



**MARK FREEMAN
ON THE NET**

This year, see how the Web can help you be healthier, happier and in control of your life. I've listed America's 10 most popular New Year's resolutions and how the Web can make them a reality.

10 Quit smoking
If you want to kick the habit this year, look online for resources and communities. Smokefree.gov provides a quitting plan for those who don't know where to start. After reviewing these basic plans, join communities like Quitnet.com to meet other people who are in the process of quitting and can help you quit, too. Quitnet tracks the amount of money saved and years added to your life by quitting.

9 Learn something new
I love Wikipedia.org - it's the best place on the Web for the knowledge-hungry person with a busy schedule. I guarantee you'll learn something new if you visit the site just once a day. Read the daily featured article on Wikipedia's home page for a taste of the site's 2 million entries. Recent features included California condors, Uranus and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." But be

New Year's Web-olutions

warned - some Wikipedia entries are more factual than others.

8 Go back to school
Before you pack your books, check out DegreeScout.com/degree-blog, a blog that advises "mature students" who want to resume or enhance their education. It has tips about avoiding fake Internet universities and tips for "preserving your sanity when returning to school." The author explains that future students should set aside the desire for academic perfection and instead "try to achieve excellence in your schoolwork, maintain balance in your life, and enjoy the journey."

7 Get out of debt
If you spent too much on Christmas gifts in December, there's help online. You can check out the website Icanhelpyougetoutofdebt.com for useful articles about dealing with mortgage and credit card payments and managing your debt. The site also provides loan calculators and consolidation advice. Also look at Bloggingawaydebt.com, a blog that gives debt reduction a more personal touch. Tricia, the blog's author, uses it to celebrate victories over her family's nearly \$40,000 credit card debt.

6 Help others
You can use the Web to find out which organizations will put your donation to good use. Charitynavigator.org

investigates a group's financial information to see how much is actually spent on charitable programs. The site illustrates the data with helpful pie graphs and revenue charts. It also offers tips for potential donors and lists nearly 1,500 4-star charities like the African Wildlife Foundation and the International Children's Fund.

5 Take a trip
Plan your next adventure by investigating Travelocity.com's Last Minute vacation packages. These packages, which can be booked two weeks in advance, have themes like "Ski" or "Casino." You can also choose from trips that cost less than \$250 per person. Travelocity and its rivals, Expedia.com and Orbitz.com, allow you to plan more extensive vacations such as Caribbean cruises, as well.

4 Get organized
Defeat your junk in 2008 by following www.Get-organized.com's helpful tips. Run by a professional organizer, the site advises people how to reduce stress and simplify their life by conquering their closet and managing their time. The site also discusses why it's important to be organized and how to avoid becoming a pack-rat. Here's some advice for paper pushers: "Don't use a bulletin board. It's a burial ground."

3 Find a better job
Stop by Indeed.com to find your dream job in

2008. Indeed searches newspapers, company career pages and other job search sites to give you more thorough results than regular classifieds or Craigslist. Just enter a job title and city and you're good to go. You can even ditch the long commute and search for jobs within 5 miles of Clayton. I'm using Indeed to find summer internships in the area.

2 Lose weight
WebMD.com's Health and Diet Center offers advice for those looking to shed a few pounds. The comprehensive health site helps people figure out if they really need to lose weight and what options are available. WebMD also discusses diet scams and how to set realistic goals. A tip for those with a sweet tooth: Try dipping healthy fruits into chocolate to get your fix while keeping the calories under control.

1 Spend more time with friends and family
Although social networks are great, I sometimes find myself spending more time on Facebook than with my family. For 2008, I've resolved to invest in more "unplugged" time.

Mark Freeman is a student at St. Mary's College in Moraga, studying economics and English. He enjoys creative writing and is a reporter for the school paper. Questions/comments can be sent to mfreeman543@gmail.com.

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All ages are right for playing music

Many people seem to think that learning to play music can only be done when one is a child. I'm always amazed at how many times someone will say, "I took piano lessons as a young girl (or boy), and I should have kept it up," implying that they're now "too old" to take or resume their lessons.

It's never too late to learn how to play a musical instrument. True, some people are more naturally musically talented than others. But it all starts with desire. If it's genuinely in your heart to learn to play an instrument, you can, no matter how old or young you are.

A few years ago, I met a man who told me he'd recently retired and had just turned 72 years old. One of the things he'd finally gotten around to was taking piano lessons. He'd put it off his entire life, and he was having a ball learning to



**JIM HUDAK
MUSIC NOTES**

play. His relatively late start wasn't holding him back at all. He can serve as an inspiration for all of us.

On the other end of the spectrum, I recently spent some time introducing children as young as 6 to the basics of piano playing. The hardest part about playing the piano at such a young age is physical limitations. Most kids that age have tiny hands and can't get much action going with the piano

keys. Furthermore, their legs are so short they usually can't reach the floor, or even the piano's foot pedals. Still, they weren't too young to begin their appreciation of how sounds and notes fit together to make music. Even learning the basics of the joy of music is rewarding.

Every musician started from the same place. I remember the great pleasure of learning my first song on the piano. It sounded so good to me, which was enough impetus to learn another song, and another one after that. It even got to where the lessons themselves, the scales and exercises and learning to read music, were fun.

But it's the songs themselves that bring the most delight. It's an indescribable feeling to be able to play a song you love from start to finish.

Piano is a wonderful "stand

alone" instrument. It's a bit like having an orchestra at your fingertips. But other instruments are just as important. Guitar, flute, saxophone, percussion and a whole list of less "popular" instruments are there to be learned and enjoyed. After all, you need not be an expert or a professional to have fun playing music. It's all about the personal enjoyment and a certain Zen-like therapy that playing music can provide.

Forcing someone to learn to play music seems wrong. But if the desire is there, it's never too early - or too late - to take some lessons and learn to play a musical instrument.

Jim Hudak's Music Notes column appears regularly in the Pioneer. Contact him at jimmy-dak@pacbell.net. His piano music CD's are available from his Web site at www.jhudak.com or at amazon.com.

One Warm Coat Project
Thank you very much for your participation in this important community project.

Because of your support we collected more than 30,000 coats, sweaters, blankets and warm clothes!

We look forward to community support for additional community projects in 2008!

Happy New Year, and thanks for making a difference in the lives of families in our area who are at risk.

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