

Castro: Who're you calling old?

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FACEBOOK IMAGE

In the annals of rebranding, this may not make a splash, but it sure has made me think.

On Sept. 5, The Senior Center announced that it shall henceforth be known as just The Center.

From The Center's perspective, the word "senior" implies that you're at the last stage of something — the last year of high school, the fourth year of college, etc.

But with life expectancies now stretching longer than ever, many older people are just at the third stage of their life, with much more to come.

"The problem is the perception that all old people are alike, and that they're just sitting around making potholders all day," said Virginia Peale, The Center's director of marketing. "Expectations have changed, and this is just part of that evolution and the way language changes over time."

The Center is also replacing its logo with a Costco-esque blue C.

Let me tell you, this whole folderol reminds me of 1999. That's the year AARP announced it was dropping all four of the words behind the acronym to broaden interest in membership by taking the focus off retirement. (Yes, I'm old enough to remember that, but full disclosure: I used to work for AARP, and my spouse currently works for the organization.)

Up until then, most people had pronounced it "arp," but suddenly broadcast media were expected to enunciate each letter of the name as though it were an acronym — even though the organization was now saying it's definitely NOT an acronym, dang it.

Newspapers were supposed to twist themselves into pretzels to avoid using the phrase "American Association of Retired Persons" when explaining AARP.

Then in 2007, AARP went global for a bit, forming the AARP Global Network and bringing international seniors' groups into the fold. At that point, AARP may as well have called itself the Association of Persons. Of course, The Associated Press already had dibs on AP, so that was probably out of the question.

By 2014, AARP was releasing ads calling itself “arp” and now the group urges Americans to #disruptaging, which is such a millennial/Silicon Valley thing to say.

But at least the hashtag embraces the role AARP plays in advocating for older people.

Personally, I always found “The Senior Center” moniker to be a little too bland, at least by journalism standards. It covered the who and maybe the why of the five basic reporting questions, but it left out the what, when and where.

But this new, anodyne name drops any attempt at a who or a why, so it's utterly lacking the differentiation, authenticity and focus that most branding experts would recommend.

To its credit, this change is actually part of an evolution to being rebranded The Center at Belvedere, after a new facility is built in Albemarle County's Belvedere neighborhood next year.

But The Center's entire mission is to “create opportunities for healthy aging” by providing ways to socialize, stay fit, get involved in civic matters and continue lifelong learning.

“Healthy aging” is in the first clause of that mission statement.

And with a rapidly aging population — older Americans are projected to outnumber young'uns by 2035 — serving seniors shouldn't be something The Center or anyone else runs from.

In marketing lingo, it's your value proposition. In French, it's your raison d'être. In millennial-speak, just own it. In English, it's who you are and who we all shall become — embrace it.

“We are in no way walking away from older people; that is our focus and that is our mission,” Peale said. “But ageism is so pervasive, and it's hard to change these perceptions. It's the only form of prejudice that's still accepted.”

Jobs for UnRetirement

Here's another startling aging statistic: By 2030, one in five Americans will be of retirement age, and most of them won't have the financial means to pay for those erstwhile Golden Years.

More than half of workers approaching retirement in the next five years believe they will either keep working or return to work after they cross that line, often in a new industry.

Working longer might even help a person delay claiming Social Security, which can increase their monthly benefit check by as much as 30 percent, for life, according to actuaries and financial experts.

Besides creating financial security, working or volunteering after retirement also fights off the dangers of social isolation, which carries a greater mortality risk than obesity, according to research by Brigham Young University.

“Finding a fulfilling post-retirement career can be incredibly valuable for an older adult,” said Jeanne McCusker, owner of the Home Instead Senior Care office serving Charlottesville and surrounding counties. “For some, that fulfillment comes from being a professional caregiver, but many find new career or volunteer opportunities that help serve their skills, passions and life goals, and challenge them in a way their previous career might not have.”

According to Tim Driver, CEO of RetirementJobs.com, older workers value flexibility and the opportunity to be creative.

“Retail sales clerks and bank tellers are among the most popular options, as are jobs that allow you to work from home, such as online tutoring. And caregiving is often a job where creativity is rewarded — giving you the ability to create activities for older adults and get a peek into what older life looks like,” Driver said.

To help workers think about options for their post-retirement years — and, let’s be honest, to promote the in-home care field — Home Instead offers an online career assessment tool that asks users questions about their interests, skills and ideal work environment before recommending categories of jobs that might suit them.

For those interested, the tool is at UnRetireYourself.com. Or call Home Instead at (434) 979-4663.

If you’re worried about your retirement finances, AARP (I said “arp!”) has an excellent calculator that can help you to identify specific funding gaps and how to close them. The calculator is at aarp.org/retirementcalculator.

Locally, there’s a \$20 four-week retirement investing seminar at The, ahem, Center, from Sept. 27 to Oct. 18. The course, a partnership with CFA Institute, is open to the general public.

You can sign up online at thecentercville.org or in person at 491 Hillsdale Drive, formerly known as 1180 Pepsi Place.

Jobs for any and all

The Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday released its 2018 Chamber Jobs Report, the 15th such edition analyzing area employment trends.

The report looked at a 10-year study period, from 2007 to 2017, and determined that our economy had added 11,551 jobs, with nearly 66 percent of those coming from the private sector.

Nearly 5,700 of those new jobs were in Albemarle County.

The 11,551 new jobs represent slightly more than 10 percent growth for the area.

Among private-sector employers, the leading employment fields are: trade, transportation and utilities (21.6 percent of all private enterprise jobs); professional and business services (17 percent); leisure and hospitality (16 percent); education and health services (15.3 percent); and construction (7.6 percent).

With the most recently reported local unemployment rate at 2.7 percent, it shouldn’t be too hard for anyone who wants to work to find a job. Whether that job will pay your bills and help you save for retirement is another column for another day.

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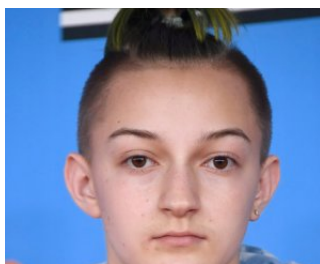
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