

# Reframing Aging â?? Sharing joy never gets old: Bayview woman brings steel drumming and other â??feel goodâ?? activities to communityâ??s seniors

## Description

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Is 73 too old to feel beautiful, travel the world, learn a musical instrument or lead an exercise class? Ask any of those questions to 73-year-old Susie Tyner and youâ??re likely to get a rather astonished look and a firm â??No way.â?•

Tyner, who is one of five older adults featured in the cityâ??s recently launched Reframing Aging campaign, leads a high-energy, no-time-for-naps schedule that has her bouncing around San Francisco from her home in the Bayview â?? that is, when sheâ??s not helping to lead a foreign tour venture that has taken her to every continent save Antarctica.



Susie Tyner (Photos by Robin Evans)

Her weekly to-do list includes leading exercise classes â?? she brought the popular Always Active program to the Bayview â?? steel drum band practice â?? another activity she brought to her neighborhood â?? and helping with a host of other activities at the George W. Davis Senior Center, an â??aging campusâ?• offering a multitude of health, recreational and supportive services for the neighborhood.

If her regimen seems tiring, Tyner says she wouldnâ??t have it any other way: â??I am living the good life,â?• she says during a chat in the sunny courtyard of the Davis Center. Being content with oneâ??s life is hardly noteworthy, but what makes Tyner stand out is her focus on improving the lives of other

older adults â?? and the creative ways she brings that commitment to her neighborhood.

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During a trip to Trinidad years ago, she watched steel drum bands perform. Tyner learned that the bands were formed as a measure to help calm the youth violence that was then plaguing the island nation.

â??They were all feeling really good about themselves,â?• Tyner says. At the time, the Bayview was suffering its own epidemic of violence, and Tyner says it was her dream to bring that music to the neighborhood. It took nearly 18 years to make that dream a reality, but the band was formed two years ago and now practices regularly at the Davis Center and recently performed at Civic Center.




Practice sessions are fun: â??Caribbean music makes us all so bouncy,â?• Tyner says. But the sessions are serious, as well. Each band member plays a handmade steel drum and works from a simplified score under the direction of a leader who makes them repeat sections until the rhythm is just right. â??When Iâ??m playing the drums, Iâ??m not thinking about anything else. Iâ??m happy and peaceful.â?•

**80, 90 and still dancing**

Health and beauty are top-of-mind concerns for Tyner. â??What is the age limit on beauty? When you get to a certain age, youâ??re not supposed to wear makeup; Youâ??re not even supposed to care about that,â?• she says.

Tyner, who looks healthy and energetic, was wearing a blue and yellow dashiki, black slacks with matching shoes, hoop earrings, red lipstick and just a bit of makeup when she talked with a Senior Beat writer. â??I like to look good when I go out,â?• she says. Helping her stay fit is the exercise class she

leads a few times a week. â??We stretch, we lift weights, we do our breathing and our marching. We really get down.â?•

Tyner delights in startling Filipinos with her command of Tagalog. Although she doesnâ??t look it, Tynerâ??s grandmothers on both sides were Filipino. They met their African American husbands when the men were stationed in the Philippines during the American occupation in the late 19th Century.




The steel drum group rehearses at the George W. Davis Senior Center.

That heritage made Tyner aware of racism. â??They were buffalo soldiers,â?• she says, using a term for African Americans who fought for the United States. â??But when they came back home, they were called â??boy.â??â?•

Busy as she is, one of her favorite activities is the Monday night jam, a program she organized 10 years ago that brings bands to the senior center. â??Some of these seniors are in their 80s and 90s. if you could just see them dance at the Monday night jam, it would blow your mind.

â??Itâ??s like going to a nightclub. We even serve margaritas.â?•

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