

BAY NATURE

AN EXPLORATION OF NATURE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

Getting Outside: Good for All Ages

A chat with Bay Area Older Adults' founder Anne Ferguson

by [Beth Slatkin](#) on April 29, 2013



Hikers on a BAO outing.

Inspired by her grandparents' love of the outdoors, South Bay biotech executive Anne Ferguson founded an organization that helps older adults feel good about getting outside and engaging with nature. We spoke about Bay Area Older Adults and what it's all about....

BN: When did you first arrive in the Bay Area and what first brought you here?

AF: I arrived in the Bay Area in 1999 after finishing my postdoctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins Oncology Center in Baltimore. I came to Silicon Valley because it was the premier place for biotechnology in the world. My first job was working with a team that was developing revolutionary cancer treatments.

BN: When did Bay Area Older Adults come about?

AF: I started Bay Area Older Adults (BAO) in 2008, while I was working full time in the biotechnology industry. Just last April, I started working on BAO full time, so I could give it my complete attention.

BN: What inspired you to start it?

AF: BAO was inspired by my two favorite people, my grandparents Jean Paul and Jacqueline Latil, who were both very active physically and mentally throughout their lives and who taught me how to love and appreciate nature and the outdoors. Hence, the mission of the organization is to promote an active and healthy lifestyle for older adults with a vision of building communities of active older adults.

BN: What are your main goals for BAO?

AF: When people think of health, they typically think of physical health. More and more, people are realizing that staying mentally and socially engaged is just as important. In fact, there is plenty of scientific research showing this to be true, especially as we age. Staying mentally, physically and socially active reduces the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes and colon cancer, helps manage conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and arthritis; improves your psychological well-being; and positively affects cognitive function.

With that in mind, we want to make staying active easily accessible for older adults in the Bay Area. We started with a free online resource listing more than 1,500 outdoors, fitness, social and cultural activities (www.bayareaolderadults.org). Next, we launched a healthy living program including cultural and historical hikes, museum tours and lectures, a healthy cooking class, and a pottery class.

This year, we launched an educational series designed to exercise your brain with nine lectures covering a variety of topics including how to save money, get a better night's sleep, travel in Italy, understand alternative medicine, and even how to interact with the local police! (<http://www.bayareaolderadults.org/BAO-educational-lecture-series>)

BN: How are things coming along?

AF: This past year, we have witnessed a six-fold increase in our membership, as well as in the number of older adults using our free resource. I'm grateful to have met nearly 100 inspiring, warm, bright, and sociable older adults who participated in our healthy living program.

BN: You feature a lot of outdoor excursions. What makes them particularly interesting to older adults?

AF: We promote and organize outdoors activities that are led by experienced docents who assure a safe outing. Additionally, this is an opportunity to learn about the nature, history and culture of the area. Older adults, just like everyone else, are more likely to

explore new parks, gardens and other outdoors activities if they go with others. This is why we plan group outdoor events that are social and make them accessible to people with a variety of physical abilities.

BN: Do you have special outings for those with mobility issues?

AF: There are two ways we try to accommodate older adults. First, some of the outdoors activities we organize are on flat and accessible trails. Secondly, we offer events that are not focused on physical activity but also mental health like our educational lectures series.

BN: Can you talk a bit about engaging older adults in volunteer activities, specifically outdoor-related ones?

AF: Some of our members volunteer to organize outdoors events like nature and wildlife walks along the San Francisco Bay and spring wildflower hikes in the hills. On our list of things to do this year is a BAO member volunteer event with Save the Bay.

BN: What's your favorite park, hike, or place to go in nature in the Bay Area?

AF: I love to hike at Purisima Creek Redwoods in the hills above Redwood City. In the spring, there is a perfect combination of banana slugs, wildflowers, and views of the Pacific Ocean. Here are some photos I took on a hike there last year:

<http://www.bayareaolderadults.org/parks/redwood-city/purisima-creek-redwoods-open-space-preserve/review>

>> *Learn more about BAO and upcoming events at [bayareaolderadults.org](http://www.bayareaolderadults.org).*