanah-first day Synagogue Transportation
September 8	Rosh HaShanah-second day Synagogue Transportation
September 15	Erev Yom Kippur Synagogue Transportation, last pick up at 7 pm
September 16	Yom Kippur Synagogue Transportation, TBD 2:00 Yizkor Reading Break-the-Fast at 4:30 (Depending on COVID regulations.)
September 19	Erev Sukkot Decorating the Sukkah 3:30 pm

*Repentance—constitutes a new relationship to oneself, to the other and to the divine.**

*<https://www.ciunow.org/insights/repentance-reconciliation/>

High Holy Days—New Year and Yom Kippur—explained

The Jewish High Holy Days include Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. “The High Holy Days are a time of year when the Jewish people, as a whole, are asked to engage in a process of doing a moral self-assessment; seeking forgiveness from others for harms we’ve done; making amends as appropriate; and resolving to do better in the future.” *

Before the Common Era, New Year was celebrated during the spring, on the first of Nissan and the first day of Passover—the redemption of the Jewish people. However, through a unclear history, by 200 CE, New Year was celebrated in Tishre, the seventh month which was also the agricultural new year and the Biblical birth of the world. The themes of sin and the renewal which were originally linked to Tishre, eventually became celebrated during New Year. The idea of the Passover redemption

“for you” was translated into the New Year-Yom Kippur theme of repentance.

Today what is called the High Holy Days include Rosh HaShanah and ten days later Yom Kippur. Holy days continue with a week of Sukkot, Shemini Azeret and concludes with Simhat Torah—rejoicing in the Torah. On that day, the yearly cycle of Torah reading ends and the new cycle begins with Genesis.

Yom Kippur stresses the importance of prayer, repentance, and the giving of charity to encourage a favorable judgment. Sukkot celebrates the forty years Jews lived in the desert, before entering the Holy Land. Traditional symbols of New Year include the pomegranate, apples dipped in honey, a round challah, fish—all of which relate to sweetness, plenty, and abundance in the upcoming year.

*(https://18doors.org/what_is_the_meaning_of_the_high_holy_days/)

Symbols of Rosh HaShanah

Shofar:

A ram horn calls the Jewish People to repentance, also it is a reminder of continuity and a hopeful future



Apple with honey: Eating apples and honey on Rosh HaShanah to encourage a sweet new year

Fish Head The head of a fish represents beginnings and emphasizes how important to begin a year with determination and strength.



Pomegranate

The pomegranate is symbol of abundance; its seeds represent prosperity or a desire to perform many mitzvahs. It is a tradition to eat a “new” fruit—one that has not been eaten recently.

Round Challah:

Round challahs with raisins represents the cycle of life and creation; the raisins are for a sweet new year.



Torah

The yearly cycle of public Torah reading ends and begins on Simhat Torah, the last day of the holidays.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/symbols-of-rosh-hashanah/>



Health Notes

Adrienne Fair, MSN, RN,
Assistant Executive Director

Novelty and Neuroplasticity



Meet Marian C. Diamond, who was a professor of integrative biology at UC Berkeley. She published a study in 1985 that showed that the brains of senior rats showed a thickening of the cortex, with larger, more active brain cells, when exposed to

a stimulating environment.¹ This was revolutionary at the time, and spurred further researchers to confirm her findings. It seems that, yes, the brain can “grow and prosper, even in old age”.²

But what is a stimulating environment? What will boost our neuroplasticity and strengthen our brain synapses? I would suggest that RGP is indeed a stimulating environment. There are really so many fascinating residents with whom to have a conversation. We have interesting lectures and outings as well. The menu in the dining room offers creative, innovative dishes. There are great activities to try, particularly related to the arts and painting. Being creative really is stimulating for the mind. In other words: why not try something new? Novelty can really give your brain a boost.

Speaking of neuroplasticity, we are offering a new activity option with the California Game Girls. This organization was started by two women named Frada and Lisa who describe themselves as “game loving women from Brooklyn who (...) play and

excel at teaching brain enhancing games to anyone who wants to have fun, while expanding their social connectivity and their minds.”³

I would be remiss if I only mentioned neuroplasticity with regards to novelty. Dr. Diamond actually emphasized five essentials for a healthy brain. I truly hope that you enjoy all five every day, because you (and your big, healthy brain) deserve it: Newness, Challenge, Exercise, Healthy Diet, and Love.⁴



¹ Diamond M. et al (1985). Plasticity in the 904-Day-Old Male Rat Cerebral Cortex. *Experimental Neurology*, 87, 2, 309-317. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0014-4886\(85\)90221-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0014-4886(85)90221-3)

² Grimes W. (2017). Marian C. Diamond, 90, Student of the Brain, is Dead. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/science/marian-c-diamond-90-student-of-the-brain-is-dead.html>

³ California Game Girls (2021). About us. <https://californiagamegirls.com>

⁴ Shaffer J. (2016). Neuroplasticity and Clinical Practice: Building Brain Power for Health. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 1118. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01118>



Candiece Milford,
Managing Director of Marketing

“The Shiny Penny Syndrome”—At RGP We Have Polish

It's natural and human to be attracted to new things, especially when the trumpets are blaring in the media about a new product, service or community. It is alluring and just think, you get to be one of the “first users!” I call this the “Shiny Penny Syndrome” that dazzles us with promise and by the “look” of a product, service or community. And who wouldn't be, as we are but mere mortals? Just don't forget to ask the hard and invisible questions that are going to determine the actual personal value and experience for you and your family over time. Remember, too, that any new product on the market is going to have some bugs to work out and who wants to be their “beta test?” I recently had a couple move from a newly-opened community which turned out not to have the staff necessary to take care of a parent and required them to pay for 24/7 care. Not as advertised . . .

Rhoda Goldman Plaza is a mature community. Its staff, business structure, and programming have been tested over time into a reliable, trusted organization that delivers excellent care. We daily earn our stellar reputation in the medical community and about thirty percent of our residents have adult children who are medical professionals. Our non-profit organization is financially and uniquely strong and not steeped in debt, which means we can offer smaller, if any, yearly monthly fee increases (last year we had a no fee increase). The staff is loyal, and we have an unprecedented low staff turnover including about ten percent of staff who have been with RGP since day one, twenty-one years ago. That reflects good management.

Yet, we don't rest on our laurels; we polish our penny. We continue to reinvent and reimagine programming and stay limber, ready to change, when needed . . . and sometimes that must happen (like last year and COVID) basically overnight. With a mature team who work seamlessly together, we are more able to adapt quickly to change and then learn from it. That's where we are today—reimagining and reinventing our programming and service delivery to better serve residents where they are today.



Financially robust as we are, we continue to invest in our building infrastructure and continually update its systems and the interiors of the apartments. Imagine being blessed with our own painter who is constantly walking the halls to touch up and repair little dings and scratches that

naturally occur when you have close to 300 people using the building daily. In Memory Caring, we reimagined a part of the floor, that is flooded with sunshine, into a kind of solarium with plants and seating that has become popular with the residents. Our penny may have been minted in 2000, but experienced hands polish it all the time to a beautiful sheen that reflects the maturity of experience.

Employee of the Month— Sheryll Ramos, PCA, Med-Tech



Sheryll Ramos, PCA became a med- tech in the most dire of situations. Last year, when many Terrace staff members were out with COVID, Sheryll agreed to step in and take on the med-tech role on the Terrace.

Facing a challenging situation, Sheryll, who had faced difficult situations before, concentrated

on learning her new job. She was well qualified—she has a nursing degree from the University of Perpetual Help System in Isabela, the Philippines. In 2012, she came to San Francisco where her family lived. “Coming to a new country, learning a new language, and becoming proficient in the American nursing profession was initially quite difficult,” she said, “but I felt that I had to do whatever was necessary to succeed.”

Sheryll worked as a private caregiver in San Francisco retirement homes before coming to Rhoda Goldman in 2019. “I like working at RGP very much; I have worked here longer than at any other assisted living facility. The staff are very friendly and have helped me learn. If I need help, I know that a co-worker will assist. We have great team work on the morning shift. I like the residents too; they are very friendly.

I have learned that I can do better if I push myself. When I focus on working and learning new skills, I can look back and see that I have gained a lot of skills and experience. Hobbies include camping in the mountains and road trips. I really like the mountains because they are so quiet.

September Birthdays

Milka Rols	1
Maxene Greenspan	2
Phyllis Demchick	3
Lillian Finkel	7
Raisa Bykhovsky	18
Marilyn Hartwell	22
Josephine Staub	22
Jane Cutler	24
Pat Woolf	25
Bob Erickson	29

Community Rabbi Needed

RGP is looking for a Rabbi. It is our hope to find a Rabbi who is interested in supporting the spiritual health of our residents and has experience working with older adults including people with dementia.. Responsibilities would include facilitating weekly Friday afternoon services for both Memory Care and Assisted Living leading services on High Holidays and Seders for Passover, and other special events. The Rabbi would also provide spiritual counseling and support to residents as needed or requested. We will also consider someone who is not a Rabbi, but who has extensive knowledge of Judaic practices and competent to lead services. The Rabbi would work closely with the Director of Programming, act as an independent contractor and receive a monthly retainer for their services. Please contact Emma Davis, Director of Programming and Counseling, at 415.345.5098.

Activities Intern



Emma Davis’s internship program for MFT trainees officially started on August 24th, with the first intern Annie Gwynne-

Vaughan. Annie is interning at RGP as she works toward a degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the Wright Institute in Berkeley. She has been a middle school humanities teacher at the San Francisco Friends School and is excited to learn more about memory care and working with elders.



Elizabeth Wyma-Hughes
Director of Resident Services

A Fresh Start

When folks move in, they often consider it a opportunity for reinvention: how do I want to be known and understood in my new community? Moving into a community can be a chance to begin new habits and put aside ones that no longer serve us. As we approach the new year, we can all reflect on the ways that we participate in our community and engage with each other.

Some residents may look for ways that they can serve their community. There are many opportunities for residents to use their considerable knowledge, experience, and voice to enhance life at RGP. Committees are an excellent place to start for those who want to provide feedback and insight.

Are you a long time San Franciscan with tips on great day trips or restaurants? Bring your suggestions to the activities committee so these ideas can be incorporated into future outings. Have you come across an interesting dish that you think others would be interested in? Share your idea at dining committee. Do you have ideas on how to help make the transition for new residents smoother and more welcoming? Join the hospitality committee and become a friendly face for new residents finding their way.

While some people jump feet first into participating in community functions right away, others like to become more acclimated; there is always time to join and have your voice heard. I'm so pleased to see the range of tenure of the residents currently serving on the RGP Residents Council Executive Board. Not only do we have new residents with fresh insights, but also seasoned Board Members who have been at RGP for several years. This Board will serve as an excellent resource to all our residents, and they are eager to share feedback with management. It is never too soon or too late to take an active role!

Part of what makes RGP such a unique place to live in work is the enduring commitment to re-evaluation and ability to change on the part of residents and staff.



1. Turn off all faucets completely
2. Make sure toilets stop flushing.
3. Wash full loads of laundry
4. Take short showers

Reflections on Collections

by Jeanne Halpern, Resident

Lately, I've been wondering why people make collections. Do we collect for the sheer pleasure and fun of the hunt? Because we find certain things cute, useful, beautiful, even valuable – and want more of them? Or because, when we look at our growing array, it gives us a sense of accomplishment, even pride? As I stand here in my apartment, where I can turn my head slightly and see three collections of my own, I answer these three questions with a loud “yes.” But there's one more aspect of collecting, perhaps the most significant: It connects us to parts of our past that we want to keep close.

I look at my largest collection, the penguins, and feel attachments that reach back decades – to people, places, and times in my life, to when this treasure began, grew, and flourished. I'd be surprised if other collectors don't have similar feelings and memories. In this two-part series, Part 1 shows how penguins have waddled their way through the last third of my life. Part 2, in the next issue, introduces four residents' collections—bow ties, donkeys, plants, and masks—and how they came to be.

When you walk into my apartment, even before you get to the living room, you learn a lot about me. Greeting you first, twelve steps inside my front door, is M-Go-Blue, a black granite penguin, seventeen inches tall; he's a miniaturized copy of Penguin* from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When you turn left, you see two glass shelves with fifty-one penguins from around the world. And were you to walk through my apartment, you'd find thirty-nine additional penguins that made the cut when I moved into RGP. They all continue to bring me joy.

What is it about collections, even a recently slenderized one like mine, that can make us feel happy? So happy, in fact, that they can help a new apartment feel like home. Can creating a collection inspire a chain of memories that carry us back through time – say, to the year we first adopted a penguin at the San Francisco Zoo or the first time we saw “The March of the Penguins”?



Consider, for instance, M-Go-Blue, a ridiculous name for a penguin, of course, but the first penguin you meet in my home. MGB wears a cord around his neck bearing a big maize-and-blue button that represents the huge chunk of my life devoted to the University of Michigan, where my husband Eddie taught mathematics, I studied and taught English, our two sons studied from preschool through college, and two of our four grandchildren studied, too. Over the years, we all watched or heard the Wolverine football team win or lose an endless procession of games. By the way, you can never truly enjoy a Michigan game without hearing the deafening chant: M-GO-BLUE!

Seeing MGB reminds me of the day I bought him at the Met. My three best friends from college and I – by then old enough to refer to ourselves as The Traveling Grannies – were picking up a few things in the first-floor gift shop when there, almost hidden in a corner, I spied this delightful penguin and, not far from him, a sign: TODAY ALL SHIPPING FREE! Though the price tag, \$250, was ‘way over what I was planning to spend that day, the other grannies convinced me what a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I had: to ship this shapely piece of granite that weighed at least twenty pounds from New York City to San Francisco, for free! They also said they could already see I loved him, and convinced me to send him to Louis, my beloved partner, for his upcoming birthday. Could there be a better surprise for him?

You see, Louis and I loved penguins; we felt like part of their genus, *Pinguinus*. There were times he even seemed to believe we were part penguin. This unusual affinity had begun many years earlier, when we found ourselves alone in the Penguin Room of a small museum at the Rose Garden in Portland, Oregon. We

**Penguin, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was carved in the Paris Zoo by famed animal sculptor Cornelia van Auken Chaplin the year after I was born.*

Collections - continued

transfixed by a large cardboard diagram illustrating the mating ritual of one penguin species, and, being alone, we decided to try to reenact the ritual. Just as Louis started Step 1, which called for a loud bellow – GAWK! GAWK! GAWK!, a young family walked in, so we coughed and laughed loudly, took a



photo of the diagram, and left. We added that photo and story to our evolving collection of penguin memorabilia.

Over the years, Louis and I traveled far and wide to get to know our “clan.”

Together, we mingled with the Magellanic and Chinstrap penguins in the Falkland Islands and belly-flopped down the snowy slopes of Antarctica with the Adelies. I went hiking in South Africa to cavort with the Jackass penguins at Boulders Beach. But my most exciting trip to penguin lands was my first, in the early 1990s, to New Zealand’s South Island, on the Otaga Peninsula. There I lay on my stomach with two strangers, hiding behind a blind

to see how a patch of beach was being rescued for the Yellow-eyed penguins, who had been driven away by seals, skuas, people and other enemies. I’ve read that the hard work of this small, nature-loving group “down under” has expanded to include a National Trust and other organizations determined to recover and protect these rare, wonderful-to-watch Yellow-eyed penguins.

One thing, above all, that I have learned about collections from writing this column: They can mean so much to us. Basically, I am not a sentimental person. But my attachment to this gorgeous, smart, faithful, whimsical, endangered animal has grown so strong over the years that it brings tears to my eyes to imagine their extinction from human abuse and climate change. I am buoyed, though, by the “penguin” support and encouragement of so many friends from around the world. Among the many thoughtful gifts I’ve received over the years, I particularly treasure an early British penguin book from the estate of a dear friend’s father, and a big penguin pin, glittering with rhinestones, from the jewelry collection of another friend’s deceased mother. Finally, I’m indebted to penguins of many kinds who’ve prompted me to see so much of the world. Honestly, one never knows where a collection might lead.

In the next issue, stay tuned for these four collections:

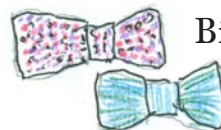
Bernice’s
Donkeys



Frida’s
Rescued
Plants

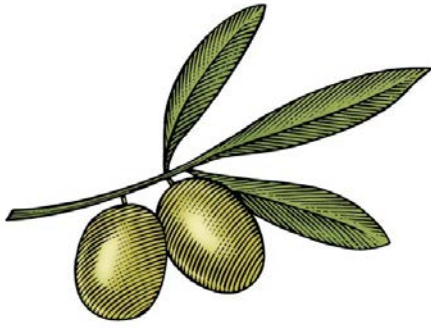


Paul’s Masks



Bill’s Bow Ties

Illustrations by Amalia Shedro



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*Founded by Jewish Family and Children's
Services and Mount Zion Health Fund*

RHODA GOLDMAN PLAZA

The appeal of Rhoda Goldman Plaza is undeniable. Older adults and their families prefer our unsurpassed assisted living and memory care community enriched by culture and tradition.

Residents enjoy superb, “made-from-scratch” cuisine that is always well reviewed by our most vocal critics; our residents! While our dining selections please the appetite, accommodations showcase spacious, private apartments designed to maximize space and comfort. In fact, we’re re-defining your life as Living Well With Assistance—we believe our community is every bit as good as a five-star hotel. And, professionally trained, courteous staff promotes your health and well-being with choices of activity programs both on and off-site.

Our Terrace Memory program provides specialized memory care to residents through therapeutic activities that enhance physical, mental, and emotional health. Both privacy and companionship are afforded on our self-contained Terrace.

Living Well With Assistance is more than a promise, but a way of life for our like-minded residents and staff who share the vision of our upscale community.

Visit Rhoda Goldman Plaza today by calling 415.345.5072.

Founded by Jewish Family and Children's Services and Mt. Zion Health Fund in 2000, Rhoda Goldman Plaza (RGP) was established as a non-profit assisted living facility to provide a better and more secure life for older adults.