

Summer 2017

free  
TAKE HOME

# WESTCHESTER SeniorVoice

Connecting BOOMERS and SENIORS to the Best Local Information

**Summer  
Calendar**



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- pain management
- your annual physical
- dental checkups

**Top Classes  
For Summer  
Fun & Learning**

**aah...  
'tis the season  
for blueberries**

**the stories behind  
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landmarks**

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Westchester Senior Voice connects boomers and seniors with the local professionals and businesses that serve them. Within our pages, we inspire, educate and exchange information in an embracing, respectful and inclusive way.



Pictured here: A licensed occupational therapist at Burke's Driver Evaluation Program administers tests that measure necessary driving skills to determine if someone can drive safely. For details and questions regarding scheduling: 914-597-2187.

# Behind the Wheel

## KEEPING AN EYE ON DRIVER SAFETY

By Tiffany R. Jansen

**W**hen Keith Bronnitt, a Scarsdale resident, travelled to England to visit his parents, he'd take the train from Gatwick Airport to his parents' town, where his father would be waiting at the station. "Then we would jump in the car and we'd drive home," recalls Bronnitt, an AARP driver safety instructor. "And I did this for years and years."

On a latter trip back home, Bronnitt realized his father wasn't heading towards the usual train station parking lot. When asked why, his father said there was no car waiting for them. He'd sold it.

"He'd had a couple of near misses," Bronnitt explains. "He turned the corner and

almost hit a pedestrian. He had another where he almost sideswiped a car." The elder Bronnitt confessed that, at age 86, he no longer felt safe behind the wheel.

As all of us age, physical changes can make driving more of a challenge: due to weakened muscles, stiffness, hearing and vision loss, as well as slower reaction times. Not surprisingly, multiple medications and cognitive decline can also affect performance behind the wheel.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, drivers aged 75 and older are just as likely to be involved in an accident as those under the age of 25.

Perhaps you've noticed a series of new dings and dents in the car, more instances of being honked at by other drivers or, like Bronnitt's father, many more 'close calls.' "You might notice too, an increase in stress or a hesitancy to drive usual places or at certain times of day," says Andrea Sullivan, a licensed occupational therapist at Burke Rehabilitation Hospital in White Plains.

If someone close to you exhibits any of the above behaviors, it may be time to explore whether continuing to drive is in everyone's best interest. You can become apprised of these changes by:

1. Making yourself aware of the person's overall health, including any

medications they may be on and possible side effects;

2. Asking neighbors, friends, and acquaintances if they've noticed anything strange or out-of-sorts;
3. Sharing your concerns with the person's doctor or, with permission, tagging along for the next appointment; or
4. Driving with them as a passenger so you can observe them behind the wheel.

You may also want to consider a formal driving safety assessment like the Driver Evaluation Program at Burke Rehabilitation Hospital. The first part of the assessment is a physical and cognitive evaluation completed by an occupational therapist. Those who pass are referred to a local driving school for an on-the-road assessment by a certified driving instructor.

Burke uses those results to make a recommendation to the individual's physician. "Sometimes, it's a situation where I think we can intervene to have a positive result," says Sullivan, who oversees the program. "Somebody might come in, and I say, 'You had a

of couple errors that I'm a little concerned about, but come in for therapy and [let's] see if we can get it up to par.'"

Sullivan tells Westchester Senior Voice that the majority of those who take the assessment *do* continue to drive though, unfortunately, there are cases where the recommendation is to give up driving. "We're not looking to take people off the road," she says. "We want to see what we can do to help people *stay* on the road."

That includes educating people about things they can do now to make them safer drivers. Sullivan recommends limiting travel during high traffic times, at night, or in inclement weather to minimize driving risk. See your doctor regularly and have your vision and hearing screened periodically. Stay active to maintain the strength and flexibility needed for driving.

Driver improvement programs like the Smart Driver Course Bronnitt teaches through AARP are great for keeping current on driving rules and increasing confidence on the road. They can also earn you a discount on your insurance.

Karen Ganis, Director of RideConnect, a free transportation service that relies on volunteer drivers, suggests that "driving retirement" can be both liberating and cost effective, after accounting for savings on car payments, insurance and maintenance. She adds that programs like RideConnect also provide the non-driver with "the added value of positive social interaction." Additionally, services like Uber and Lyft are already making it easier to get around the suburbs without car ownership.

We owe it to ourselves and those around us to be as safe on the road as possible. With programs like Burke's Driver Evaluation and the AARP Smart Driver Course, there are objective means to help determine what the responsible choice should be in answering the question: to continue driving or not?

■ ■ ■

*To find out more about the Burke Rehabilitation Driver Evaluation Program, call 914-597-2187. For information about the AARP Smart Driver Course, go to [aarp.org](http://aarp.org) and, once on the site, search for 'smart driver.' To learn more about RideConnect, go to [rideconnectwestchester.org](http://rideconnectwestchester.org).*

## On the Road Again

If you or a family member has experienced a medical condition that may affect driving ability, Burke Rehabilitation Hospital offers a driver evaluation program conducted by a licensed occupational therapist to determine if driving is safe.

### APPROPRIATE FOR THOSE WITH:

- Stroke
- Dementia
- Neuropathy
- Advancing age

Program offered in White Plains and Somers

CALL (914) 597-2187

**BURKE**  
Rehabilitation & Research

*Burke is a member of the Montefiore Health System, Inc*