

Spumoni's: "Where Everybody Knows Your Name"

Study Says Being Socially Active May Improve Cognitive Functioning

by Herb Weiss



Mark and Nancy Shorrock toasting a great life Photo Credit: Patricia S. Zacks

As George M. Cohan's famous musical once lauded, "Just 45 Minutes from Broadway," Mark and Nancy Shorrock, have discovered that their "home away from home" is a mere seven minutes away. While some people take to the internet, or some plug into television, the Shorrock's discovered a long time ago that by staying socially engaged with a wide circle of friends and family was their secret to the fountain of youth. Like the fictional Boston bar featured in the television sitcom "Cheers" where 'regulars' would gather to share their daily life experiences at that fictional place where "everybody knows your name", this couple found the same camaraderie at Spumoni's Restaurant. The Shorrocks have been traveling over the Massachusetts state line to Rhode Island for 17 years to dine at the Pawtucket bar and join the 'regulars at this well-known eatery. And not surprisingly, over the years their social network has drastically expanded, and not shrunk in size. Spumoni's regulars and staff know their names and even the intimacies of their lives.

Good Food, Minutes from Home and Pac-Man

The Attleboro couple, now in their seventies and married for 52 years, began dining at Spumonis twice a week with their children in the 1980s, and remember being drawn to the Italian-style restaurant because of its reputation of serving “good food.” Over the years, as the Shorrock’s three children became more independent and “doing things on their own,” the couple began increasing their trips to Spumoni’s since it was so close by, says Nancy.

Nancy remembers her children playing Pac-Man at Spumonis, an iconic video game from the 1980s. “The just loved playing that game,” she says. Coming regularly deepened our relationships with the people, and we met and our waitresses and staff,” she stated.

Prior to retirement, this couple maintained their own busy careers and raising a family. Nancy, a former nurse worked at special needs facilities and various hospitals for almost four decades, officially retired in 2000. That year, Mark who served as manager of materials and properties, retired from Raytheon after 37 years. Soon they began dining at Spumonis daily, seven days a week, if their schedules permitted.

Today, every night around 7:00 p.m., Nancy and Mark sit at the bar and order individual extra thin pizzas with peppers and onions – one light on cheese and the other four cheeses (in case you’re wondering, these pizzas are named after the couple). Pat Maziarz, a bartender from over 30 years, makes their drinks, “one wine and one martini.” And for now they are settled in and will catch up with their extended family of bar regulars that may last for hours. Mark even plays a little Keno, piling up his tickets on the bar counter.

Even family gatherings with their three children, three grandchildren and one great grandchildren are held at the restaurant. “We don’t sit at the bar for these events,” quips Nancy.

Richard Veroni, 51, a Pawtucket resident and Spumoni’s regular, says that after a long day working at the Massachusetts-based Shaw’s Corporate Headquarters, on his way home he will stop off at the restaurant on Newport Avenue if he sees Nancy and Mark’s 2005 Toyota Camry in the parking lot. Veroni observes, “They are not lonely, they know so many people here.”

Nancy agrees, noting that she and Mark have developed personal relationships with around 30 couples who frequent Spumoni’s bar. “Spumonis is sort of our Cheers and we know everybody’s name,” she says.

Life milestones are recognized at their favorite restaurant, too. The staff of Spumoni’s held a 50th wedding anniversary party for the Shorrocks. Their children provided enlarged photographs from their parents wedding and the restaurant even duplicated the couple’s wedding cake from a picture.

Dining at Spumoni’s is a “shared” activity, says Nancy. If she has to work late at her part-time job at a local funeral home, Mark won’t go alone.

Looking at the positive impact of having a regular hang out at Spumonis, “it’s our therapy and coming here makes us happy,” Nancy says. Mark totally agrees..

Hanging Out with Friends May Improve Cognitive Functioning

What the Shorrockes know innately, a 24 page report, “The Brain and Social Connectedness: GCBH Recommendations on Social Engagement and Brain Health,” released by the Global Council on Brain Health in February 14, 2017, tells us that larger social networks may positively impact your health, wellbeing, even your cognitive functioning. This report is available at <http://www.GlobalCouncilOnBrainHealth.org>.

“It’s not uncommon for our social networks to shrink in size as we get older,” said Marilyn Albert, Ph.D., GCBH Chair, Professor of Neurology and Director of the Division of Cognitive Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. “This report provides many helpful suggestions about the things we can do to improve the quality of our relationships with family and friends, which may be beneficial in maintaining our mental abilities.”

“We know that loneliness and social isolation can increase physical health risks for older people,” said Sarah Lock, AARP Senior Vice President for Policy, and GCBH Executive Director. “The GCBH’s consensus that people who are socially engaged have a lower risk for cognitive decline shows us just how important social connections are to brain health.”

The Brain and Social Connectedness report addresses the social benefits of having pets, the role that age-friendly communities play in fostering social ties, and how close relationships promote both physical health and psychological well-being. The report also covers how social media like Facebook and Skype helps older adults maintain their social connections.

Strengthening Social Ties Through Volunteerism

“While there are many ways people get involved with AARP, the one thing shared by our volunteers is that their contribution to our mission gets them out and about,” said AARP Rhode Island State Director Kathleen Connell. “Whether it’s a trip to the State House to support Age-Friendly legislation, staffing a table at a community event or working in support of our Livable Communities initiative, volunteers are active and engaged with others – both fellow volunteers, our community partners and the public we serve,” she says..

“It comes up in conversations as well as volunteer surveys that staying active is one of the added benefits that accompany advocacy and community service,” Connell says.

“Also, it is important to know that AARP does more than pay lip service to other organizations that help keep people active,” she adds, noting that AARP’s Create The Good web site (www.createthegood.org) is an online source to help people find volunteer work at a multitude of organizations and community groups looking for help. You enter your zip code and the distance you’re willing to travel, and dozens of various opportunities appear. Another great resource is AARP Staying Sharp (<https://stayingsharp.aarp.org>), which includes a brain-health that

features advice and activities as well as an assessment tool that includes active living as an important factor.”

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