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NEW ENTERPRISE

Making social isolation a thing of the past

Stitch looking to bump its West Valley numbers

By Chris Caraveo
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Debbie Oliver and Chris Bloom wouldn't know where they would be in their lives without a relatively new social enterprise that started internationally but has now crept into Arizona and the Valley.

"Today's society, we go to work, come home, do your things, go to work next day, over and over," Ms. Oliver said. "It's hard to get out and make friends. We were coming home, having dinner, watching TV, and that's it. "And now, we have friends. It's really cool to be available to do the things with people who like to do the same."

The Chandler sisters have done that through Stitch, a social enterprise looking to address loneliness and social isolation in people over 50. Stitch does this by helping people make new friends in their local community by allowing them to join interest groups, and giving them the opportunity to attend and host activities of their own.

Of those people who joined Stitch in Phoenix five months ago, there has been a 54% decrease in loneliness and isolation, according to a survey. The same people also reported they are now



Phoenix hosted its inaugural Stitch Spring Festival in May, a week-long celebration of activities and events across the city. Stitch is looking to boost its presence in the West Valley, with around 250 members there out of 2,000 Arizona members who mostly live in Phoenix. [Submitted photo]

five times more likely to engage in social activity and 40% more likely to engage in physical activity since before joining Stitch.

Spokeswoman Anastasia Hadjidemetri said Stitch has around 2,000 members in Arizona, with the majority living in Phoenix. But even though Stitch has been around for five years, it launched in the Phoenix area at the beginning of 2019.

Since then, Phoenix members have attended and created a range of activities including coffee meetings, walks at the park, painting classes, concerts, beers and

burgers, and sports.

"We're so very proud of the results," Ms. Hadjidemetri said. "Our goal is to introduce more people in the West Valley to Stitch and to find volunteers (or Community Ambassadors as we like to call them) to help us create fun and engaging activities that help our members get connected. And connected people means we have happy and healthy people."

According to a 2018 national survey by Cigna, loneliness levels reached a record, with nearly half of 20,000 adults reporting they sometimes or always

feel alone. In addition, 40% of survey participants reported they feel isolated and sometimes or always feel their relationships are not meaningful.

Ms. Oliver first heard about Stitch through SilverSneakers, a program that allows people access to multiple health and fitness locations. SilverSneakers was offering free memberships to Stitch. There was an orientation one night, and Ms. Oliver attended.

"I just loved the concept," she said. "Because even though we're at work, it's still hard to make friends."

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TESTIMONY

Mueller: No Russia exoneration for Trump, despite his claims

By Eric Tucker, Mary Clare Jalonick and Michael Balsamo
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Robert Mueller, the taciturn lawyer at the center of a polarizing American drama, bluntly dismissed President Donald Trump's claims of "total exoneration" Wednesday in the federal probe of Russia's 2016 election interference. In a long day of congressional testimony, Mr. Mueller warned that Moscow's actions represented — and still represent — a great threat to American democracy.

Mr. Mueller's back-to-back Capitol Hill appearances, his first since wrapping his two-year Russia probe, carried the prospect of a historic climax to a rare criminal investigation into a sitting American president. But his testimony was more likely to reinforce rather than reshape hardened public opinions on impeachment and the future of Mr. Trump's presidency.

With his terse, one-word answers, and a sometimes stilted and halting manner, Mr. Mueller made clear his desire to avoid the partisan fray and the deep political divisions roiling Congress and the country.

He delivered neither crisp
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