

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR SENIORS

By Bill Hull, Haskell Senior Living Solutions

### *Step Right Up!*

Here is a Helpful Hint that can promote and enhance your health and safety, enrich your quality of life, improve your communication with the people you love and admire, increase your mental capacity, broaden your awareness of the world around you, simplify complex tasks, solve transportation challenges, and provide you with hours of fun, entertainment, friendship, and connection.

Perhaps this sounds too good to be true, like those tales of the Traveling Medicine Man back in the Old West . ( I love these quirky, human parts to our great American History, don't you?) It was a common sight in many a prairie town for these greedy, flim-flam artists to attract a huge crowd selling all sorts of dollar-a bottle tonics and restoratives for any matter of mental or physical ills. There was Hostetter's Celebrated Stomach Bitters which had an alcohol content of 44.3% by volume. Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound promised women they could avoid operations and nervous breakdowns. There was also Wizard Oil, Kickapoo Indian Oil, Kickapoo Buffalo Salve, and the famous Kickapoo Indian Worm Killer! The "secret ingredients" in many of these tonics turns out to be anything from of alcohol to cocaine and even morphine; so it's no wonder that many people, like Aunt Bea in that famous Andy Griffith tale, found happiness from a swig of the magic elixir.

But put your healthy skepticism aside for a moment and consider the claims above. What if it's true? How much would you be willing to commit of your time and your resources to secure such positive rewards? Where can you find these seemingly too-good-to-be-true benefits? They are yours for the taking with just a few keystrokes on your computer.

I am amazed when I talk to so many seniors who haven't yet decided to make the switch to the computer age. Listen, gas lanterns, wringer washing machines, and a party line were good enough once upon a time; but there comes a time to embrace new technology. In the words of Frank Zappa: "without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible." The computer is the best tool for seniors to overcome limitations, boundaries, and obstacles and release creative energy. Even though it can be intimidating at first, I assure you that an amazing universe will expand before you by learning just a few rudimentary computer skills. If you have been thinking you could never master a computer, here are some tips to help you find an entrance onto the information highway:

1. Jump into the computer age. It has never been easier or less expensive to own and use a computer. Many resources are designed especially to help seniors get started and make the most of the experience. You don't have to know how to type, you can even get a keyboard with giant letters and a mouse (a glorified clicker) that is easy to handle. With a little help, you can find a simple system that will do everything you want to do with a few keystrokes. If you would like to read a book about all this before you move forward, check out [The Senior Sleuth's Guide to Technology for Seniors](#) by David Peterka. (Of course this comes in a large print edition!)

2. Have someone else help you set up a simple computer system. Perhaps you would love to communicate daily with a relative who is living overseas, make someone a birthday card, or capture all of your old photographs so they will never get faded or torn. Maybe you would like to know about a country where you will be visiting, or find an easy way to keep track of your calories. Maybe you just want to learn about every National Park in America, read *The London Times* or collect a history of all the Presidents' wives. The possibilities are endless, so talk with someone who knows you and can steer you to a dependable system that is adequate but not excessive. Face reality: Buying a computer is not like buying a refrigerator or a new stereo. You will need to replace it more often than every fifteen or twenty years; but after you get started, you will want to keep up.

3. Go your own speed on the Information Highway. Yes, there are computer gurus who work, play and perform limitless activities on the computer. We call these teenagers! Somehow they know all this stuff just from drinking milk. Don't try to figure out how it works. You and I will never understand them, but the computer is still the best and cheapest way to accomplish incredible, life-enriching activities. Start slowly and add as you go. It seems like a page out of a science fiction novel, but the power to dramatically make your life easier and better is right at your fingertips: You do not have to be a genius to be skilled in the following: **Communication** ( with or without a live view of the other person, anywhere in the world!) . **Information:** find out anything, at any time; and I mean *anything!* You can save it, print it, file it, or send it to someone else. **Pictures:** talk about capturing your Kodak moments! **Health & Safety:** You can monitor your financial accounts, your medical records, your home security system, and dozens of other important aspects of your life within your own four walls.

4. Search freely. Save carefully. Delete often. Here is an important tip: Just because something shows up in your "mailbox" doesn't mean you have to open it. Don't read everything that comes, and don't believe everything you read. Don't open any mail from anyone you don't know. With a little practice you will be able to tell what's really important.

5. Find other seniors who are learning like you. In fact, you can use your computer to connect with other seniors in just this way. Like never before, older Americans are demanding and finding the solutions to their biggest questions on the internet. Checkout *BigScreenLive* and *Seniornet* just for starters.

As important as it is for us to keep our feet firmly planted in the values and lessons of our history, there is something within us all that extends our hands to the stars to welcome the promise of a better future. It isn't snake oil or magic. It is the power of information, available like never before to anyone who has the will to begin. Step right up!