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VA Oklahoma City
Health Care System

Mobile Medical Unit

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Wade Vlosich



OKC Veterans Administrator Healthcare System director.

Story by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

The Oklahoma City Veterans Affairs Oklahoma City Healthcare System has become the fastest-growing VA in the nation, according to Fiscal Year 2023 statistics.

Wade Vlosich, OKC VA HCS director, attributes the rapid growth to community engagement and outreach efforts, particularly to isolated Veterans.

"Many Veterans are not sure if they are eligible for VA healthcare," Vlosich said. "We have traveled to remote locations to personally reach out to our Veteran population and provide answers to their questions through our PACT Act resource fairs."

In August and September of this year, Vlosich said OKC VA averaged about 22 new registrations a day.

"Overall, this fiscal year, we saw 13,994 first-time users, which was 18 percent of our overall users within the Oklahoma City VA," he said. "That is

about a 20 percent increase over the last four years, when most other VA facilities average between 1-3 percent annual growth.

Vlosich said keeping up with established patients with so many new patients coming in presents a challenge, but the facility is also expanding and growing to meet all satisfaction and clinical care needs.

With new equipment arriving and construction constantly happening, Vlosich is often seen in scrubs instead of a suit as he inspects new specialty and construction areas throughout the downtown facility.

Expansion is the primary focus for this health care system which includes Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC). The VA now has two clinics in North OKC, including one that provides dental care.

VHA implemented these clinics to make access to health care easier. These clinics provide the most common

See VA Page 4



The OKC Veterans Affairs Health Care System leadership and Shawnee VA Clinic Staff cut the ribbon during the Grand Reopening of the Shawnee VA Clinic on Sept. 18th.

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The Kiowa Black Leggings Warrior Society Honor Guard - North Oklahoma City VA Outpatient Clinic.

VA

Continued from Page 2



outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting a larger medical center. VHA continues to expand their network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, making access to care closer to home. One of its newest rural clinics is in Shawnee, OK.

"Oklahoma City (VA) has grown by 22 percent total since 2019," Vlosich said. "We're growing so rapidly, and we're trying to build all these new clinics. For instance, new clinics are pending approval to be built in Woodward and we're expanding our Stillwater and Yukon clinics."

Another area of growth is occurring among this facility's female Veteran population. Expanded services for women now include a mammography clinic and plans to build a new women's only stand-alone clinic.

Other plans include securing facilities for inpatient services, substance abuse treatment and long-term care as well as opening a Fisher House for Veterans' families.

Vlosich said the VA has acquired the former Norman Specialty Hospital near the corner of Robinson Street and Berry Road to convert into a new VA hospital, and is redesigning the facility to meet both the inpatient substance abuse and skilled nursing

facility building requirements.

The new hospital will have 53 beds — 26 for skilled nursing, and 26 for inpatient substance abuse treatment — and serve up to 78,000 veterans who live in the Oklahoma City area.

The 26 substance abuse beds will be used for the highest level of rehabilitation services for patients who are diagnosed with alcohol or drug addictions or substance use disorder.

"One of the things that some of our younger and older veterans face is substance abuse treatment issues," Vlosich said. "We're building a substance abuse treatment facility in Norman to help with that. There are none in the state of Oklahoma right now."

Vlosich said homelessness with Veterans is a growing problem in Oklahoma.

OKC VA HCS previously launched a mobile medical unit to treat the homeless population and even established their own ambulance service.

"We've got a great homeless program here in Oklahoma City," he said. "We are the second VA in the nation to get a mobile homeless van. We call it MMU, Mobile Medical Unit, and they travel around different areas providing healthcare to homeless veterans at their homeless camps or the homeless shelters because a lot of them don't want to come in, they have mental health issues or other things. We'll drive out there and



provide medical care to our homeless veterans and bring the van back in."

Vlosich said the OKC VA HCS continues to work with the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Programs to expand their capabilities.

The goal of OKC VA HCS leadership is to eliminate Veteran homelessness by providing shelter, transitional and permanent housing to Veterans to those who need it the most. Some examples are providing employment and different legal services through the Veterans Justice Outreach program.

Throughout 2022, VA staff helped Veterans find permanent housing such as apartments or houses that Veterans could rent or own, often with a subsidy to help make the housing affordable. VA staff also helped some Veterans end their homelessness by reuniting them with family and friends.

Vlosich said Veterans have another tool with the VA Health Chat which allows Veterans to immediately connect with VA health care clinicians over text-messaging.

The VA Health Chat App provides easy, online access to chat with VA staff when you have minor health questions, want to schedule an appointment, have a non-life-threatening health concern, and more.

"We've instituted an app now that if you need to talk to somebody in our community care office, you can go online and chat with them through the app as opposed to spending 30, 40 minutes on the phone. It's easier," he

said.

Vlosich said the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act is one of the largest VA Health Care expansion programs and extends eligibility for Veterans who have been exposed or possibly exposed to toxic environments while serving in Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras.

Over the last year, Indian Health Service (IHS) and The Department of Veteran Affairs have partnered together, holding PACT Act outreach events across Oklahoma. This joint effort has assisted Tribal, non-Tribal Veterans, and Veterans in rural areas to receive healthcare services, education, and other benefits they deserve.

Vlosich said hiring fairs and recruitment incentives have helped bring new employees on board.

"On average, we're bringing on about 30 to 40 staff members every two weeks just to meet demand," Vlosich said. "We've added new primary care teams for most of our community-based outpatient clinics."

Vlosich also acknowledged the efforts of current employees during this season of growth. He said OKC VA employees have stepped up to meet Veterans' needs.

"They've worked overtime," he said. "During COVID, we had employees spending the night in the hospital just to take care of our Veterans. We appreciate their dedication because, without them, many could go without healthcare, and our Veterans are our most precious resource."

For more information on the PACT Act see the press release on page 11.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.va.gov/oklahoma-city-health-care/>

SNL PUBLISHERS NOTE: Let's have some fun!

Our December Christmas TOON HUNT WINNER IS...

1st place - GWEN GILLUM and 2nd place - Rick DeSpain while Angie Harney was 3rd! Gwen texted 20 TOONS AT 6:48 p.m. December 8th and Rick Texted 20 TOONS December 11th at 11:35 a.m and Angie Texted 20 TOONS December 20th at 3:06 p.m.!



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Faith Leads to 50 Year Career

RN Still Working at 79



by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Joella Francis credits God for leading her into a RN nursing career that has spanned over 50 years, including today at age 79, where she continues to work part-time at Pioneer Technology Center in Ponca City.

"I will be a nurse forever. I would never change my vocation," she said. "I give all my credit to Jesus Christ because I'm a Christian, and so He has led me and guided me all the way. He gives me the ability to have, I think, a real love towards patients and people. I couldn't do it without the Lord. I haven't always given Him credit, but now when I look back on my life, I'm almost 80, I know He was there and guiding me all the way.

Francis' nursing journey began at a young age.

"My grandmother on my dad's side was a dietary aide at Wesley Hospital in Wichita, and I would go with her when

she passed snacks to patients. I couldn't go in the rooms, but I could help her get the snacks ready and be up on the floors when we passed them to the patients. That is where I got my first thoughts that I might want to be a nurse."

Francis graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1966. During her education, she worked as a student nurse for OU Children's Hospital for \$8 per shift as a junior and \$10 per shift as a senior nursing student. She met her husband Richard during her time at OU and they were married when she was a junior in nursing school.

After graduation, she worked for Children's Hospital for approximately two years. Francis and her husband later moved to Norman where he attended OU.

"We moved to Norman and I went to work for Primrose Nursing Home. I



Joella Francis, RN has been in the nursing field for over 50 years, and still works part-time at age 79.

worked there for about three years. After having our first child, I returned to the workforce for the Norman Public School as a practical nursing instructor. I was only there about a year, and then we

moved to Duncan, and that's where I did most of my nursing at the Medical Center Hospital in Duncan, which is what it was called then, she said.

See FRANCIS Page 7



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FRANCIS

Continued from Page 6

Francis said she wore several hats working at Duncan.

"I did all kinds of things there," she said. "I've been an educator, Director of Nursing. I was a house supervisor. I helped set up their first coronary care unit, because they were just being developed at that time. I think it was the early seventies. A couple of other nurses and I went to coronary care school for two weeks and then set up the system for the hospital. During that time, I had two more children. I continued to work full-time, but because of family obligations, I worked nights in ICU, ER and supervisor for several years. I also started to do some part-time teaching at Red River Technology Center as a practical nursing instructor."

Francis said they were in the homebuilding business in Duncan, and when the oil bust came in 1985, they moved to Texas.

"I worked in an ICU in San Marcos during that time," she said. "We then moved to McAlester due to my husband's job. I went to work at McAlester Hospital in ICU and then I worked for Kiamichi Technology Center as a practical nursing instructor."

Due to better job opportunities, they decided to move back to Duncan where Francis became the Coordinator for the Practical Nursing program at Red River Technology Center.

"Because of our children being college age, we moved to Stillwater and I then began working at Meridian Technology Center as a practical nursing instructor," she said. "We moved to Connecticut for my husband's job and I went to work for a large nursing home facility as a nursing educator."

Francis said during that time, her parents who lived in Braman needed care as her dad was very sick.

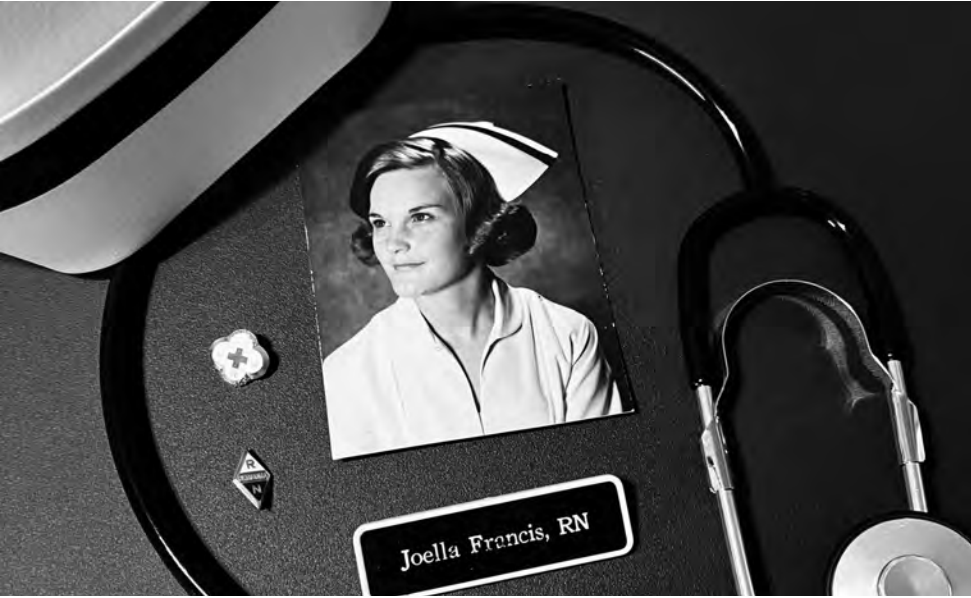
"On my way home to Ponca City, my daughter called me and said there was a Practical Nursing Coordinator job at the Ponca City Pioneer Technology Center," she said. "I worked there for about 10 years as the Practical Nursing Coordinator and retired in 2010."

Francis didn't stay retired long.

"I stayed off for about three years, and then (Pioneer Technology Center) called me," she said. "Because I have nursing home experience and was an RN, they needed someone to check off nurse aides testing skills. They have to do a skills checkoff, and they need somebody to come and do their skills checkoff testing. I'm still working, but it's like every other month. Sometimes I work three days, sometimes it's two days. It depends on how big their nurse aide class is."

Francis said one of her joys from nursing has been taking care of patients.

"I've always loved nursing. I love taking care of people. I love being with students and patients together," she said. "My favorite thing besides just being a



Francis credits her faith for leading her into her nursing career which continues today at age 79.

plain old nurse, was to be with the students and with their patients and helping them learn, and see students grow in their knowledge and see students pass their boards. It is a joy to see young ladies or gentlemen, who thought they couldn't do anything in this world become very good Practical Nurses."

Francis said she enjoys being a mentor to nursing students.

"A lot of them go on and get their RN, so I feel like I've been an instrument in helping them to realize that life is out there for them, and they can do things," she said. "I'm very proud of my students that I had because a lot of them didn't

think they could do anything when they came to our school."

Francis turns 80 in March, and has no plans to slow down anytime soon. She has just completed her CEU's required to renew her license in March.

"I don't ever consider myself an old lady, but I know I am," she said. "I don't ever see myself as that, because I stay very active in what I do. That's another reason I like to work. I help with art in the Christian school at our church. I stay very, very active. I have many hobbies, 13 grandchildren to love, I do not plan to slow down yet. I give all that credit to the Lord for giving me good health."

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BEETLE BAILEY, BLONDIE AND ZIT! Let's keep it going!



Loved all the entries. Let's do it again! We have an ALL NEW CARTOON PAGE! Beetle Bailey, Blondie and Zit will be gracing our NewsMagazine and your job will be to locate TOONS related to those cartoons! You already know the routine. TOONS are scattered throughout this issue. Count the related TOONS and TEXT the total number, with your name and phone number, to 405-631-5100. 1st and 2nd texter with correct number, WINS a free one year subscription to SN&L (\$43.75 value each) PLUS a \$25 gift card! 3rd place wins a \$25 Gift Card! All entries will receive a free copy of our digital Flip Page Edition of SN&L each month (you must provide an email address)! Everyone's a winner! TOONS are not hidden, but look in stories, ads and features!

IMPORTANT NOTE: Contest begins January 5th and ends January 31! No entries will be accepted prior to 01/05/24.

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**"My feet feel like they're on fire."
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"I can't sleep, my hands and feet
tingle all night."**

What do all of these people have in common? They suffer from **peripheral neuropathy**. It's estimated that more than 20 million people in the United States have peripheral neuropathy. Unfortunately this figure may be significantly higher as the disease is often misdiagnosed because of its wide array of symptoms.

Toni Twitty of Be Well Acupuncture in Edmond, OK shares this belief. "I've been treating neuropathy, in all its various forms, for over a decade and so often my patients come to me because of the symptoms not because of a diagnosis. They saw one of my television specials, or read a testimonial of another patient and say to themselves, 'hey, I feel the same thing'."

Betty M. of Oklahoma City testified to this, "I remember my husband driving me to my consultation and I saw a woman running just outside our neighborhood. I was so envious- I kept thinking, 'I would give anything just to walk again'. My primary care doctor told me my troubles with pain and balance were just symptoms of old age and gave me a prescription. I was so depressed."

Fortunately, Betty would eventually see a review of Toni Twitty talking about similar symptoms and how she offers a real solution at Be Well Acupuncture. "I just knew I had to see her. She was my last hope."

"Almost all of our patients come to us with a story similar to Betty's. They've been everywhere else. They've been told there is no hope. They've been told, 'it's just part of getting older,'" shares Brooke, a Patient Care Technician at Be Well Acupuncture. "It just breaks my heart but I know that we can help people like Betty so I'm always so happy when they walk through our door."

Those diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy often face a grim reality; Western medicine declares there is no solution while most alternative therapies carry huge price tags and offer little to no resolve. Which is why Toni Twitty and the staff at Be Well

pride themselves on being, 'the last resort with the best results'.

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves. This damage is commonly caused by low blood flow in the hands and feet. Low blood flow results in lack of nutrients; the nerves then begin to degenerate and die which causes pain ranging from discomfort to debilitating. Because neuropathy is a degenerative condition, once those nerves begin to deteriorate they will continue to do so until they completely expire, leaving those suffering with crippling balance issues. "In this case the absence of pain is not a good thing," shares Dr. Toni. "This usually indicates that your nerves are hanging on by a fragile thread."

So how exactly is Dr. Toni able to reverse the effects of this degenerative disease? "Acupuncture has been used to increase blood flow for thousands of years. It helps get the nutrients to the nerves. But the real magic happens when I integrate ATP Resonance BioTherapy™. This is tech that was originally developed by NASA to expedite recovering and healing."

**"I just can't say enough
about Be Well," Betty
shared joyfully. "My
husband and I moved here
3 years ago to be near our
grandchildren. I always
stayed home because of
the pain and discomfort. I
couldn't keep up.
Yesterday I walked around
the park with him! Next
week we're taking the
grandkids with us! I am
truly living life these days."**

According to Betty's test results, she has seen a 74% improvement in pain and functionality, which is on par with a majority of our patients," shares Paige. "But more important than those test results is the joy she's expressed being here and hearing about all the amazing things she's able to do because she feels great!"

By seamlessly blending the ancient science of acupuncture with modern medical solutions, Be Well Acupuncture has achieved a 90% success rate in reversing the effects of neuropathy. She starts each patient with an initial consultation during which a sensory exam is performed. "This not only aids in making a proper diagnosis but it helps to define just how much nerve damage has occurred," tells the doctor. "This is important because if a patient has suffered more than 95% damage, there is little that I can do to help them. I'm familiar with the medical miracle but I know my limits as a practitioner and the limits of my medicine."

When it comes to treating peripheral neuropathy, regardless of its origin, early detection greatly improves your chances of full recovery.

If you or someone you love are suffering with chronic pain that presents as burning, tingling, or 'pins and needles' or you've recently been diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy, it's important to know that there are options. There is hope.

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VA Delivered More Than \$2.2 billion In Earned Benefits To Veterans And Survivors

Today, VA announced that Veterans and their survivors have filed more than one million claims for toxic exposure-related benefits under the **PACT Act** since President Biden signed it into law Aug. 10, 2022. VA has processed more than 551,000 of these claims, granting 77.9% of them and awarding more than \$2.2 billion in earned benefits to Veterans and survivors. Supporting Veterans and their families is a core pillar in President Biden's Unity Agenda for the nation, and today's announcement helps deliver on his promise to comprehensively address military related toxic exposure.

Thanks to the largest outreach campaign in VA history, Veterans and survivors are applying for their earned benefits at record rates. In this fiscal year alone, Veterans and survivors have submitted 2.29 million total claims (PACT and non-PACT) — 40.4% more year-to-date than last fiscal year, which was the previous all-time record. Veterans have also submitted more than 2.1 million “**intentions to file**” during this fiscal year — 53.1% more than all of last fiscal year and also an all-time record.

The PACT Act is the biggest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in decades. VA encourages all **eligible** Veterans and survivors to **file a claim — or submit their intent to file a claim** — for PACT Act-related benefits now.

“Thanks to President Biden, the heroes who fought for our country are now getting health care and compensation for the conditions that followed them home from war,” said *VA Secretary Denis McDonough*. “We’re proud that more than one million Veterans and survivors have applied for their hard-earned benefits to date, but this is just the beginning — and we won’t rest until every Veteran and every survivor gets the VA health care and benefits they deserve.”



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Partly due to the PACT Act, VA is delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before. Key results to date include:

- **Delivering benefits to Veterans and their survivors:** VA has processed 1.85 million total Veteran claims (PACT and non-PACT) thus far in this fiscal year —15.7% more to date than last fiscal year and already surpassing last year's all-time record total of 1.7 million claims processed.

- **Increasing Veteran access to health care:** Since Aug. 10, 378,995 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care. This includes more than 158,691 enrollees from the PACT Act population (Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 era Veterans).

- **Screening Veterans for toxic exposures:** More than 4.4 million enrolled Veterans have received 5-minute screenings for toxic exposures from VA under the PACT Act.

Right now, there is also a **special enrollment period** for Veterans to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Specifically, until 11:59 p.m., local time, Sept. 30, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013, are eligible to enroll in VA health care without first applying for disability compensation benefits. VA encourages all of these Veterans to visit **VA.gov/PACT** or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and sign up for VA health care before the deadline.

VA is delivering health care and benefits at record rates partly due to a dramatic increase in hiring at VA. For the first time in VA's history, the Veterans Health Administration has over 400,000 employees and the Veterans Benefits Administration has over 31,000 employees — and both organizations are growing at the fastest rates in 20 years. Moving forward, VA will continue to modernize and expand capacity to deliver health care and benefits to Veterans as quickly and effectively as possible.

For more information on VA's implementation of the PACT Act, visit the PACT Act Dashboard. VA is publishing this **dashboard** every other Friday to document the implementation of this legislation and showcase its impact on Veterans and survivors. The next dashboard, which will reflect the data in this release, will publish on Sept. 15.

Veterans and survivors may apply or learn more about the PACT Act by visiting **VA.gov/PACT** or calling 1-800-MYVA411.

OPINION

S

THE SAVVY

SENIOR

Topics You Need to Discuss with Aging Parents

Dear Savvy Senior,

My siblings and I don't know much about our elderly parent's financial situation or their wishes if and when something happens to them. They are both in their mid-eighties. What's the best way to handle this and what all should we know?

Apprehensive Daughter

Dear Apprehensive,

Many adult children don't know much about their elderly parent's financial situation or end-of-life plans, but they need to. Getting up to speed on their finances, insurance policies, long-term care plans and other information is important because some day you might have to help them handle their financial affairs or care, or execute their estate plan after they die. Without this information, your job becomes much more difficult. Here are some tips that can help.

Have the Conversation

If you're uncomfortable talking to your parents about this, use this column as a prompt or see <https://theconversationproject.org/>, which offers free guides that can help you kick-start these discussions.

It's also a good idea to get all your siblings involved too. This can help you head off any possible hard feelings, plus, with others involved, your parents will know everyone is concerned.

When you talk with your parents, you'll need to collect some information, find out where they keep key documents and how they want certain things handled when they die or if they become incapacitated. Here's a checklist of areas to focus on.

PERSONAL INFORMATION: *Contacts:* Make a list of names and phone numbers of your parent's doctors, lawyer, accountant, broker, tax preparer, insurance agent, etc. *Medical information:* Make a copy of their medical history and a list of medications they take. *Personal documents:* Find out where they keep their Social Security card, marriage license, military discharge papers, etc.

Secured places: Make a list of places they keep under lock and key such as safe deposit boxes, safe combination, security alarms, etc. *Digital assets:* Make a list of their digital assets – everything from social media accounts to online banking. It should include usernames and passwords. *Pets:* If they have a pet, what are their instructions for the animal's care? *End of life:* What are their wishes for organ or body donation, and their funeral instructions? If they've made pre-arrangements with a funeral home, get a copy of the agreement.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS: *Will:* Do they have an updated will or trust, and where is it located? *Power of attorney:* Do they have a power of attorney document that names someone to handle their financial matters if they become incapacitated? *Advance directives:* Do they have a living will and a medical power of attorney that spells out their wishes regarding their end-of-life medical treatment? If they don't have these documents prepared, now's the time to make them.

FINANCIAL RECORDS: *Financial accounts:* Make a list of their bank accounts, brokerage and mutual fund accounts, and any other financial assets they have. *Debts and liabilities:* Make a list of any loans, leases or debts they have – mortgages owed, car loans, student loans, medical bills, credit card debts. Also, make a list of all credit and charge cards, including the card numbers and contact information. *Company benefits:* Make a list of any retirement plans, pensions or benefits from their former employers including the contact information of the benefits administrator. *Insurance:* Make a list of the insurance policies they have (life, long-term care, home, auto, Medicare, etc.) including the policy numbers, agents and phone numbers. *Property:* Make a list of the real estate, vehicles or other properties they own, rent or lease and where they keep the deeds, titles and loan or lease agreements. *Taxes:* Find out where they keep copies of past year's tax returns.

You're probably not going to get all this figured out in one gathering, so it's important to keep the conversation going to ensure your parent's wishes will be accurately executed.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.

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Not Too Late to Get a Flu Shot, OMRF Experts Say



Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation physician-scientist Hal Scofield, M.D.

Good news: This year's flu vaccine appears to be particularly effective at preventing severe cases.

Bad news: Only about 40% of Americans eligible for flu shots have received one.

More good news: There's still time to get protected before the virus peaks in Oklahoma, said Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation physician-scientist Hal Scofield, M.D.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, influenza affects, on average, about 8% of the U.S. population each year. The virus annually kills about 35,000 Americans and sends another 450,000 to the hospital. Young children, people 65 years and older, and those with chronic medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes are at greatest risk of severe disease.

"In the Southern Hemisphere, flu season runs about six months ahead of ours, which provides us with a window into the severity and most common strain as well as the effectiveness of the vaccine," said Scofield, who also is associate chief of staff for research at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center.

"This year, the vaccine appears to be a great match for the virus," Scofield said. "Although complete data isn't available yet, Australian health authorities reported that this year's vaccine significantly reduced the risk of ending up in the doctor's office from the flu."

According to the CDC, pharmacies and doctor's offices had administered about 51 million doses of adult vaccine as of Nov. 25 – 13% below the same time last year. Similarly, the percentage of U.S. children who had received flu

shots through early December was lower than at the same time for the past four years.

A survey conducted in August by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases found 65% agreement among American adults that an annual flu shot is the best prevention, yet 43% didn't plan to get one or were unsure if they would get one this year. Among those in the latter group, 32% cited concern about side effects.

The most common flu vaccine side effects are soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, and sometimes, low-grade fever. But, according to OMRF Executive Vice President & Chief Medical Officer Judith James, M.D., Ph.D., none of this is cause for alarm. "It's your body developing protective immunity, and compared to contracting the flu, it's nothing."

James added that many fear getting a flu shot can cause the flu.

"The vaccine is made from proteins, not the virus," said James, a member of the National Academy of Medicine and chair of OMRF's Arthritis and Clinical Immunology Research Program. "It isn't possible to get the flu from the vaccine."

She noted that the flu vaccine typically reaches full effectiveness in two weeks. As of the first week of December, Oklahoma flu activity is low, but increasing. According to the CDC, flu rates are high in neighboring states of Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado, and rising in Arkansas.

"Vaccination is your best defense, along with practicing smart health hygiene," James said. "Stay home if you feel ill, wash your hands frequently and cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough."

Jan Brett Brings Winter Magic to Belle Isle Library

Holiday magic was in the air Dec. 7 at the Belle Isle Library, when bestselling children's book author/illustrator Jan Brett stopped by on her Winter Wonderland tour to give a presentation and visit with library guests. The event, presented with support from Best of Books in Edmond, saw between 800 and 900 guests, and 726 pre-ordered copies of Jan's books. Some guests drove over 2 hours to attend the event. Best of Books was on hand during the event for purchases at the door, as was a hot chocolate stand provided by the Gold Dome, that served a delicious and cozy way for guests to warm up. The library's mascot, Spoticus, and one of Jan Brett's beloved characters, Hedgie, made several appearances together throughout the evening, meeting their fans and taking photos with children and families.

Jan is the author and illustrator of 40 winter-themed children's books, with over 43 million copies sold. While at Belle Isle Library, she gave an illustration demonstration and discussed drawing techniques with the engaged audience. She also signed books for the more than 200 guests that waited in line to meet her. The Belle Isle Library stayed open until 10:00 p.m. to accommodate those wanting to get a book signed and get a photo with Jan.

Upcoming events at the library

Upcoming Metro Library events include Literary Voices happening April 9-11, 2024, which features James Patterson, Kevin Kwan, and Kwame Alexander. Learn more by visiting <https://www.metrolibrary.org/literaryvoices>.

The Metropolitan Library System provides library services for more than 800,000 residents of Oklahoma County. We have 19 physical locations as well as 24/7 access to our digital resources at <https://www.metrolibrary.org/>.



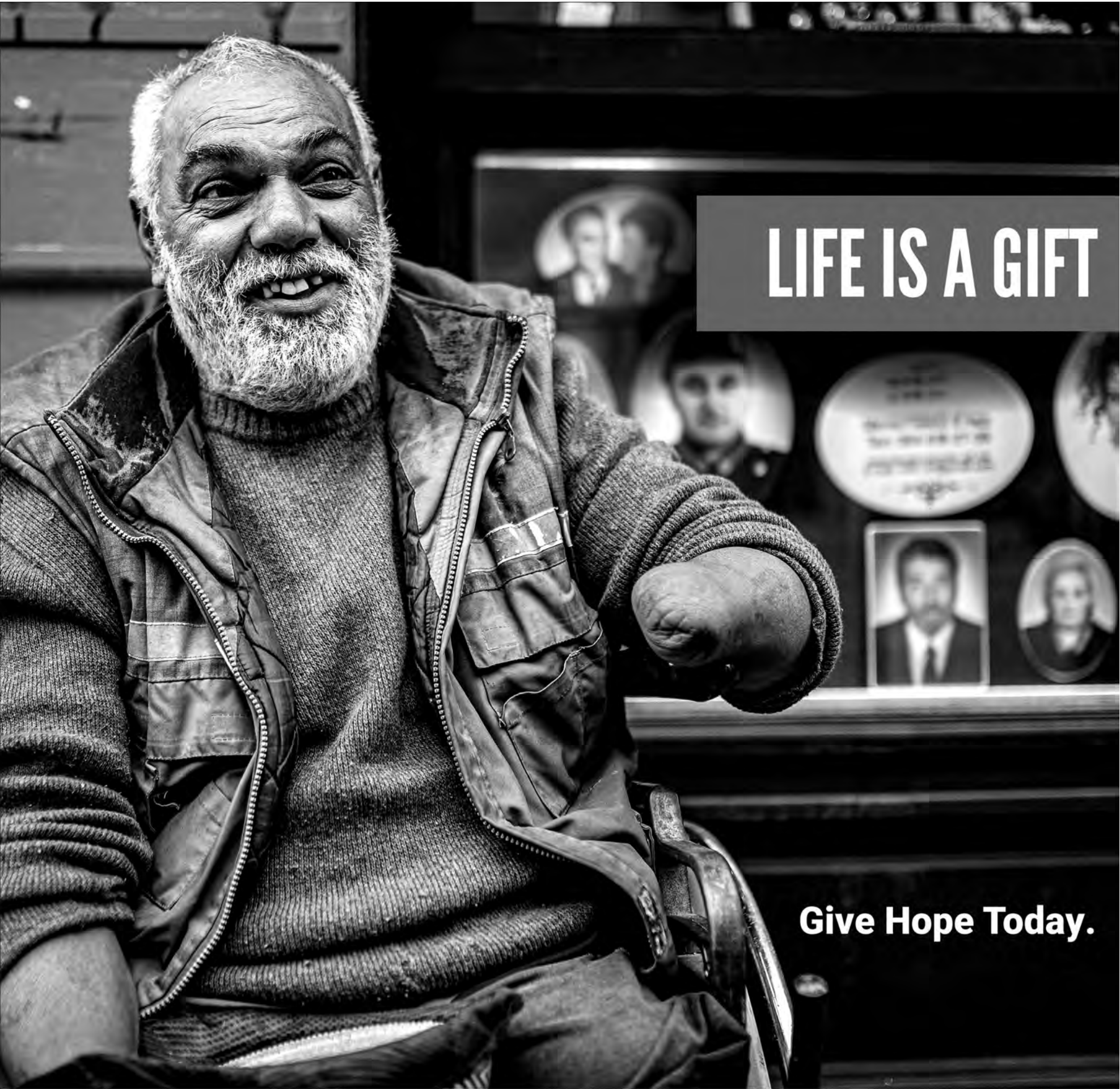
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Fall Weather

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Breeze	Drizzle	Forecast	Lightning	Shower	Windy
Chilly	Fall	Front	Mist	Sleet	
Clouds	Flood	Frost	Radar	Tornado	
Crisp	Fog	Hurricane	Rain	Windsock	

Check Out Answers in the Classifieds Page 23



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CENTENARIANS OF OK



Albert “Al” Hair

(Right) **100 years old.** WWII Veteran Wm. Albert “Al” Hair of Ada was born on August 22, 1922. After the war, he worked for IBM & Boy Scouts, ultimately ending up in Chickasha where he worked for Washita Valley Community Action Agency & became a self-employed carpenter & painter.



Wilma Marie Goodwin



(Left) **100 years old.** Wilma Marie Goodwin of Enid attended Enid Business College & was a bank teller. She has 6 children, 12 grandchildren & 20 great grandchildren. She enjoys the good food & family being together. Fried chicken is her favorite food. Her words of wisdom to younger people: “Have the Lord in your life and love your family!”

Hattie Powell

(Right) **100 years old.** Hattie Powell lived most of her life in Beggs & celebrated her 100th birthday in Tulsa today. She graduated from Beggs HS, worked OSU Extension nutritionist & library assistant at Beggs schools. Her words of wisdom to younger people: “Be honest with yourself and others. Respect yourself and others. Recognize & acknowledge your faults & work to correct them. Obey God!”



Eula Mae Stewart

(Right) **100 years old.** Eula Mae Stewart of Yukon was born on the 15th of December, 1923. She graduated from Red Oak High School and from secretarial school in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. Eula Mae had a 30-year career as an administrator with the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, retiring in 1989. Her words of wisdom to us are: Know that Jesus Loves You and Learn to Depend on Him. Respect Your Parents and Authority.



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Abe Lincoln Trading Company Added to the National Register of Historic Places



North side of Main St. and 175 feet west of Clearview Rd., Clearview

Constructed c. 1903, the Abe Lincoln Trading Company was the main office of the Lincoln Townsite Company, which planned and developed the All-Black community of Clearview. The company sold groceries and building materials to townspeople and surrounding farm families. The building was pivotal for the establishment of the town; for several decades thereafter, various owners and tenants conducted business from the property to the benefit of Clearview. The Abe Lincoln Trading Company retains several character-defining features associated with early 20th-century commercial buildings, including a rectangular form, stone exterior walls with no ornamentation and a modest storefront with original fenestration. Such integrity enables the Abe Lincoln Trading Company to convey significance as a rare, surviving example of a commercial building associated with the All-Black towns movement in Oklahoma.

Funding for the Abe Lincoln Trading Company nomination was provided by an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service. This program works to diversify the National Register of Historic Places by funding surveys and National Register nominations of properties associated with communities underrepresented in the National Register.

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places is an honorific designation that provides recognition, limited protection and, in some cases, financial incentives for these important properties. The SHPO identifies, evaluates and nominates properties for this special designation.

The State Historic Preservation Office is a division of the Oklahoma Historical Society. The mission of the Oklahoma Historical Society is to collect, preserve and share the history and culture of the state of Oklahoma and its people. Founded in 1893 by members of



The Oklahoma Historical Society and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) are pleased to announce the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) designation for the Abe Lincoln Trading Company was the main office of the Lincoln Townsite Company.

the Territorial Press Association, the OHS maintains museums, historic sites and affiliates across the state. Through its research archives, exhibits, educational programs and publications the OHS chronicles the rich history of Oklahoma. For more information about the OHS, please visit <https://www.okhistory.org/>.

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Grandfather, Grandson Create Documentary Telling Story Of The C-47 Skytrain Airplane



Story by Van Mitchel, Staff Writer

Preserving history for future generations to learn from is important to Gary Banz, a former Oklahoma State Representative, and a former Midwest City High School teacher who was the Social Studies Department Chairman and taught American Federal Government.

During his tenure in the Oklahoma Legislature, Banz found out about the C-47 Skytrain airplane's involvement in D-Day when relatives of a New York paratrooper, killed after his jump, contacted him about finding out what happened to the airplane he jumped out of on June 6, 1944.

The relatives from Long Island, New York had done some checking and tracked the airplane to Oklahoma City. But that's when the trail reached a dead end.

The paratrooper's niece and her husband resorted to the Internet, typing veterans and Oklahoma City on the Google search service. Banz's name came up, who was chairman of the

House Veterans Subcommittee.

The family was able to find records that the paratrooper, Pvt. Vincinzo Fiore, was among the 17 paratroopers to jump from the C-47 with tail No. 292838 on June 6, 1944.

The Douglas C-47 Skytrain or Dakota is a military transport aircraft developed from the civilian Douglas DC-3 airliner. It was used extensively by the Allies during World War II. During the war the C-47 was used for troop transport, cargo, paratrooper, for towing gliders and military cargo parachute drops. The C-47 remained in front-line service with various military operators for many years.

Banz said the history of the C-47 has Oklahoma ties as the airplane was built at the Douglas Manufacturing Plant in Oklahoma City.

Banz and his grandson Nathan Livingston, produced a documentary called "Skytrain: the pilot, the paratrooper, and the plane that brought them together." It tells the story about the plane that is now displayed at the Veterans Memorial in Joe B. Barnes



Former State Rep. Gary Banz, right, and his grandson Nathan Livingston, did a documentary called "Skytrain," about the C-47 Skytrain which honors the airplane that was created at Tinker Air Force Base, and was used in World War II, including D-Day.

Park in Midwest City. It honors the plane that carried 82nd Airborne paratroopers on D-Day June 6, 1944.

"My professional career in public education was teaching history and World War II was certainly a big part of that," Banz said. "Development of the City of Midwest City and the 'depot in the Midwest' and subsequent impact on the Oklahoma City area was an integral part of central Oklahoma's history. That was fascinating to me."

Livingston said his grandfather asked him to film and edit the documentary.

"My grandpa said, 'Hey, you want to make a documentary? I'll pay you for it.' I was like, 'Cool. I'm a college student. I need money,'" Livingston said. "He made my life a lot easier. I just had to show up and film and I was able to really focus on the creative aspect because I knew that he would make sure that all the facts were correct and that we were telling the parts of the story that we needed to tell."

Banz said he enjoyed working with his grandson.

"He's the creative side of the equation. I bring the administration and

structural side to the team so to speak," Banz said. "It's been unique and very rewarding in that regard."

Banz said they started work on the documentary in 2020.

"It's a COVID project," he said. "We had the public release of the film on June 6th, 2021, which was the 77th anniversary of D-Day. The plane's mission that day was to deliver 17 members of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Division into battle behind enemy lines."

Banz said part of the documentary process was interviewing Bob Blackburn, former Executive Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

"Bob Blackburn's assessment and his contribution to the film gives it enormous credibility," Banz said.

More than 10,000 C-47s were built nationwide during World War II. The Douglas plant in Oklahoma City produced more than 5,300. Peak production saw 13 a day come off the assembly line.

Sold as government surplus material following the war, the airplane




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AIRPLANE

Continued from Page 20

served as a corporate aircraft for Phillips Petroleum and Kerr McGee.

"It flew oil executives around the oil patch long before aviation became a staple," Banz said.

A May 16, 1946, bill of sale, in accordance with the Surplus Property Act of 1944, shows that Will D. Parker of Bartlesville bought the plane. It had the same serial number as the airplane used in the D-Day mission. The plane was sold for \$20,000 to Parker who, according to papers, worked for Phillips Petroleum Co. in Bartlesville.

Papers filed in August 1946 show that Parker sold the airplane, which had the civilian designation of DC-3, to Kerr-McGee Skyways Inc. of Oklahoma City. Kerr-McGee Corp. then transferred it to Kerr-McGee Oil Industries Inc. in June 1950. In April 1976 the company donated the airplane to the Oklahoma State Fair for a static display where it remained until 2006.

Banz said the plane left the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in 2006, with the intent to restore the exterior to its D-Day look and display it on Metro Tech's aviation career campus, 5600 S MacArthur Blvd., near Will Rogers World Airport where it remained for 10 years unanchored and unsecured.

"It incurred a lot of vandalism and then the weather finally took its toll, which caused the leaders of Metro Tech to believe that they were never going to be able to exhibit it like they had anticipated when they agreed to accept it from the fairgrounds," he said.

Banz said he helped navigate the process of getting the plane removed from Metro Tech, and later finding its current home.

"Utilizing my connections in the Legislature, we were able to help negotiate the transfer of property from Metro Tech to the Oklahoma History Center, and then a separate agreement between the History Center and the City of Midwest City, to find a home for it," he said. "Then we set about putting into place plans to restore the plane to its D-Day look and get it moved and anchored to where it is today, two miles north of where it came off the assembly line on March 5, 1944, during World War II."

Banz served in the United States Army from 1968-70 and the U.S. Army Reserve from 1982-1990. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal in 1970 and was awarded the Army Achievement Medal in 1985.

Banz comes from a family of veterans with his father and his four

brothers all serving in the U.S. Navy in the south Pacific during World War II. They all met in Washington, D.C. and attended the dedication of the World War II Memorial on May 29, 2004.

Banz is the leader of VillagesOKC Veterans Initiative. VillagesOKC is a connector of many efforts to provide opportunities for older adults to age successfully.

Banz previously helped veterans through the Oklahoma Honor Flight program, a non-profit organization aimed at shining the spotlight on America's World War II veterans and the sacrifices they have made.

The first Oklahoma Honor Flight was taken in 2010. Banz served as flight commander on 24 flights which took 2,055 Oklahoma World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam veterans to Washington D.C. for an all-expense paid daytrip to see all their war memorials.

Banz later set about helping raise money to restore the C-47 Skytrain.

"Like our fundraising for the Honor Flight program, there were a lot of people that had a passion for what was represented in the project," he said. "Obviously it was unique to the City of Midwest City. In a broader sense, it's unique to the City of Oklahoma City because the Douglas manufacturing plant was created by leaders from Oklahoma City Municipal connections. A lot of people had an interest in saving that story and preserving it for the community at large."

Banz said a little over \$150,000 was raised to help the Oklahoma History Center be able to restore it and get it moved and transported.

"They (restoration company) had to take it apart, take the tailpiece off and the wings," he said. "It was quite an ordeal to watch that plane arrive on the multiple flatbed trucks on Sunday morning Dec. 3, 2017. It was reassembled and sits two miles north of where it came off the assembly line in 1944 as a part of the Midwest City Veterans Memorial. The public may review this unique story on five panels posted in front of the aircraft."

Banz and his grandson are working on their next documentary, scheduled for release on March 29, 2024, a day set aside by federal statute to honor Vietnam War Era veterans.

He said working with his grandson was meaningful in that together they were able to tell the story of a C-47 Skytrain that means so much for the Oklahoma City area and the mission it rendered on D-Day.

"Every veteran deserves to be recognized in a tangible way," Banz said.

For more information on the "Skytrain" documentary visit

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aocCkgTD8s

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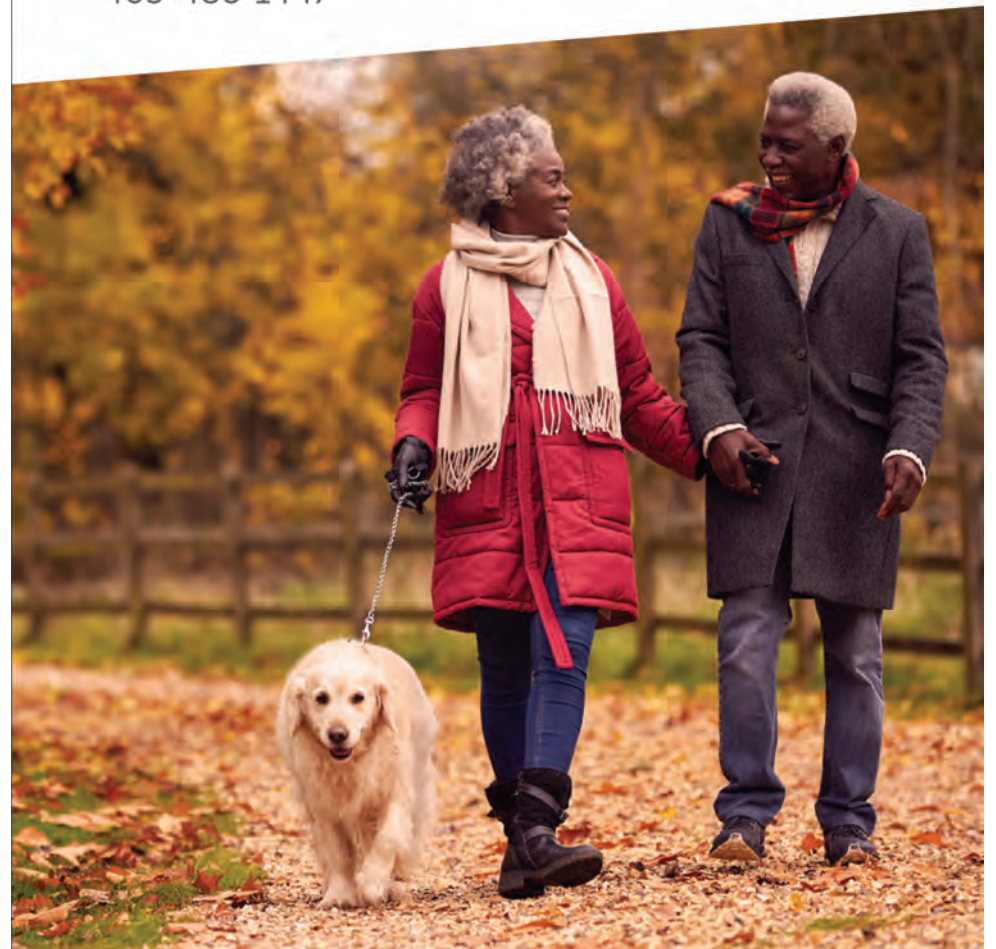
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1012-ASC-3

9/23

SNL News Line - Matilda Charles

Don't Give Up

This is not the world we grew up in, or even the world we knew for much of our lives. If my informal poll of friends and acquaintances is correct, we don't like it much. The current state of the world has taken an emotional, physical and social toll on us. This isn't the retirement we planned.

I hear:

We're too trusting and it gets us into trouble when we fall for scams coming to us via phone, email and the internet, and resulting in identity theft and loss of money.

The pandemic locked many of us away, and we haven't surfaced yet because COVID is still out there, as well as the annual flu and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) this winter. Staying home seems to be the safest way to avoid it all.

And there's the television news. Some of us have started only watching the first five minutes to catch the weather and then turn to a different channel to avoid the political scene and crime reporting, some of which unfortunately is happening in our own areas. Channels showing reruns of retro programs are getting a lot of our attention now.

No, we don't like it much, and some of us wonder if we're sliding into depression.

But there are ways to regain some of what we've lost, and a trip to our physician might be the best first step. Go, and tell him or her what's going on with you. A simple blood test might point to a change in diet that could help how you feel.

At the same time, he might know of some community resources, even if it's having meals delivered.

Reconnect with friendships that matter (even if it's on the phone), ask if the library delivers books, become a pet foster parent, look for senior exercise videos on YouTube, etc.

Don't Give Up.

ODWC Director Resigns, Interim Director Appointed

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Director J.D. Strong resigned effective immediately. The decision was accepted unanimously by the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission, the agency's advisory, administrative and policy-making body.

Strong was the Department's 18th Director and had served as Director since 2016. ODWC Assistant Director Wade Free was named Interim Director by the Commission.

We greatly appreciate the past seven years of leadership and service that J.D. has provided during his tenure with the Department of Wildlife Conservation, and we wish he and his family all of the very best in their future endeavors.

"After much prayer, and after more than 31 years of state service, I have decided to step down as Director of the ODWC, effective immediately.

This decision is bittersweet. I have loved every minute of working alongside the wonderful people that comprise the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, watching them passionately and skillfully nurture a better environment for our fish and wildlife, and for the Oklahomans who get to enjoy them. Our state is unquestionably better because of ODWC's dedicated team of professionals, and I thank them for the privilege of working alongside them for these past seven years.

Having been ODWC Director for the past seven years, I'm extremely proud of what we have accomplished together. As with previous exits, I've always tried to leave with no regrets, as well as to leave the woodpile higher than I found it. My hope and belief are this is the case here.

I have no doubt that ODWC's future is bright, and I will be cheering for the continued success of the Department every step of the way."-- J.D. Strong, Former Director of ODWC



J.D. Strong, Former Director of ODWC

McRaniels Named to Lead RSVP of Central Oklahoma

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Central Oklahoma has named a new executive director. Laura McRaniels will fill the position following the retirement of Beth Patterson on Dec. 31.

McRaniels, who was named as the organization's assistant director in 2022, joined RSVP in 2018 and served as the organization's volunteer coordinator linking more than 500 older adults to volunteer opportunities with 124 local nonprofit organizations.

"It is an honor to pass on the reins to Laura," Patterson said. "In addition to Laura's genuine compassion for people through her words and actions every day, she has such insight, problem-solving skills, follow-through, and attention to detail that make her an excellent person for this role."

Prior to joining RSVP, McRaniels owned her own in-home childcare business, and served as a direct care specialist with the J.D. McCarty



Center. She joined RSVP as the administrative assistant and was appointed to volunteer coordinator in 2018. She completed all tiers of the Nonprofit Management Certification program through the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits. McRaniels has a long-time dedication to volunteerism, serving since 2008 with D-Dent, Inc. and West Wind Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

Since 1973, RSVP of Central Oklahoma has helped older adults continue to live with purpose and meaning by connecting them with rewarding community volunteer opportunities. RSVP is a partner of AmeriCorps Seniors and the United Way of Central Oklahoma. To learn more about RSVP of Central Oklahoma, call 405-605-3110 or visit <https://rsvpokc.org/>. You can also follow RSVP on Facebook at facebook.com/RSVPokc.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

KORCA

RIYTD

BUDEOL

TYREPT

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Print answer here:

(Answers next month)

December Answers | Jumbles: AVOID EAGLE GOVERN MOTIVE
Answer: People thought Mary Shelley's new Frankenstein character was a — NOVEL IDEA

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

I don't know why I bother combing my last few strands.

It may be time to shave your head. That would be a great style on you too.

HE USED TO COMB HIS HAIR TO ONE SIDE BEFORE HIS HAIR ---

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Living History Program Returns to Enid for Another Year

History Alive! on the Cherokee Strip, a living history program at the Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center in Enid, will return for another year.

It takes place throughout the year on the first and third Saturday of each month from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. The four historic buildings in the Humphrey Heritage Village, which are from the territorial days, come to life with reenactors dressed in period clothing from the late 1800s.

Attendees can sit at school desks in the Turkey Creek one-room schoolhouse from 1896 while lessons are taught, hear a pioneer tale from those tending their shops and watch as craftsmen and women work their trades. Visitors can go inside the 1905 Glidewell house or stop at the church from 1902. Guests can watch and participate in the different skills and trades of the time or file their own land claim at the historic 1893 U.S. Land Office.

History Alive! started at the CSRHC in the winter of 2019 and happened once a month. It has grown into a biweekly event. Volunteers are always needed.

The History Alive! programs are included with paid admission. For more information about the Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center, please call 580-237-1907 or visit <https://csrhc.org/>.

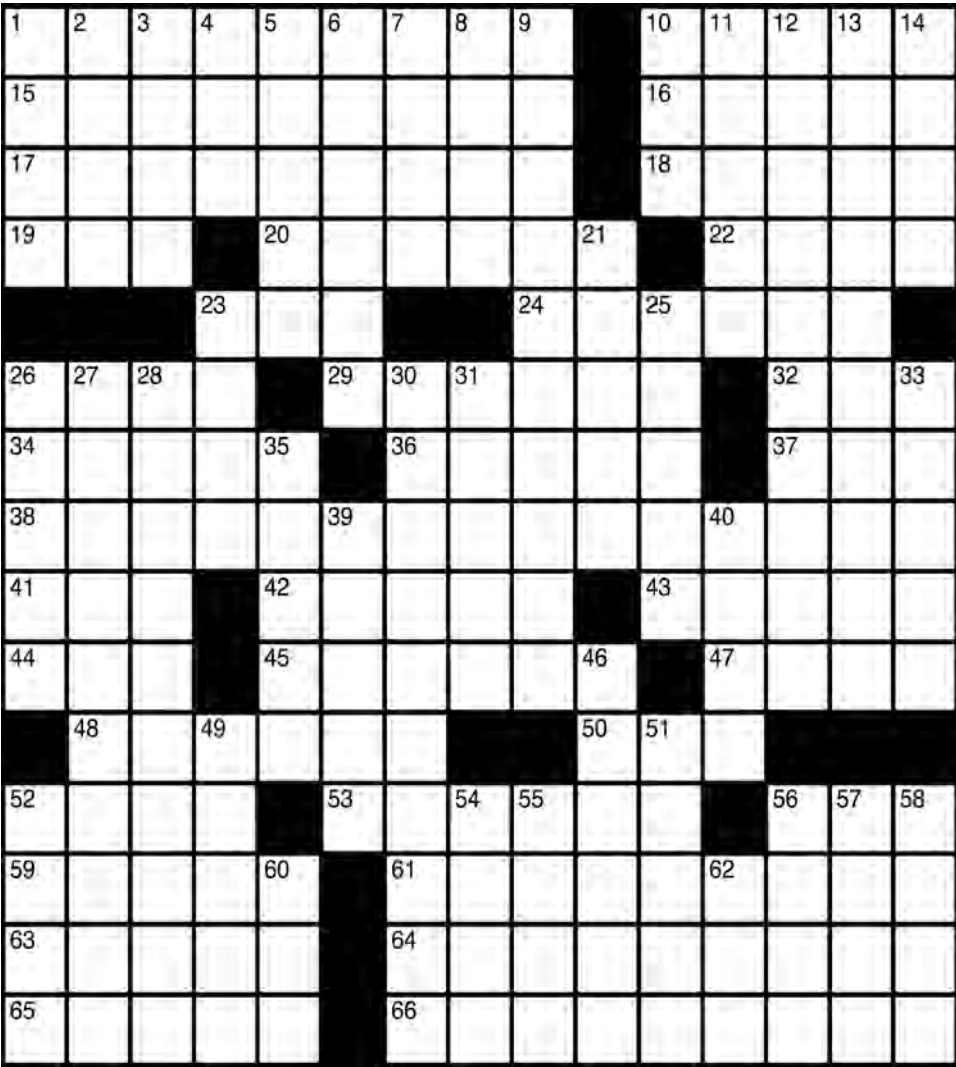
The Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center is a division of the Oklahoma Historical Society. The mission of the Oklahoma Historical Society is to collect, preserve and share the history and culture of the state of Oklahoma and its people. Founded in 1893 by members of the Territorial Press Association, the OHS maintains museums, historic sites and affiliates across the state. Through its research archives, exhibits, educational programs and publications the OHS chronicles the rich history of Oklahoma. For more information about the OHS, please visit <https://www.okhistory.org/>.

SNL WORD SEARCH ANSWERS



SNL CROSSWORD CORNER

- Across**
1 Concern when merging
10 Texas river diverted into the Red Bluff Reservoir
15 Museum download
16 Dippy
17 Stranger in many a family holiday photo
18 Cake made from ground nuts
19 "While I Was Gone" novelist Miller
20 Becomes, finally
22 "High Anxiety" actress
23 Say further
24 Corps member
26 Metered fleet
29 Treatment plant input
32 "The Cube" network
34 Delighted toddler's demand
36 "Jinkies!"
37 Time worth studying
38 Gruff prescription for a minor injury
41 "Glad to hear it!"
42 Aspect
43 Branch of Islam
44 Org. whose members take hikes?
45 Mets slugger Pete who holds the record for most home runs by a rookie
47 Benefit
- 48 Irredeemable
50 Word of invitation
52 Cheese paired with kalamata olives
53 Do more than listen
56 ___ diavolo sauce
59 #LiveUplifted sneakers brand
61 Arthroscopic procedure that may follow an MRI of the knee
63 McNairy of "Halt and Catch Fire"
64 Ride between runs
65 Buttonlike flower
66 Setting for some unboxing videos
- Down**
1 Some carpentry noises
2 Party with poke
3 Between jobs
4 Bupkis
5 Gave a shot, say
6 Efforts at resistance
7 Spot for a koi or a decoy
8 Ballpark figure
9 Emergency gear
10 Depression
11 Miso soup mushroom
12 Road show necessity?
13 Flirting with
14 Camille Pag n's "Woman Last ___ in Her Thirties"
21 "Your table's ready" device
23 Warts and all
25 Relies (on)
26 Whoopi's birth name
27 Drink often flavored with hibiscus
28 Aveeno product
30 Peer-to-peer sharing?
31 Add capacity to, in a way
33 French composer who influenced Ravel
35 Diet food choice
39 Some mechanical connectors
40 Dethrone
46 Egyptian god invoked in "The Magic Flute"
49 ___ al pastor
51 Disinclined to form compounds
52 Media ___: unplugged period
54 Sign of hollowness
55 "Proof" or "Doubt"
56 "Point taken"
57 Abounding (with)
58 Review-heavy newspaper section
60 Trough spot
62 Gp. central to the 1993 Oslo Accords





VillagesOKC Announces New Staff, Member Roles

By Marilyn Olson, Executive Director, VillagesOKC

VillagesOKC has exciting member and staff news as the New Year begins. On the staff side, there are two promotions to announce. On the member side, one member has accepted the position of VillagesOKC Director of Veteran Initiatives, and another will lead a monthly Alzheimer Support Group at the Bethany Library.

Amy Shirola, previously operations manager, assumes a new role as director of administration and finance. Britni Bergman, previously office assistant, becomes office manager. On the member side, Gary Banz is the new Director of Veteran Initiatives. Herb Magley will lead the Alzheimer Support Group.

Shirola will oversee all accounting functions, including analyzing financial data and managing budgeting and planning processes. She started working with VillagesOKC in March 2022 after 15 years in corporate accounting. Her entrepreneurial experiences include two food-based businesses - Pie Prerogative OKC and 2 Women and a Whisk Catering Company.

Bergman will oversee all office

functions and vendor relations, as well as managing the robust VillagesOKC calendar. She has been the office assistant since November 2022. Her past experience includes six years in a variety of roles with Red Rock Behavioral and Mental Health Services in Yukon and Oklahoma City. Before coming to VillagesOKC, she was office manager for Sarah Libby Photography.

"The promotion of these two professionals highlights their exemplary performance," said VillagesOKC Executive Director Marilyn Olson. "Ms Shirola and Ms Bergman are part of the organization's long-term plan for sustainability. Having an intergenerational workforce brings energy and wisdom. And, with this organization there is great work flexibility which is so important to young parents. VillagesOKC is making great strides due to the talent and heart from these leaders, and we honor their success."

Banz is a former Oklahoma state representative and high school social studies and American Government teacher. He was honored by the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame for organizing and serving as flight commander on 24 Oklahoma Honor Flights which took 2,055 Oklahoma World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans to Washington, DC, for an all-expenses paid day trip to visit war memorials. He has written and produced two documentaries honoring service members and is working on a third.

Magley is a retired geologist who spent 43 years working in the oil industry. Tragedy struck late in his career when after 35 years of marriage, his wife, Gail, developed Alzheimer's disease at the age of 54. Magley retired from the oil industry to care for her. The couple went on an 11-year journey with the disease. After his wife died, Magley decided to dedicate his life to those who were on their journeys with Alzheimer's. The VillagesOKC sponsored Alzheimer's Support Group will meet monthly beginning January 16 at the Bethany Library.



Amy Shirola

Britni Bergman



Herb Magley

Gary Banz

Meetings will be on successive third Tuesdays of the month from 6-7 p.m. in Meeting Room B.

To learn more about VillagesOKC, call or text (405) 990-6637 or email info@villagesokc.org.

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Recent Second Half Expo Brings Resources Together For Seniors in Oklahoma



Story and photos by Van Mitchell, staff writer

Bob Loudermilk and his wife, Denise, moved from Wichita, Kan. to Edmond in 2016 so they could be closer to family in Oklahoma.

Loudermilk, who was previously in the trade-show business, sold his business before moving to the Sooner State. He soon began researching and exploring opportunities to work with the senior population in Oklahoma.

The end result was the creation of the Second Half Expo which just concluded their third annual event on Oct. 21, 2023 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, 1700 NE 63rd St, Oklahoma City.

The 2024 Second Half Expo is scheduled for Oct. 19 at the same location.

The Expo is tailored to people who are in the "second half" of their lives who are looking to connect with the resources needed to live the way that they have always imagined. Up to 130 of Oklahoma's businesses are present at each expo, providing education and demonstrations of the products and services that are available for the 50+

generation.

Loudermilk said each expo attracts up to 1,500 seniors, and that they plan to continue making each year bigger and better.

"We had to push on it three times because of Covid, the first one," Loudermilk said. "It was a big success, lots of wonderful feedback. This year was another success we're very grateful for."

Loudermilk said he wanted to put his business background to use helping Oklahoma seniors.

"With my background in trade shows, I started looking at this 50+ demographic and retirees," he said. "The deeper I went, the more I saw an opportunity, because we have 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 every day in America. And, that spells challenges for our retirement system economy, but it also really spells opportunity."

Loudermilk touched base with people that serve the 50+ community for more input.

"I began to meet people that cater to or serve the 50+ community," he said. "We started having little forums to talk about what can be done,



October's Second Half Expo, at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage museum, was a complete success and attended by seniors throughout the state.

what is needed in the community to serve the people above 50. We concluded that a quality, annual event for seniors was needed so I teamed up with a local radio host and magazine publisher, and together we launched the Expo."

Loudermilk said each Expo is loaded with fun and activities, including free educational seminars, food samples, drawings for prizes and music from some of Oklahoma's best talent.

Second Half Expo is supported by knowledgeable experts in their fields of health, business, motivation, senior living, retirement planning and more to help you discover what's next for you.

"For too long, the concept of aging has a negative connotation in the minds of some," Loudermilk said. "Our mission is to change that outdated mindset. We firmly believe the senior years can be lived with dignity and purpose with the right guidance and resources. We're (Second Half Expo) here to support seniors and the adult children of seniors who are honoring and assisting their aging parents. The whole idea is to give people above 50 and their families an opportunity, in one day, to explore and visit with

organizations that are resources for them, education for them, products, services."

Loudermilk said the Expo attracts seniors that are retired, and are looking at what services are available to them, as well as younger seniors not ready to retire yet.

"The other demographic within this is the younger people above 50, and they're very active," he said. "Some of them want to start a business. They're looking at opportunities to travel, and we cater to that as well."

Loudermilk said the 2023 Expo had an added chapter.

"This year we added something new that we'd never done," he said. "We started what we call Second Half Heroes as a part of the expo, where people can go to our website and nominate someone that is above the age of 65. We select and celebrate someone each year that we feel will be an inspiration to others. Our Second Half Heroes are doing things. They're very active and they serve the community in a way that is noteworthy."

This year's selected Second Half Hero, Jim Stewart, age 71, was honored at the recent expo. He is a leader

See EXPO Page 29

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SECOND HALF EXPO 2024

EXPO

Continued from Page 28

in the non-profit sector and a board member of a foster care non-profit.

Stewart spent 20 years serving in prison ministry and he recently started Heroes In Waiting (501c3), to provide solutions and hope for the bullying and mental health crises among youth.

His Heroes In Waiting non-profit was awarded a \$500 donation from the Second Half Expo, to celebrate his selection as their inaugural Second Half Hero.

Loudermilk said more exciting changes are coming in 2024.

"We're also doing some additional things leading up to the next expo," he said. "We have what we call Coffee Talks. Those will be monthly starting in January where people can come and be a part of the 50+ community. There's usually an inspirational and/or educational speaker along with a free continental breakfast and coffee."

Loudermilk said the annual Expo includes an added bonus as participants can visit the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum at no extra

charge on the day of the event.

"The other idea was to give the seniors an opportunity free that day, not only to attend the expo, but also to tour the museum," he said. "Everybody that attends, they get a free ticket to the museum. The expo closes at 1 p.m. and then they can spend the rest of the day exploring the museum."

Loudermilk said he didn't know what to expect after putting on the initial Second Half Expo.

"I had no idea what to expect when we started. The first year was challenging and we had to postpone three times due to the pandemic. But our wonderful exhibitors stayed with us and fully supported our inaugural event, which was highly successful."

Loudermilk credits God for giving him guidance for the Second Half Expo.

"I give the Lord credit for what He's done through this," Loudermilk said. "I'm extremely pleased with what He has brought about and the ongoing opportunities we have to encourage and serve our seniors in Oklahoma."

For more information visit <https://secondhalfexpo.com>



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SNL TINSELTOWN TALKS

Joyce Bulifant's Ups and Downs of Marriage and Career



By Nick Thomas

For those who keep track of Hollywood nuptials, the title of Joyce Bulifant's 2017 autobiography may not represent a marital world record, but it's certainly an attention grabber. The actress, who co-starred in TV series such as "Flo" and "Mary Tyler Moore," recounted her life and career in "My Four Hollywood Husbands."

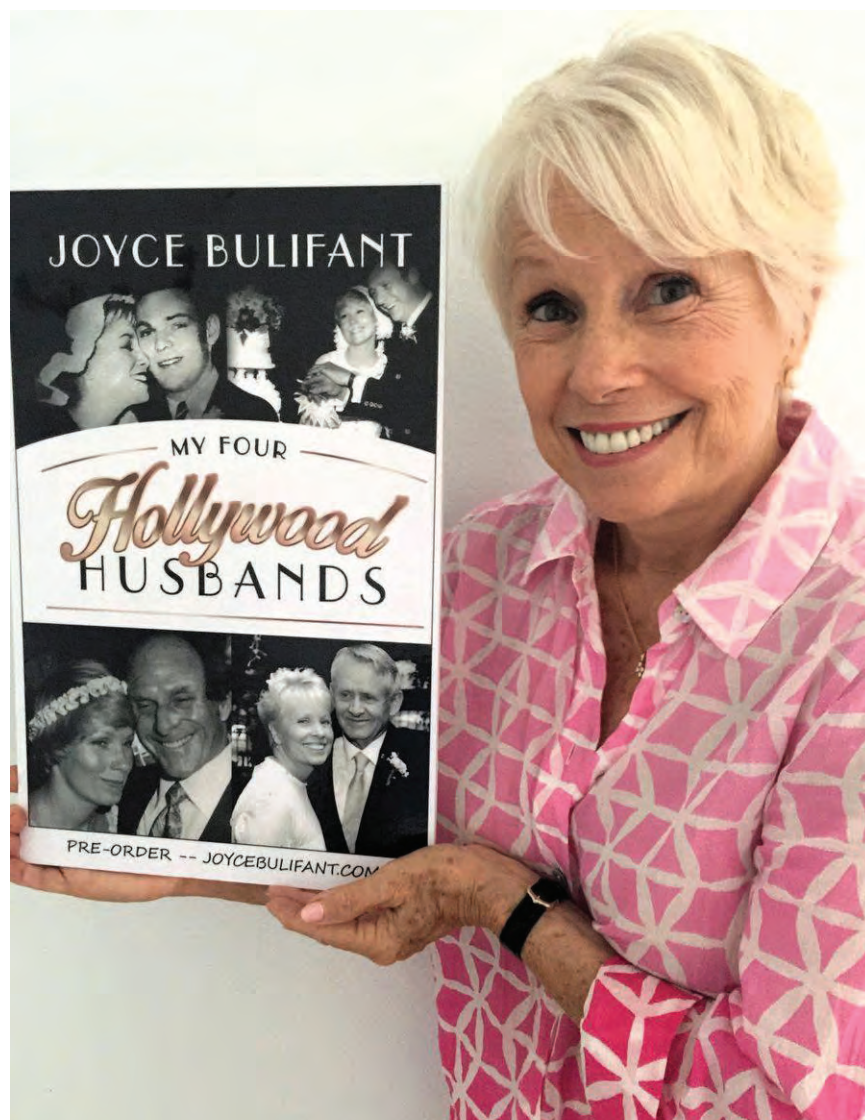
Bulifant describes how alcohol influenced her four hubbies: "Hawaii Five-O" star James ("Danno") MacArthur; TV/film producer, director, and screenwriter William Asher; "Days of Our Lives" actor Edward Mallory; and her last husband actor Roger Perry who died in 2018.

"It was never my intention to marry famous Hollywood men, it just happened that way," said Bulifant from Los Angeles. "I was 14 when I first met Jimmy (MacArthur) while we were at boarding school together and we started dating a couple of years later."

She remembers her spouses as unhappy men especially MacArthur in their decade-long marriage.

"When he wasn't working, he would drink more and it became a terrible situation," she said. "I thought if I just loved them enough they wouldn't need to drink and would become happy, but it just didn't work that way."

She remained happily married to her last husband Roger Perry although he too experienced some early rough patches. "He wanted to get better, so that's why this



Joyce Bulifant displaying cover of her book, My Four Hollywood Husbands. Provided by publicist

marriage worked," she said.

Career-wise, Bulifant has been successful on stage as well as in film and television, and was a frequent game show panelist in the 70s and 80s. She even appeared briefly in the classic 1980 comedy "Airplane!" as the mother of the sick little girl with the intravenous drip.

"I didn't want to do that dadgum movie, I thought it was so silly," she recalled. "I was married to William Asher at the time and he told me 'You're an actress – you act!' Now it's been called one of the 100 funniest movies ever made."

But one major TV role did slip past.

"I was all signed, sealed, and delivered to play Mrs. Brady on 'The Brady Bunch,'" she recalled. "One Friday, I was showing the director and producer (and writer, Sherwood Schwartz) my wardrobe but they were acting very strange. When I asked what was wrong they sat me down and said the executives at ABC in New York wanted Florence Henderson for the role."

Schwartz called that evening confirming the bad news. "That's the way it goes in this business," said Bulifant. "Florence was a wonderful actress and a lovely lady."

Concentrating on TV work,

Bulifant only appeared in about a dozen films. Her first main feature role was in the 1967 Disney musical "The Happiest Millionaire," memorable for her "Bye-Yum Pum Pum" song with Lesley Ann Warren. It would be the last live-action feature produced by Disney, who died a year before the film's release.

Bulifant's radiant cheerful on-screen personality and distinctive youthful voice made her a favorite comedic actress with audiences. Despite some missed career opportunities and the marital challenges, she has always remained optimistic.

"When you're in the entertainment business, you have to deal with disappointment and rejection so if you don't feel strong and confident about yourself it can be very disheartening," she says. "That's true for anyone with self-doubt which is why my book resonates with people from all walks of life. So I'm very pleased when I hear from people it has helped."

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery, Alabama, and has written features, columns, and interviews for numerous newspapers and magazines.

See <https://www.getnickt.org/>.

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Sudoku Answers

VICKEY'S MIRACLE

By Theresa Green

It's the season when we talk a lot about miracles, and one Oklahoma woman will tell you she is living proof they exist.

Vickey McDonald, 62, spent more than half a year hospitalized.

"I had two heart attacks, seven surgeries, spent almost seven full months in the hospital," she said.

Her prognosis was grim. McDonald says she was told by doctors at the hospital in February that it was unlikely she'd survive.

"It was very grave, yes. She was given really no chance of survival at all. Pretty grim," said Tracy Bates, a nurse practitioner with Valir PACE.

Doctors at the hospital planned to send her home on hospice care, but McDonald chose a different path, enrolling instead in an all-inclusive care program called Valir PACE. It is a holistic program of care that offered help with her medical, therapy, dental, transportation, home care and other needs. It all sounded too good to be true.

"At first, I was like, this is not for real. You got to be kidding me," she said. "But then I realized they really do everything that lady said they would do. They really do."

Now, several days a week, you will find McDonald hard at work in the physical and occupational therapy clinic at PACE in downtown Oklahoma City.

"She's one of the hardest workers I know in therapy," said Kirsten Paschal-Wilson, Valir PACE Therapy Manager. "She wants to be there. She shows up. She puts in the work, and it doesn't stop at therapy. When she gets home, she keeps putting in the work because she loves her life. She loves to live it and she's going to do it independently."

It's more than just therapy, though. McDonald is seen regularly by the team of health professionals in the PACE clinic too.

"Just seeing her be able to walk out the door and walk back in on a regular basis. A year ago, for sure, I don't know that would



Vickey McDonald works with physical therapist Ana Stone, PT, at Valir PACE. PACE therapists say Vickey is one of the hardest workers they know in physical therapy, overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds.

have happened," Bates said. "She's very determined to do the very best she can do as long as she possibly can. She's a fighter – 100 percent a fighter."

McDonald's is a story of sheer grit, determination and what many, including her health team at Valir PACE, might call a medical miracle too.

"It's hard not to get emotional," said Bates, her eyes welling with tears, "because it shows that I am where I need to be."

And McDonald says clearly so is she.

"Went to my doctor in August for my six-month check-up. He said, 'Let me explain it to you. When you left the hospital in February, you had a zero percent chance of survival. So whatever you are doing, you need to keep doing it.'"

The grandmother of 10 is determined to keep doing just that, working hard to get healthier, to continue to live life independently and to prove wrong those doctors who gave her no chance of survival just ten months ago.

"She swears up and down that she wouldn't have done it without PACE," said Paschal-Wilson, "But I don't think she would have done it without herself either."

"Life is a gift. My family is so precious to me and I'm thankful that I am able to spend more time with them. I thank God every day for Valir PACE. I'd sing it from the rooftop if I could sing," McDonald said, adding with a chuckle, "When I get my voice back, I might do that."

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Nursing Home Advocates Endorse New Federal Legislation

Care Providers Oklahoma today announced their support of the "Protecting Rural Seniors' Access to Care Act," a federal bill that would block implementation of a new staffing mandate proposed by the Biden Administration.

The bill, cosponsored by U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Oklahoma), states: "The Secretary of Health and Human Services may not implement, enforce, or otherwise give effect to the proposed rule entitled 'Medicare and Medicaid Programs; Minimum Staffing Standards for Long-Term Care Facilities and Medicaid Institutional Payment Transparency Reporting' published by the Department of Health and Human Services on September 6, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 61352-61429), and may not promulgate any substantially similar rule." Similar language has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives as part of the Health and Human Services budget bill.

The rule proposed by the Biden Administration would require specific nursing home staff to spend a minimum number of hours with each resident - 2.45 nurse aide hours per

resident per day (HPRD) and 0.55 registered nurse (RN) HPRD - as well as have a 24-hour registered nurse (RN) on site.

Nursing home professionals have argued that the rule ignores the staffing crisis occurring in Oklahoma and across the nation and imposes impossible to meet goals and crippling financial penalties on a field that is already struggling to recruit and adequately compensate qualified staff.

An analysis of the Biden administration mandate by professional services firm CLA CliftonLarsenAllen, LLP (CLA) drew the following conclusions:

- If implemented, the proposed mandate would require Oklahoma nursing homes to hire an estimated 1,253 additional full-time employees, including 538 nurse aides and 715 RNs.
- The proposed mandate would cost Oklahoma nursing homes approximately \$76 million per year.
- Over 99 percent of nursing homes are currently not meeting at least one of the three proposed staffing requirements: the 2.45 nurse aide HPRD, the 0.55 RN HPRD, and the 24/7 RN.
- If nursing homes are unable to increase their workforce to meet these new requirements, more than 5800 nursing home residents could be impacted by census reductions.

Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt has already signed a letter, along with 14 other governors opposing the mandate.

Care Providers Oklahoma President and CEO Steven Buck thanked Oklahoma's elected officials for opposing the mandate, which he said would be incredibly damaging to senior care in Oklahoma.

"As I have said for months, this mandate makes the federal government seem completely oblivious to the dual threats impacting seniors receiving care in nursing homes: a severe staff shortage coupled with chronic underfunding," said Buck. "The Biden administration is quite literally demanding that our facilities hire staffers who do not exist



with money we do not have. That is a recipe for disaster. My thanks go out to Sen. Lankford, Gov. Stitt and others who have worked to block a policy that will negatively impact senior care in Oklahoma and elsewhere."

Buck went on to say the mandate would ultimately hurt vulnerable seniors the most.

"We can't hire the number of staffers this mandate is proposing because they don't exist," said Buck. "What facilities can do and will do to avoid new penalties is to reduce the number of seniors they are caring for by ceasing to admit new residents. That means vulnerable seniors will be left without the care they need. That is a terrible outcome for these seniors, and it is why we continue to oppose this unworkable, unwise mandate."

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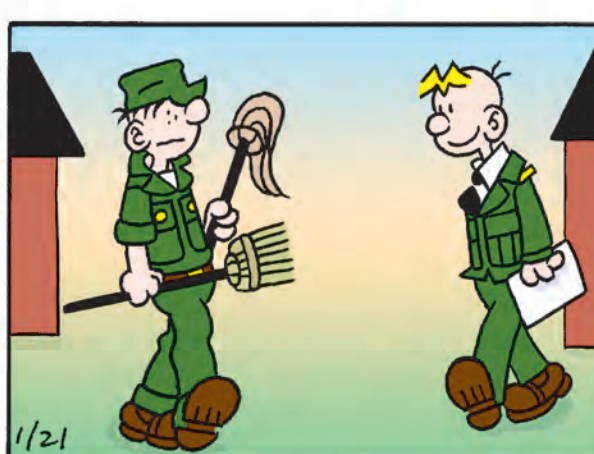
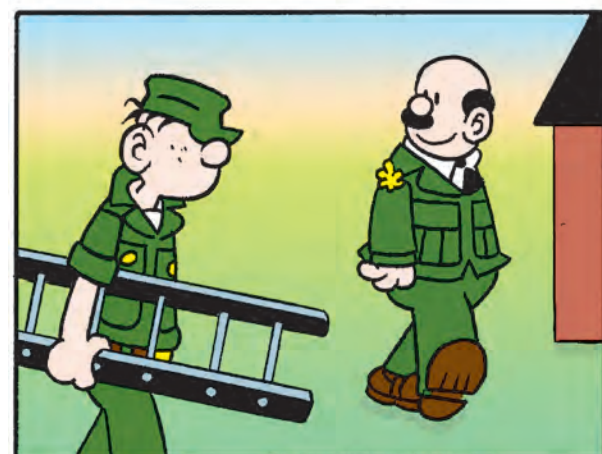
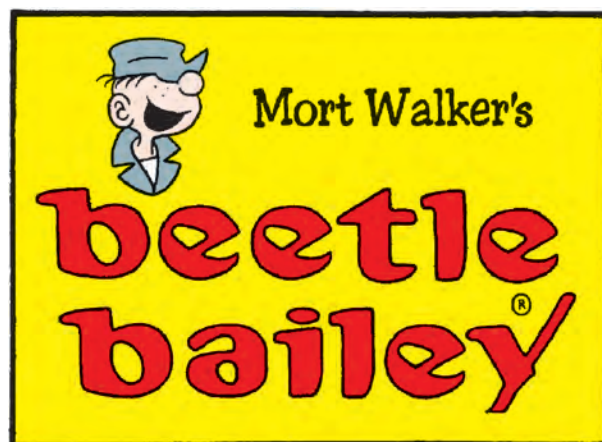


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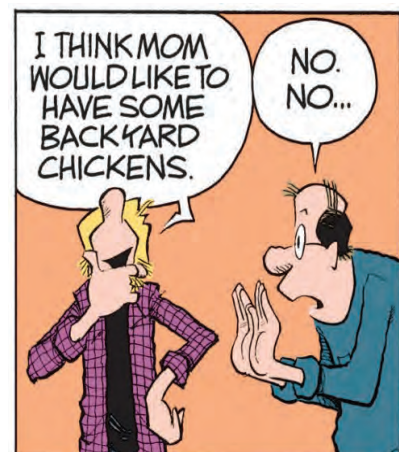
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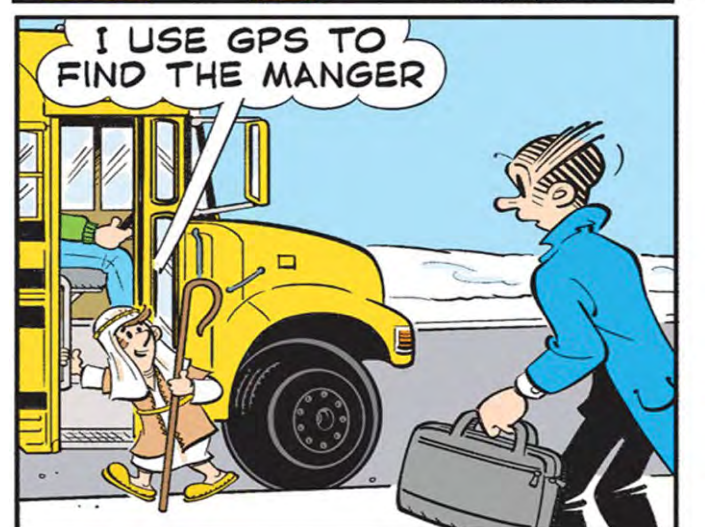
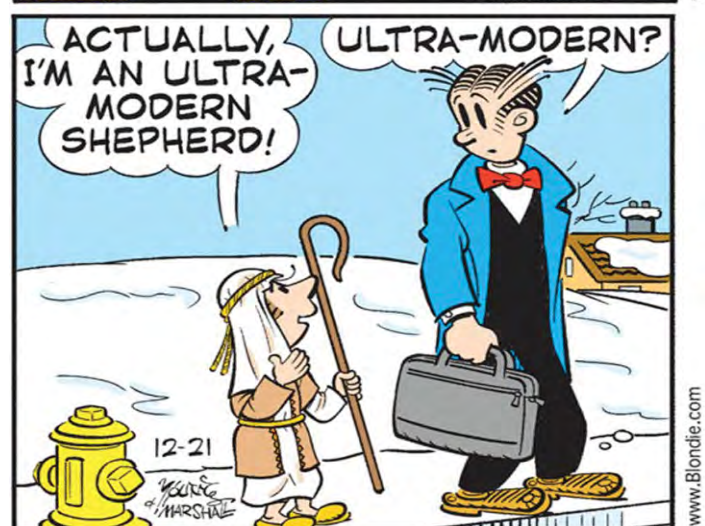




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