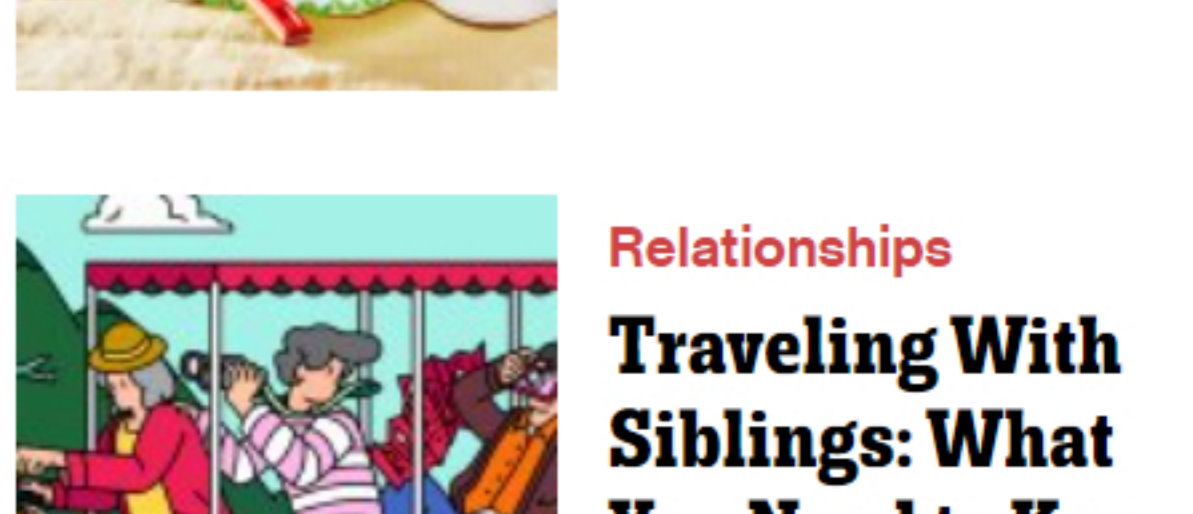
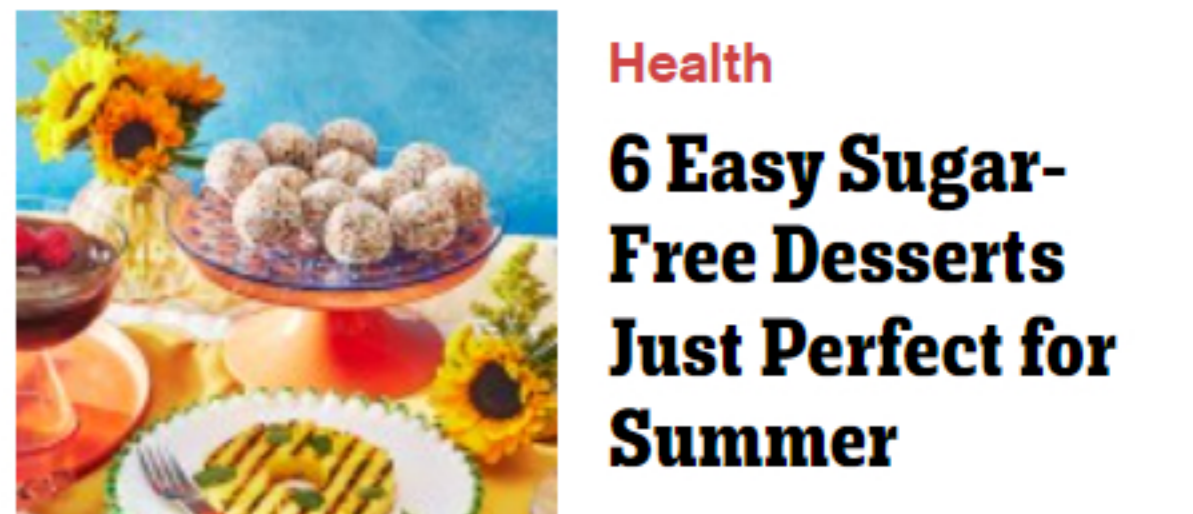
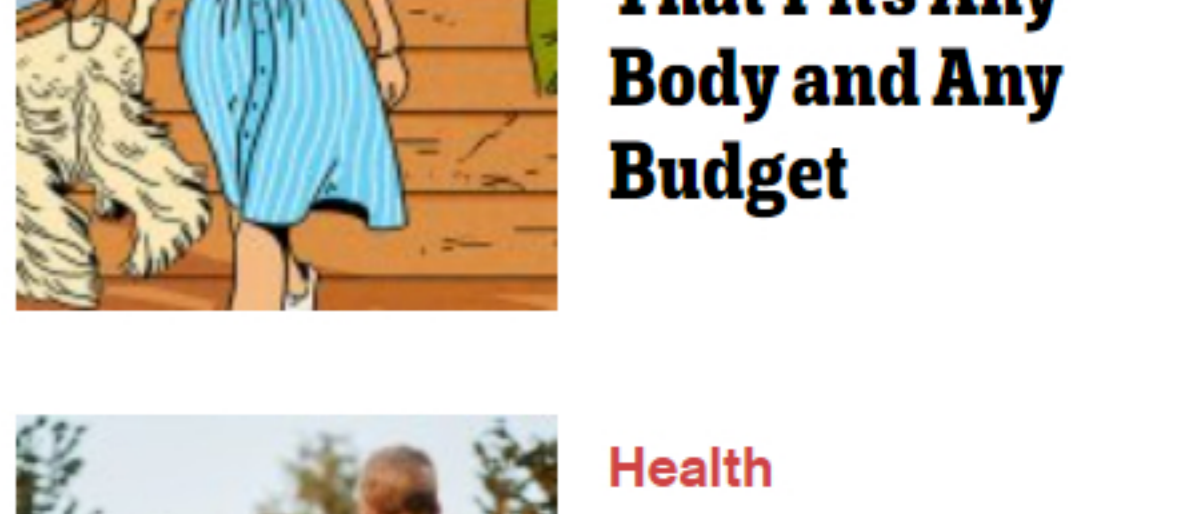
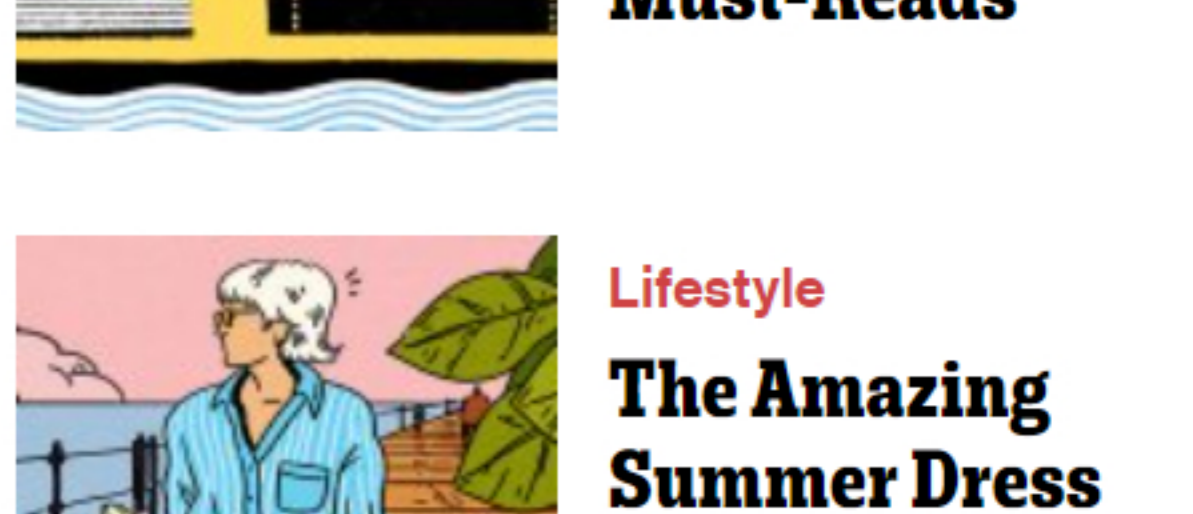
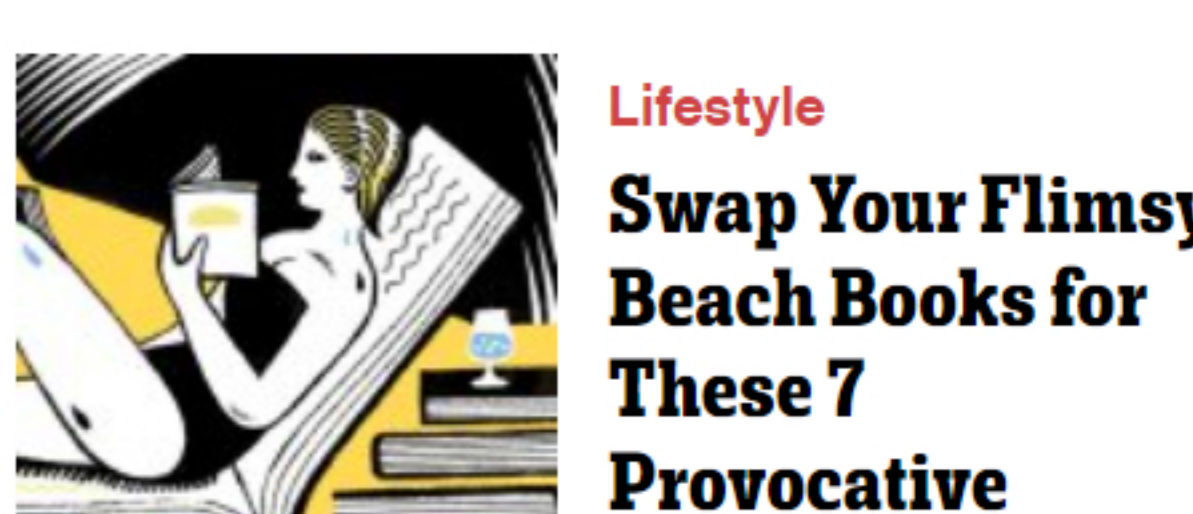
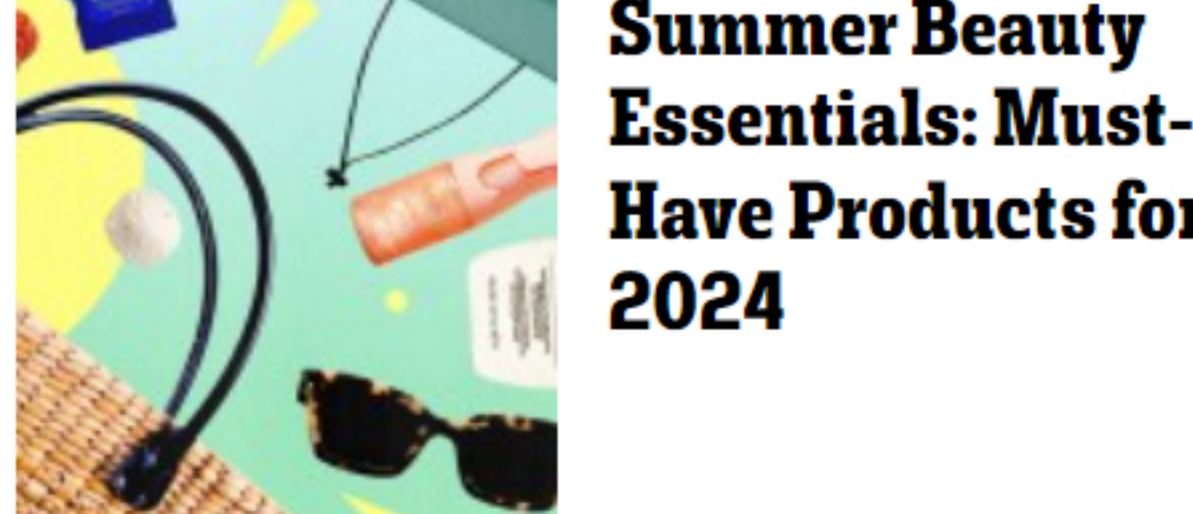
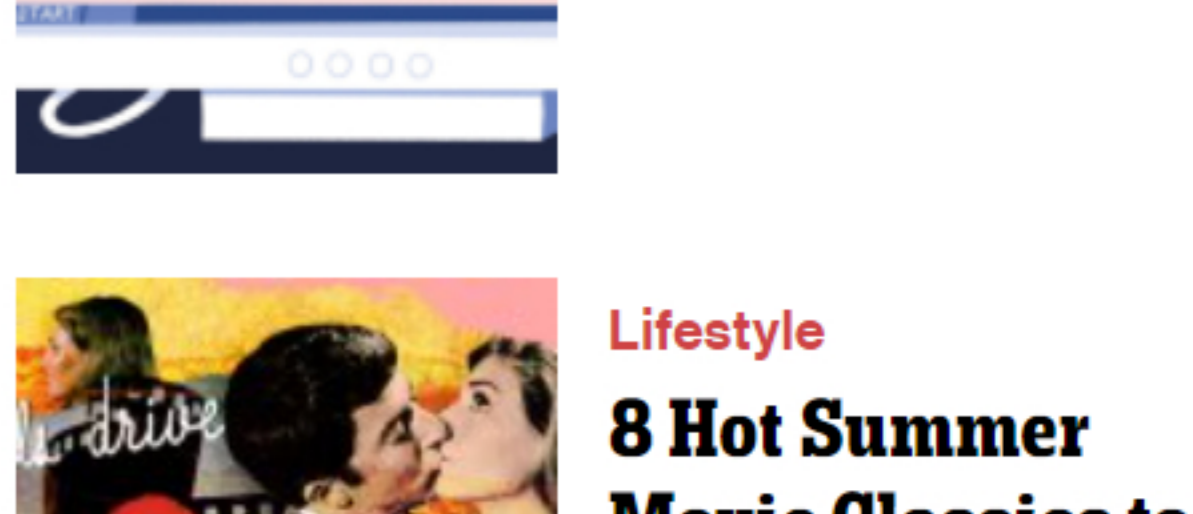




Kendrick Brinson



CURRENT ISSUE



When the original retirement community of Sun City opened its doors for the first time in the 1960s, in Arizona, the landscape of older adult communities was less-than-encouraging. At the time, the expectation for life after 55 was "literally, to retire from it." Older folks were expected to walk slowly off into the sunset, **retreating from an active**, social life, and Sun City set out to change that.

What began as five model homes in a neighborhood designed for exercise and fun became a community of 2,000 homes in just three years. Soon, others began to open across the country.

As other, more sociable senior centers began to open nationwide, Sun City was developing a culture of its own. Thus, the first 55+ cheerleading squad was born: the Sun City Poms.



Courtesy of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society Museum

Founded in 1979 as a cheer group for the Sun City Saints softball team, the Poms have been dancing past the "older person" stereotype for 45 years.

Since the 1980s, the Poms have evolved into two groups: the Marching unit and the Performance unit, taking their talents to conventions, sporting events and other retirement communities across Arizona. For over 15 years, photographer **Kendrick Brinson** has documented the Poms and Sun City at large.



Courtesy of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society Museum

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These days, the Poms are a mixed group of women with dance experience and women who didn't dance formally until joining the squad. Cheryl Jackson, 72, joined in 2019 after cheering in school almost 50 years ago. Kathleen Emerson, 76, joined the Poms just three years ago. She loves rehearsing and performing with the group because it keeps her active. "I'm constantly challenged to learn new routines and not forget the old ones," she said.

Ginger Price, 91, also didn't dance until she was a retiree, joining the Poms in 2012. "Of course, the dancing is very good for the body and the mind," says Price. "It just makes you feel so good and alive."

**"The first time I've ever performed was when I joined the Poms...I was 56. And now I'm 67!"**

Kathy Villa, Marching Director

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Though some joined the group for the undeniable physical benefits of regular dancing, many stayed for the friendship that came with it. "I love the camaraderie," says Esther Hassing, 80, who's been with the Poms for nine years.

Before a performance at another local retirement center, the Poms carpool and get into costume together, just like an athletic team before an away game. Barbara Snyder, 84, helps Ginger, a friend and fellow Pom, get into their matching costumes before a performance. "The girls are great." Ginger shared. "They're always interested in helping you out." Time between shows is often spent together, as friends and teammates.

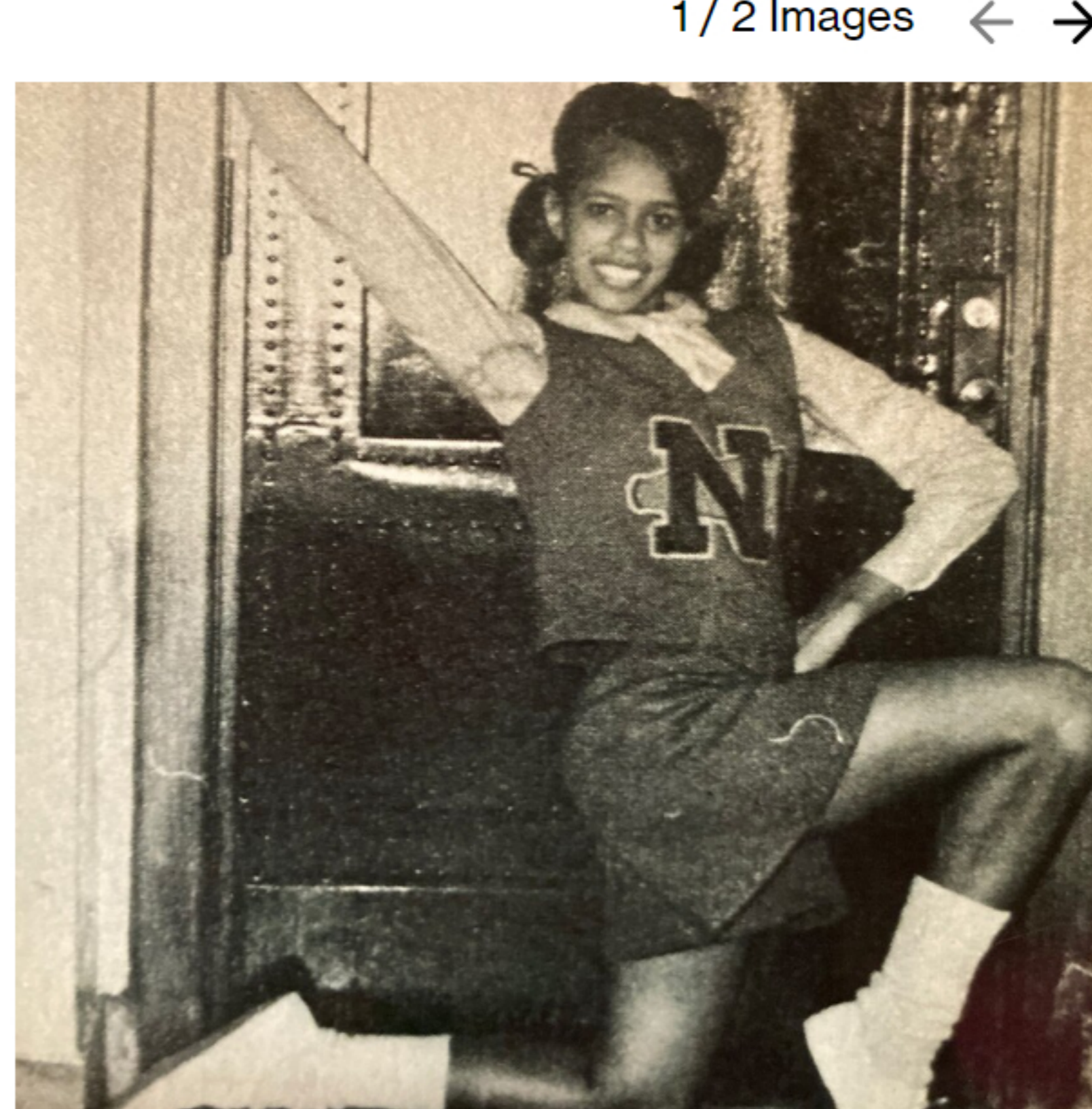
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However beneficial the Poms are for their members and community, their impact is only amplified outside Sun City walls. Today, the Sun City Poms aren't the only 55+ performance group out there. Across the country, new dance and athletic groups are forming specifically for women 50 years and older. Squads such as the **Wisconsin Diamond Dancers**, the **Vegas Golden Gals**, the **Village Twirlers** and the **Virginia Beach Silver Tappers** specialize in everything from tap dancing to baton twirling.

Even more exciting: Mainstream athletic teams have started to follow suit. The Golden State Warriors, a professional San Francisco basketball team, have their own 55+ dance crew: **The hardwood Classics**. Another NBA team, the Denver Nuggets, formed the **Sizzlin' Seniors** in 2019.

"You don't find out initially what the Poms [are] really all about until you experience some of our performances in senior facilities and even high schools," says Cheryl Jackson. "That's when it hit me. It's more than just the makeup and the glitter — it was something that we gave out that resonated with people."



Courtesy of Cheryl Jackson

After the Poms' performance at the Acoya Shea Senior Living Center, a woman from the audience stood up and announced, "I'm 90 and I can still dance!" The Poms agreed. "It was joy," Cheryl confirmed. "It was hope."

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