

The Carmel Pine Cone

YOUR SOURCE FOR LOCAL NEWS, ARTS AND OPINION SINCE 1915

It's Valentine's, and Cupid doesn't care how old you are

By ELAINE HESSER

IT'S BEEN captured in bronze on Sixth at Lincoln — the love between two people who seem to have been together forever, and who still adore each other. Many people who have seen George Wayne Lundeen's sculpture, "The Valentine," have probably imagined a romantic backstory for the couple.

The Valentine's couple represents a tiny minority of Americans, however. According to a 2011 report from the U.S. Census Bureau, only about 6 percent of married couples make it to their 50th anniversaries and beyond.

Cold statistics — especially ones like that — don't make for warm nights, especially for people 55 and older who are widowed or divorced. Enter Donna Bailey, who has a master's degree in human relations and specializes in helping grownups find love.

The former Carmel resident now lives in the San Francisco Bay area, but she comes here once a month to provide advice on romance in her local office, visit with her old friends, and hold occasional workshops at The Carmel Foundation on topics like "Finding Love after 55."

Just in time for Valentine's Day, she'll give a free talk on Wednesday, Feb. 8, at 2:30 p.m. in the foundation's Diment Hall. No registration is required. The following Saturday, Feb. 11, from 10 a.m. to noon, she'll give a two-hour, in-depth workshop, called "No More Roadblocks to Love." Pre-registration is required, and there's a \$35 fee.

The first time Bailey gave a similar talk and workshop, three years ago, more than 75 people, ages 48 to 94, showed up. "And all those people thought they were the only ones," she said.

VALENTINE'S

From page 19A

because they started going to church or joined a book club or hiking group.

"I'll ask them, 'How many new people join the group,' and they'll respond, 'about three people a year.' So, that's all the new people they're meeting."

Bailey explained that she often has to help people overcome resistance to internet dating. She said that's a good way to multiply opportunities. "They can't find you," she said.

Another mistake people make involves out-of-date beliefs and myths about gender. For example, many women believe that "all men just want to have sex." While that may have been true in their younger, randier days, it's not as true of men in their 50s and older. Bailey said they want relationships. They want love.

From the men, she sometimes hears, "Women just want me for my money." And she's frank about the fact that men who deal with erectile dysfunction often have issues with self-confidence.

Bailey's also up front when she talks about sexually transmitted diseases. She said that in recent years, adults 60 and older have had a greater increase in those ailments than any other age group. She said quite a few misunderstandings and



PHOTO/MARY SCHLEY

"The Valentine" at the corner of Lincoln and Sixth shows a love that's presumably lasted a lifetime. That's uncommon in this day and age, so the Carmel Foundation's here to help those 55 and older find love again.

Instead, they discovered a roomful of other "vibrant, lively people" who were also looking for love. "They weren't dying anytime soon," Bailey said.

She said that there are some common misbeliefs she encounters in her practice. A lot of them have to do with self-image and self-confidence, but some are more age-specific.

For example, she said, a lot of people will say, "I tried,"

See VALENTINE'S page 31A

assumptions feed into that rise.

First, the risk of pregnancy has been removed, so there's less reason to use condoms. Also, those who have been married believe their partners were monogamous, so they can't imagine they'd be infected — but sadly, sometimes they're mistaken. Finally, there's the notion that "nobody our age is having sex," so they don't have to worry. "That's just not true," Bailey said.

But by far the biggest hurdle for most people re-entering the dating world is fear of loss. "People get their hearts broken," said Bailey. "Love will always end. People are scared to try again."

That anxiety manifests in strange ways, too. She recounted the story of a client who had a girlfriend in a different part of the state, whom he saw about four times a year. When she asked why he didn't spend more time with her, he said she'd expect him to give up drinking his morning cappuccino and reading his Wall Street Journal in peace.

It turned out that he hadn't even discussed the matter with the woman. Bailey gave him some guidance on how to do that, so a newspaper and a coffee didn't stand between him and lasting happiness.

If you're ready for love again, or if you think you might be, join Bailey at the foundation, and as she says, maybe by next Valentine's Day, you'll be sharing a glass of wine and a box of chocolates with someone special.