

LOCAL

Seniority Authority: RiverWoods starts a podcast for boomers — joys, challenges, solutions

By **Kathleen D. Bailey** news@seacoastonline.com

Published 5:00 a.m. ET May 19, 2021

EXETER — Cathleen Toomey credits the idea for her new senior-themed podcast to other people's curiosity.

"I've lived in Exeter 20 years," the vice president of marketing for RiverWoods said, "and I've been involved with RiverWoods for 14 years. People started asking me questions. 'My mom needs assisted living,' 'My dad is having memory issues.' I'm not a nurse, but my best friend is, so I'd go back and ask her, then call the people back."

Toomey knew there had to be a better way and she found it with her new podcast, "Seniority Authority," which premiered April 22. RiverWoods has retirement communities in Exeter and Durham.

Emphasizing 'attitude and ability'

Toomey said that in her work with today's elders, she has noticed that, "We need to change the way people are thinking about aging. It's not about a number - it's about your attitude and ability."

The idea for the podcast was born from the questions. She recalled thinking, "If my friends are starting to ask these questions, everyone else is asking them, too."

The aging of the boomer generation brought the need for answers to the forefront, according to Toomey.

Therapy goats: Eros, Achilles, and Plato bring comfort to RiverWoods during COVID

"As the Baby Boomers age, they are asking questions no other generation has had to ask," she pointed out.

They are living longer, and looking for the support to continue living as well and as long as possible.

"Mick Jagger is in his 70s and he's still touring," she pointed out.

A marketing professional, Toomey has noted that when she was growing up, businesses stopped marketing to people over 50. Now people 50 and over stay active and relevant, she said, adding, "We are a powerhouse."

Toomey said the podcast is geared toward people 50 and older. "Either you're aging and you need this information, or your adult children want to learn new things," she said.

Expert guests provide insights

Her first guest was Dr. Robert Waldinger, principal researcher in the Harvard University Longitudinal Study.

"It's the world's longest study on aging, going for 83 years," Toomey said. "It looks at what makes a long, happy and healthy life."

The study is a reflection of its time, Toomey observed. Beginning with the Greatest Generation, it focused more on men, at least in the 1940s and 1950s, and the men were Harvard graduates.

Jump On It: Hampton Rec's new program keeps seniors on their toes

The study has identified some indicators as to what makes a "long, happy life," Toomey said, including education, marriage and children, and good diet and exercise. But the data boils down to one conclusion, she said: "Good relationships keep you happier and healthier."

Toomey has also interviewed Dr. Maureen O'Connor, a neuroscientist, head of the Alzheimer's Education program at Boston University, and author of "Seven Steps to Manage Your Memory." O'Connor boiled her theories down to three steps: enough sleep, enough exercise, and socialization.

"It's not playing brain games," Toomey said, adding, "Playing brain games just makes you better at brain games." But communication with other humans fires up part of the brain and makes it agile, she said.

Toomey is a fan of the "three tips" school of thought - or five, or seven, or 10.

"I'm a practical person," she said, "and I want to recommend what my listeners can do starting today, starting tomorrow, and starting next week."

Target audience is into podcasts

Toomey doesn't have a background in broadcasting, and isn't even a fan of podcasts, she admitted. But podcasts are one of the fastest-growing media in the country and "booming" in her 50-plus target group.

She called on Brown and Company, a Portsmouth firm, to create her logo and carve out her tiny "studio." The only piece of furniture is a mid-century chartreuse chair, "a chair Dick Cavett would have used," she said with a smile. Her listeners will know the cultural reference.

Finding a way: 'We need it desperately': York seniors line-dance outdoors with Center for Active Living

She originally planned to do the podcast with a colleague, Cindy Martin, but COVID-19 derailed that plan. Toomey also wanted a call-in show, but that couldn't be done logistically. So she's gone to the interview format, She interviews various experts in the aging field, and listeners are invited to send in questions.

"My goal," she said, "is not to talk about RiverWoods. It's to talk about the challenges, solutions and joys of aging."

Her dream guest? Atul Gawande, a physician and author of the New York Times best-seller "Being Mortal."

Stay active: Bingo revenues slump at Wells-Ogunquit senior center, even with looser COVID restrictions

It's about a lot of things, but Toomey narrowed the book to a few points.

"He talks about how doctors in the United States are trained to save people. But they fail every day - people die. So, we need to think about quality of life, and what's really important."

Toomey has heard Gawande speak on several occasions and met him once. She's hoping to contact him for a podcast in the near future.

"I'm working my way up," she said.

For more information, visit the website at www.seniorityauthority.org or email info@seniorityauthority.org.