

THE FIRST  THE ONLY

# VeroBeach

*Magazine*<sup>®</sup>

SEPTEMBER 2024

Local wildlife takes center stage in our annual Vero Beach Magazine

**PHOTO  
CONTEST**





Indian River County seniors have many organizations and services available to them, all willing to give them a hand up.

PHILANTHROPY

# Falling Down & Getting Up

A SUDDEN TUMBLE CAN REMIND US OF THE PLIGHT OF SOME OF OUR ELDERLY NEIGHBORS



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

**W**hen was the last time you fell? Not lose your balance and wobble, but really fall and crash down onto the floor.

It happened to me earlier this year on a visit to Los Angeles. I survived, but it wasn't pretty.

As on many out-of-town trips, my 10-year-old son,

Grant, and I were up early and exploring while the rest of our family slept in. After breakfast and a spin around the West Hollywood neighborhood, we made our way up to the rooftop pool of our hotel. The sky was gray, and a light mist was falling. The pool was empty despite being heated to a toasty 80 degrees—perfect for two

Florida boys eager, as my wife, Stephanie, likes to say, “to get the wiggles out.”

After we'd been swimming for about an hour, the rain started to fall more heavily and we decided to get out of the pool and dry off. We each grabbed two fluffy white towels, wrapped ourselves up, and descended three stairs into



Unexpected falls can lead to disabling injuries for seniors.

a salon that felt like a greenhouse compared to the chilly outside temperature.

As we headed for the elevator to go back to our room, I remembered that I left a few personal items along with our room key on a table by the pool. I walked Grant to the doorway and told him to wait for me as I went back out into the chilly air. Moving quickly, I skipped up the three steps, grabbed my belongings, spun around, and immediately missed the top step. Unable to regain my balance, in what felt like slow motion, I stretched to reach the bottom step, slipped, and fell to the ground with my right leg bending behind me and my right upper arm

absorbing much of the impact.

While I did not sustain any serious injuries, it took almost two months before my right quadriceps muscle and right shoulder stopped hurting and felt fully recovered. The accident reminded me to slow down, especially as someone who is legally blind. By the time we left for our summer vacation in June, however, the accident seemed like ancient history.

That is until, in a true moment of art imitating life, I was reminded of my fall by a photograph at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. It is part of an exhibition called "Fragile Beauty," which showcases works of art from the Sir

## September is Hunger Action Month

**1 in 4 people on the Treasure Coast are food insecure. We can help.**

**Join Treasure Coast Food Bank's mission to end hunger.**



Elton John and David Furnish Collection.

Gregory Crewdson's chromogenic print *Untitled, 1999* is part of a series of cinematic-scale photographs called "Twilight."

The photograph depicts an elderly, neatly dressed, bottle-blond woman in a scene that appears to have been captured immediately after a fall. She is lying on the ground, leaning on her left side, propped up on her left elbow, right knee coming up, right arm outstretched. The carpet appears to have broken her fall, but her face reflects a bewildered discomfort.

The fading light shining through open drapes provides just enough brightness to show the outline of a coffee table, decorated with a fresh bouquet of flowers, positioned between two overstuffed chairs. A lamp against the wall illuminates a bookshelf topped with framed photographs and other knickknacks collected over the years.

My impression is that the

woman in the photograph lives alone. There is no telephone in sight, so I imagine she will have to wait for a neighbor or friend to visit if she is unable to get herself up off the floor. Who knows how long that might take?

After my fall, my son immediately rushed to my aid. Two other boys standing nearby, who appeared to be about the same age as Grant, asked me if I needed help or if I wanted them to call someone. I declined but thanked them for their kindness. After an X-ray, a couple of bags of ice and a few Advil were all the additional first aid I required. I was lucky and grateful that I had the assistance of family and medical professionals to attend to my injury and prevent any additional adverse outcomes.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for everyone. Last year, falls and the unintentional injuries they cause were one of the leading causes of death in Indian River County among adults over the age of 65. It's



## 1:30 PM. Collective Action. United Way.

United Way is the heart of the community, bringing people together to make a long-lasting, positive impact. From volunteer opportunities like our Day of Caring to supporting local mentoring programs we're empowering individuals to create a stronger, more connected community for all.

**Transform Lives. Donate Today.**  
**Visit [UnitedWayIRC.org](https://UnitedWayIRC.org).**



United Way of  
Indian River County

**UNITED WAY  
FOUNDATION  
OF INDIAN RIVER COUNTY**



Meal deliveries from the SRA's Meals on Wheels program can ensure that disabled seniors get proper nutrition.



hard to imagine unless you've experienced a hard fall yourself, and even more frightening to think of considering how many of our community's seniors live alone.

If the woman in Crewdson's photograph lived in Indian River County, I imagine she might be helped by one of the many local charities that serve seniors. To start, physical therapy might be provided by the nonprofit Sunshine Physical Therapy Clinic. For more than half a century the organization has provided customized care to individuals of all ages, regardless of their ability to pay. After an initial assessment, I imagine the Sunshine staff might provide care to help her recover from the acute injury caused by the



St. Francis Manor safely houses low-income elderly residents.

**A fall has a way of slowing things down and putting everything into perspective.**

fall. They would also likely help with gait and balance impairment with hopes of preventing another fall in the future.

Because a healthy diet and good nutrition help fuel recovery, I also imagine that daily meal delivery could be provided by Senior Resource Association through its Meals on Wheels program. When seniors are disabled or homebound, unable to leave the house without assistance, or have no one to aid in meal preparation, Meals on Wheels volunteers step in to help. Beyond delivering meals, they might also observe conditions where additional services such as transportation or adult day care could be coordinated.

When living alone becomes too challenging, either due to economic constraints or safety reasons, it is possible that the woman in Crewdson's artwork might move into the community at St. Francis Manor. For more than 50 years, this nonprofit has provided affordable, independent apartments to senior citizens on limited incomes. Residents can live out the rest of their lives in an attractive, safe, and socially supportive environment.

And at the end of life, when symptoms can no longer be managed at home, it is pos-



Seniors living alone rely on family, friends, and outside caregivers to keep them living safely at home.

spective. But at the same time, so does a reflection on what it takes to get up: care and kindness from both loved ones and strangers, medical assistance by skilled caregivers, recovery supports, and rest—I'm sure there is more to be grateful for.

In a just society, the same should be afforded our elderly friends and neighbors, either through publicly funded agencies or philanthropically supported charities. It matters most to those who live alone or those who are financially disadvantaged.

If not, we are falling down on the job. 🌟

sible that the VNA Hospice House might provide a caring, dignified environment for her to spend her final days—all paid for by generous charitable gifts.

For a 51-year-old married father of three children who works as CEO of a \$100 million grantmaking foundation, the pace of life moves very quickly. In the interest of taking care of

all my responsibilities, I often hurry to get more done, meet everyone's expectations, or not let anyone down. A fall has a way of slowing things down and putting all that into per-

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