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stores of SE15

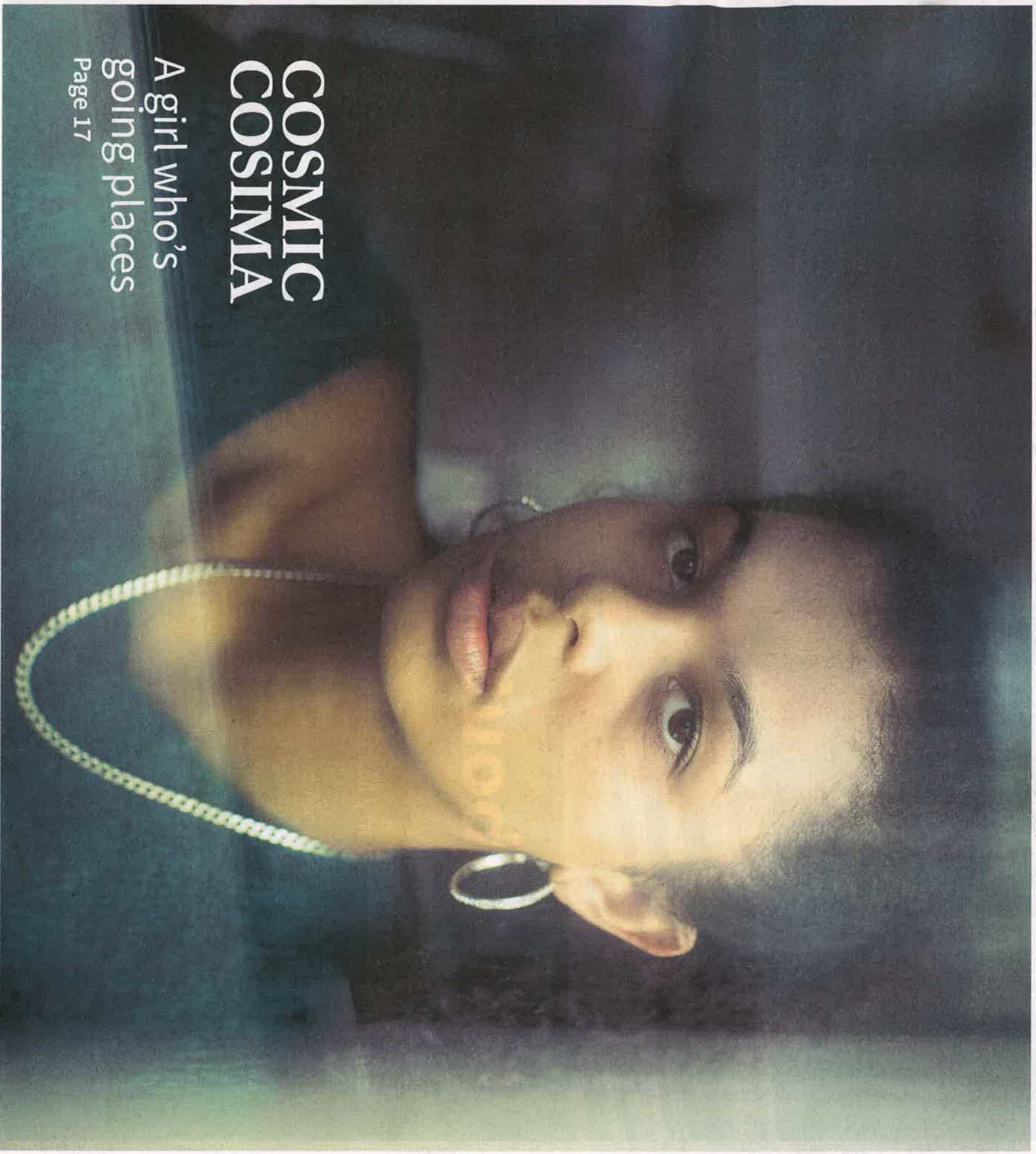
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A free newspaper for Peckham and Nunhead

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THE

PECKHAM PECULIAR



COSMIC COSIMA

A girl who's
going places

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Male bonding

GENERATIONS OF MEN HAVE SOUGHT SANCTUARY FROM THE WORLD IN THEIR TRUSTY GARDEN SHEDS. Now a communal one has opened in Peckham, giving men over 50 a chance to make and mend things while swapping skills and socialising

WORDS LUKE G WILLIAMS PHOTOS LIMA CHARLIE

The UK Men's Sheds Association defines a "men's shed" as "a larger version of the typical man's shed in the garden". The aim of these community-based sheds is to offer a space where men can share tools, resources and skills to work on projects that interest them.

The men's sheds phenomenon began in Australia, where there are now more than 1,000 in operation. Such sheds are regarded as a vital part of the country's health infrastructure, through their ability to bring men together and promote improved mental and physical health, as well as employability.

Thanks to the work of the charity Age UK Lewisham and Southwark, Peckham now possesses a men's shed of its own, in the form of the Menders Club, an initiative that was launched this year thanks to lottery funding and is fast developing into a vital and much-needed resource for local men over the age of 50.

Age UK Lewisham and Southwark's community partnerships and participation manager Claire Gaulier, the mastermind behind the project, explains how the Menders Club idea came about:

"The club is part of a project called Communities Living Well, in which we set up free activities for local older people with the support of local groups, businesses and volunteers," she says.

"With our original projects, we didn't deliberately target women but it was mostly women who came to the activities we offered. Activities often depended on the volunteers' interests and it was mainly women who volunteered, so we decided to provide something that was specifically aimed at men."

The Menders Club was the outcome of this desire to further engage the male community, particularly those among the over-50 age group – where unemployment rates are often high, and many men find that their social options are limited to the working men's club, the betting shop or the pub.

"Many of our members want to feel useful," Claire explains. "The majority are in their late 50s or early 60s. Some are still at work and some have been made redundant, but whatever their background, the group helps them keep busy, pursue their interests and exchange skills."

"The idea is for them to meet up, think of projects and be able to dream a bit as well as learn new skills. It's about getting out of the house and doing things they might not otherwise be able to do or have the space to do."

"For example, several members of the group have talked about wanting to fix bikes. Another member is a French polisher who works in a hotel and just wants a space in which he can

create things that aren't related to his work."

The logistics of finding a location for the Menders Club, as well as the necessary insurance cover to allow members to operate sometimes complex machinery, have been difficult, delaying the amount of practical work that the group has been able to embark on so far and leading to several moves of venue.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of the core members of the club is undimmed, despite these teething problems. "The group started meeting at the end of March but because of the insurance issues we weren't able to start in the workshop until September," Claire says.

"But the group are still here and are so enthusiastic. They've printed their own T-shirts, they've designed their own logo, they have their own Twitter account (@ClubMenders) and they've even created a small promotional video about the group. The funding ends in November but as long as we have the right people and we have a space, everything will be OK."

While Claire has been responsible for the logistics of the project, the group's day-to-day facilitator is Axel Sabass, the lead volunteer who now works for the charity as their main handy person.

I caught up with Axel and several members of the Menders Club after being invited along

one Friday to the old Peckham Library building on Peckham Hill Street, where they have been meeting for several months.

After a warm welcome from the group, including tea and biscuits, Axel explains how they operate. "We meet every Friday from 10am until 2pm," he tells me. "As well as learning new skills, the Menders Club is also about social interaction, so we start off with a tea or coffee and a chance to share our experiences and thoughts since the last meeting."

"Then we discuss ideas we want to explore and talk about visits to other sheds. We're open-minded about what activities will take place – whether it's bike repair, computer repair or something else."

When asked to explain the impact the group has had on participants, Axel pinpoints the importance of men being able to access a safe and positive social space. "Men often have a very macho mindset and refuse to admit weakness," he says. "You know, it's that attitude of, 'I'm alright, mate!'"

"But if you are over 40 or 50 and suddenly find yourself unemployed it can be very hard to find work and loneliness can develop. I don't want to say anything negative about job centres, but once you get sucked into that cycle it gets you down."

Axel admits that he speaks from personal experience. "I'm 59 now," he says. "I was a carpenter and a site foreman for many years but had to give it up because of health issues. Later I worked in IT and web design but then I was unemployed for a few years.

"At my age I found it very hard to find work. Once many employers find out someone is over 50 they don't always consider them, as they think there won't be any return on their investment.

"In 2014 I started as a volunteer for Age UK Lewisham and Southwark. I did graphic design for them and this volunteering ultimately proved to be a route back into employment for me. Around December last year Claire asked if I'd be interested in helping to start up this enterprise and I said yes."

Axel stresses that the men who attend the Menders Club come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances. "The group is very varied. We have people who are retired, people who are unemployed, people who are working, people with health issues and people with special needs. It's a mixed environment and we want to be completely inclusive, as well as helpful to people.

"Hopefully the Menders Club can be a stepping stone to employment for some people, while for others who are maybe retired and lonely, we hope to take them out of their loneliness in a positive way.

"The location in Peckham is also important; in this area a lot of people live in small flats and don't have the facilities to repair or make things at home, so we provide them with that opportunity.

"Our guys here are joyful and positive and there's an attitude of 'we can do it': it's a relaxed atmosphere but also serious. We're a very friendly, open-minded and welcoming



drinking in the pub it only makes things worse. The Menders Club is a way of looking outwards rather than inwards and I've found that very useful. I enjoy coming here. I like the people, I get on with them and there's no pressure."

Another member, Alan, concurs. "It's great to come here and meet other people, and find out more about life and what other people have done," he tells me.

"The Menders Club is about helping each other out and cooperation. My skills are in metalwork but I'm looking forward to learning from others about woodwork, or about repairing bikes. You don't have to be brilliant at any of these skills to join us.

"Everyone has gifts that they can share and it's great to work with other people, it gives you a broader perspective. Society tends to write people off when they are over 50 and see us as old age pensioners, but there's a lot of scope for us. We over-50s certainly aren't finished!"

One big challenge that lies ahead for the Menders Club is the fact that their current base at the old Peckham Library building, provided by local charity Pecan, is earmarked for demolition in early 2017.

"We will need a new base," Axel admits. "So we are looking for that as well as for further funding and sponsorship within the community. We're reaching out to companies in order to build relationships that will help us sustain the group. Donations of anything such as tools or materials are also always welcome."

For more information about Communities Living Well projects or to donate tools and materials, email living.well@ageuklands.org.uk or call 020 7358 4079. The Menders Club is open every Friday at 167 Peckham Hill Street from 10am-2pm and anybody is welcome to pop in and find out more.

THE MONTEPELLIER'S BACK ROOM CINEMA

EST. 2010

SEPT 18 - 28

AUTHOR: THE JT LEROY STORY

DIR. JEFF FEUERZEIG



WEITNER

DIR. JOSH KRIEGMAN AND ELYSE STEINBERG



OCT 2 - 12

OCT 16 - 26 SOUL GRAPES

DIR. JERRY ROTHWELL, REUBEN ATLAS



GUEST NIGHTS

DOC: SUPPER DOCSUPPER.COM - 10 SEPT, 13 OCT

SOUTH LONDON SHORTS SOUTHLONDONSHORTS.COM - 15 SEPT, 10 OCT

PECKHAM MUSIC VIDEO CLUB - 22 SEPT, 20 OCT

TICKETS £3.95

6:30 & 8:30

SUN - WED

FOR TICKETS AND
INFO VISIT:
BACKROOMCINEMA.CO.UK

THE MONTEPELLIER, 43 CHOUVERT RD, SE15 4AR



The Donkey Sanctuary

at THE WHITE HORSE

The team behind The White Horse and The Montpellier join forces with Chris Lawes to bring the finest cocktails to the people of Peckham Rye.

Serving a specially designed menu of carefully shaken creations as well as house favourite The Donkey Punch, The Donkey Sanctuary will also help save Sundays with an array of beautifully mixed Bloody Marys and soothing Hard Shakes.

The new bar, situated in the back of The White Horse, has been treated to a leafy makeover by London Terrariums and will host deejays every Friday & Saturday and live Jazz every Sunday.

Opening Weekend

Friday 30th September

T. Esselle (Yam Records)

Saturday 1st October

Patrick Little with guest Mr Pedro (NTS)

www.donkeysanctuaryse15.com

Shows

Thursday
7pm - 12am

Friday
7pm - 1am

Saturday
5pm - 1am

Sunday
12pm - 10pm