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SENIOR NEWS & LIVING

Joy to the world!

Read Richard's story on page 2

Aspen and Weston often play and visit with their great grandmother at Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living. Hanging out with Santa and telling him what they want for Christmas makes the family holiday. Photo by Darl Devault



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Archbishop Emeritus Eusebius Beltran's (center) vision for a senior living ministry led to the opening of Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living. The home is known for its fun and friendly culture and top-notch services.

At 76, Richard Amend, M.Ed., Journey to Becoming a Certified Santa Claus

Transforming Christmas magic into unforgettable moments, and inspiring joy across generations.

story and photo by Darl DeVault, contributing editor

At 76, Richard Amend, M.Ed., recently took his passion for creating the best Santa Claus experience to new heights. He traveled to Denver to become a Certified AuthenticClaus, a significant achievement after two decades of playing Santa. His attendance at the Santa Claus Portrayal & Business Mastery training is a testament to his commitment to embracing the spirit of Christmas.

His 2023 portrayal of Santa was a milestone for Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living in Northwest Oklahoma City. Campus Director, Joyce Clark, says the time with Santa for photos was the largest ever staged photo session in the

facility's 22-year history.

"Arranging for residents and their families to take photos together with Santa is a prime example of how we emphasize fun and resident-centered services. Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living's activity calendar is packed with entertainment, games, crafts, outings, speakers, singing, spiritual times, and things to do. We offer the most and best life enrichment program I have ever seen" Clark said in an interview.

Amend has dedicated the past 40 years to working with seniors and has been the Director of Community Outreach at Saint Ann for 18 years. He is especially tickled with his new certified Santa status, which came with

training to interact with special needs children, adults, and at-risk youth. This enhances his devotion to creating magical, heartfelt experiences that leave a lasting impression on audiences of all ages. On behalf of Saint Ann, Amend portrays Santa at a number of other senior living and healthcare providers in the region.

Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living is a ministry of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. People of all faiths love living at the recently remodeled campus that includes independent living, assisted living, and a convent for the Carmelite Sisters of Villa Teresa. Residents blossom in the home's active lifestyle and caring atmosphere.

Last year, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, Eusebius J. Beltran, posed with Santa, staff, residents, and the nuns. Beltran's vision of a senior living ministry motivated the Archdiocese to develop the campus 22 years ago. The assisted and independent living

center is a not-for-profit Catholic organization serving people of all faiths. Residents are cheerful and very pleased with the rich services and amenities at Saint Ann. Laughter and conversation in the dining rooms accompany delicious meals. Residents say they love Saint Ann's food. They also enjoy being driven to appointments and shopping in one of the two limousines Saint Ann has in its fleet of vehicles. A 24-hour concierge is a focal point for communications and assists residents with everything from check cashing to package delivery.

Resident families are encouraged to visit and participate. Three guest apartments are available for out-of-town visitors. Many guests come to eat with residents or to enjoy singers, bands, and parties. The grand theatre, private dining room, and other areas are often reserved for family celebrations.

Assisted living at Saint Ann is a cozy lifestyle where helping

See AMEND Page 4

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AMEND

Continued from Page 2

hand services are offered in addition to all the other campus amenities. Staff are available to assist with bathing, dressing, medication administration, and a number of individualized services. Three fully furnished respite apartments have been popular for folks who want a short-term stay to recover or be attended to while their caregiver is away. Respite care is a wonderful way to check out the assisted living experience without having to move or make any long-term decisions.

As Christmas approaches, anticipation is building for the day Santa's authentic sleigh will arrive. Wish lists are being created and costumes prepared for photos with Santa Amend. For many, that photo becomes a cherished Christmas card or festive social media post.

Amend says it is a privilege to don the Santa suit every year. "Our residents are full of life," Amend said. "They invigorate

me with their enthusiasm for the season. People say their time with Santa is special, but it is even more so for me. I get to play the role of one of the most loved icons in our culture who conveys kindness and gifting of special things at Christmas."

Amend is not the only staff member who helps make the Christmas season cheerful. "Our life enrichment team, concierge, marketing, maintenance, dining service, housekeeping, nurse aides, and everyone helps in numerous ways. You will see some of them dressed up as Santa's helpers, elves, reindeer, and a snowman to make Saint Ann's winter wonderland more festive," Amend said.

Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living is also known as Saint Ann Retirement Center. It is located at 7501 W. Britton Road in northwest Oklahoma City.

For more information about Saint Ann Retirement Center visit www.saintannretirementcenter.com



Families cherish their photos with Santa. Some are used for Christmas cards and social media posts. Anna Niles and her mother, Shirley Gavula, added this pic to their Saint Ann memory book.



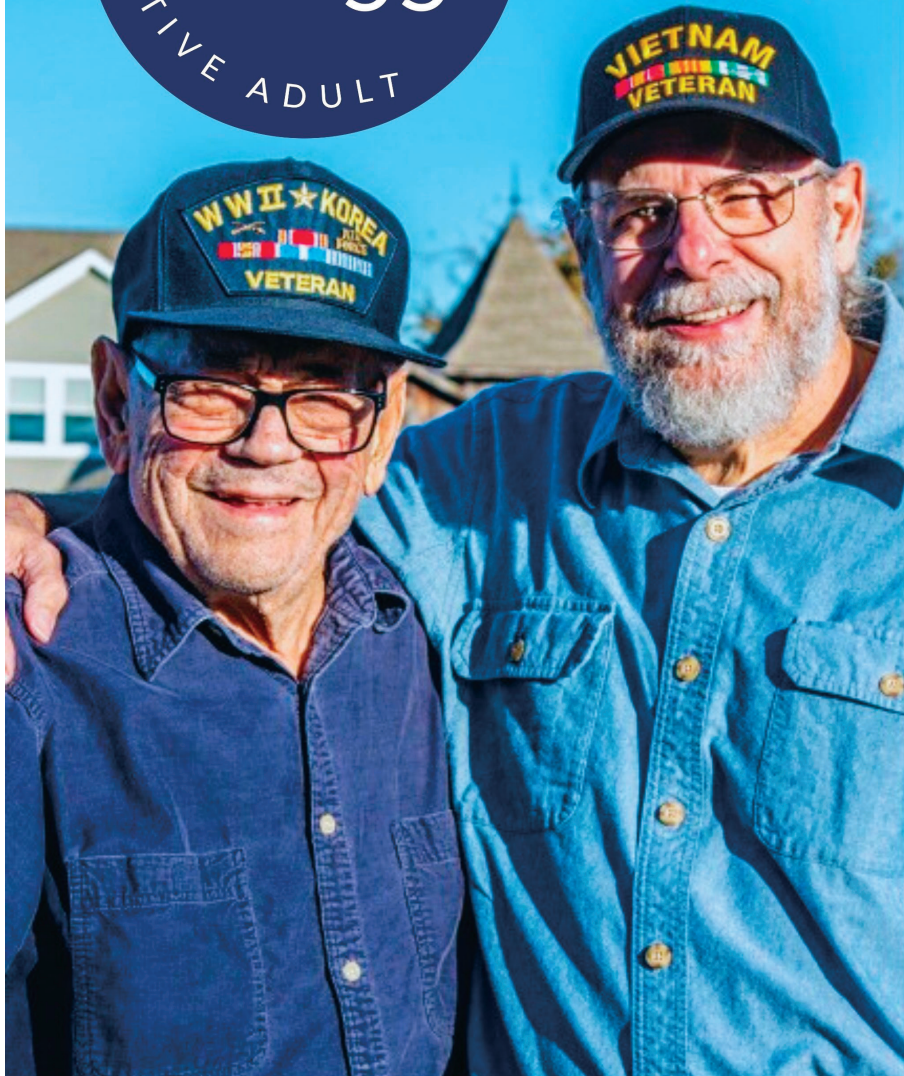
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Building a Lasting Legacy

Story by Matt Neill, Oklahoma Real Estate Planner

Since the holiday season is upon us, it is a wonderful time to reflect about how your home has been a centerpiece for the memories that have been made there and the traditions your family has kept. It is also an opportunity to think about what meaningful legacy you will create to continue to enrich your family for years to come.

Your home is much more than a property, it's a place filled with memories, love, and laughter. Whether it's the house where your children grew up or where you've hosted countless holiday gatherings, it holds a special place in your family's story. As Oklahoma's Best Real Estate Planner, I help families think about how they want their home to be a part of their family's future.

If passing your home down to your children or grandchildren is part of your plan, make sure your wishes are clearly outlined in your estate planning document. We encourage you to speak with an estate attorney to ensure your property is transferred smoothly and in line with your intentions. Most people don't know that over 70% of families argue over real estate when a family member leaves a property behind without a plan to divide it. In real estate planning, we help families think about how they want to divide their real estate, as it is often overlooked and is often a point of contention among families.

While your home is a tangible part of your legacy, your values and traditions are just as important. The holiday season offers a wonderful opportunity to reinforce what matters most to you and your family. Consider creating traditions that can be passed down for generations,



Matt Neill, the Vibrant Oklahoma Group.

such as baking a family recipe, decorating together, or sharing stories around the table. Write down or record your memories, life lessons, and hopes for the future. These treasures can serve as a guide for your loved ones, reminding them of the foundation you built and the values you cherish.

Creating a legacy plan is about more than finances—it's about ensuring that your love, traditions, and values live on. If you'd like help finding the perfect home to complement your legacy or need guidance on how to align your real estate plans with your family's future, I'd be honored to assist. Give us, your certified Real Estate Planner, a call at 405-757-9980, or email at info@vibrantok.com. Let's make sure your legacy is one that brings your family together for years to come.

Matt Neill is a realtor who has lived in Oklahoma over 17 years and enjoys spending time with his family, reading, and cheering on the OKC Thunder.

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North Pole City, Oklahoma's Home for Holiday Magic

story and photo by Vickie Jenkins, Staff Writer

As the holiday season approaches, shoppers eagerly seek that holiday magic; twinkling lights, festive decorations and the perfect Christmas tree. For those looking to surround themselves with the spirit of the season, North Pole City, is the ultimate destination. Here, the magic truly comes alive, with a dazzling array of Christmas trees, sparkling lights, and unique ornaments at every turn. Just when you think you've seen it all, another enchanting display awaits, making it a holiday wonderland unlike any other.

David Green is the owner and founder of North Pole City. He recently shared the inspiring story behind his journey to entrepreneurship. "I've always been drawn to sales and have genuinely enjoyed the process," he began. "When I was 12 years old, I dreamed of owning a bicycle, but my parents couldn't afford to buy me one. Determined to make it happen, I started helping behind the counter at Harvey's Drugstore, doing whatever tasks were needed. Over time, I saved enough money to purchase a shiny new bike. That moment was crucial to me. It taught me the value of hard work and perseverance and showed me that with dedication, my efforts would eventually pay off."

When asked how he decided to open a Christmas store, David replied, "I guess it all started when I was a kid. My mother always made Christmas a truly special time for our family. Those memories stuck with me. After I got married in 1983, my wife and I would travel to Dallas, Texas for market, and there was this incredible place called The Original Christmas Store. It was absolutely beautiful and left a lasting impression on us. At the time, I owned a ceiling fan business, which kept me and my employees busy, mainly during the summer. But, I wanted to find something to keep us occupied in the winter months as well. That's what led me to the Christmas business. The idea of opening a store dedicated to the magic of Christmas felt like a perfect fit. We chose the name North Pole City because it captured the spirit of the season. Today, we're proud to be the only Christmas store in Oklahoma City." The business, which began in 1987 when David Green built the original building, has been a family affair from the start. "Of course, my wife, Darra has been instrumental in everything over the years," David shared with a smile. "We work side by side and have spent countless hours building this dream together. Our partnership has been a cornerstone of our success." Now, their older children are becoming involved in the business, ensuring that North Pole City will carry on to the next generation. "This is truly a family-owned and operated business," David emphasized. "We put a lot of thought and care into the displays and decorations because we want everyone who steps through the doors to feel genuinely welcome. Seeing the wonder on people's faces when they walk in, that's what makes it all worthwhile."

David explained that North Pole City operates as a year-round business, with a buying season that begins in December and runs through the middle of March. "Starting in December, we also begin inventory work, which continues all the way through September. There's a lot that goes into getting everything ready for the many people who visit our store each year," he said. To keep things running smoothly,



David Green is the owner and founder of North Pole City, located at 4201 South Interstate 44 Service Road, Oklahoma City, OK. 73119. Established in 1987, North Pole City is a magical wonderland of twinkling lights and festive decorations, bringing the holiday spirit to life for all who visit.

the business relies on a dedicated team of employees. "Right now, we have 12 year-round employees and an additional 25 seasonal staff during our busiest time. I'm fortunate to have some truly amazing people working for me. They're like the cream of the crop," David said with pride. "We're like one big happy family. I have several employees who have been with us for over 35 years and others for at least 25 years. That kind of loyalty and dedication is rare and I have the utmost respect and trust for all of them. They're a huge part of what makes North

Pole City so special."

David shared his vision for North Pole City over the next five years, emphasizing a focus on growth and innovation. "We're always thinking of new ideas to enhance the experience for our customers and keep the magic of Christmas alive," he said. "I'd love to see us continue to grow, possibly even build a new, larger space to expand our offerings, and create an even more mesmerizing experience. The goal to keep improving and finding fresh ways to bring joy to everyone who visits our store."

2023 Ms. Oklahoma Senior America Continues Community Outreach

story and photo by Darl DeVault, Contributing Editor

In early November, former Ms. Oklahoma Senior America Karen B. Tims spoke about her health experiences at the Oklahoma City campus of one of the dozen Baptist Village Communities in Oklahoma. During the well-attended monthly luncheon, she related her cautionary tale about cancer and heart attacks.

She also provided valuable insights on early detection, coping strategies, and the importance of community support in health recovery at the northwest Oklahoma City campus.

Resident Wanda Halbert, 78, spoke with Tims while they ate before her presentation. During her long career, Halbert played the piano in Southern Baptist churches, where her husband was the music director. A long-time Oklahoma City Baptist Village resident, she is proud to live in side-by-side apartments on one level with her mother, Marie Hopson, 104, at the facility.

Halbert often plays the piano for her fellow residents during choir practice, performances, and sometimes during noon dining. "God's the blessing as we support one another among friends on this campus," Halbert said.

Tims then addressed those assembled for their November Fellowship Meal.

She shared what she spoke about the most as her platform when she was the reigning Ms. Oklahoma Senior America 2023. She began with her experience with breast cancer, recommending not to have silicone implants because hers ruptured causing a tailspin in her mental health.

Tims explained how extremely depressed she became and instances when it affected those around her. She said she only regained a positive outlook on life after having reconstructive surgery using saline implants.

She went on to explain how this could cause generational harm when children see their mom's changing personality.

The second half of her presentation emphasized her surprise at having a heart attack when she was in Washington, D.C. attending a national board meeting as a board member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

At age 52, she began experiencing chest pains and other symptoms during a meeting. Luckily, several in



From left, Baptist Village Development Specialist Terry Dennis poses with Ms. Oklahoma Senior America 2023 Karen B. Tims.

attendance made sure she got to the ER right away.

Tims explained how everyone should be mindful of the early symptoms of heart problems and be willing to go immediately to the ER to have themselves checked out. She related how she was present when her mother was having problems and Tims knew to get her to the hospital.

Halbert expressed her admiration for Tims' candor after the speech. "Tims showed strength of character in sharing such personal details about her life," Halbert said. "I was inspired by her desire to help others who might be going through something similar."

Before the luncheon, Baptist Village Development Specialist Terry Dennis, who played a key role in organizing the event,

gave Tims a tour of the 25-acre campus.

After speaking to a half-dozen attendees who wanted to talk with her briefly after her speech for a few minutes, Tims sat and talked at length with Dennis. They spoke about how, even today, she stays involved in her community to share the knowledge she has as a senior.

Dennis complimented Tims. "You spoke to all of us, not just the ladies because I am part of the cardiac club," Dennis said. "Working as the chaplain and safety officer for first responders in Cleveland County, Oklahoma, I had a heart attack in 2018."

Tims owns three businesses and lives in Arcadia, Okla. She grew up on a farm in southwest Oklahoma. She rides her horse as often as weather permits

and owns ranchland, making her proud to be a cowgirl.

She owns Bankers Insurance Group, CB Farms and a residential rental property firm. Her volunteer work includes the Oklahoma City Rescue Mission, National Cowboy Western Heritage Museum, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Oklahoma Foster Care Review Board, Healthy Living Center and her church.

Baptist Village Communities, which offer varying stages of senior adult living and services, are open to all seniors regardless of their religious beliefs. Residents can continue to focus on the aspects of life that make them happy while getting the level of care they need at that time, and couples with differing needs can continue to stay together.

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Oklahoma Insurance Department Shares Guidance After Storms Hit State

By Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner Glen Mulready

The Oklahoma Insurance Department (OID) is ready to assist Oklahomans affected by the severe storms that impacted central and eastern Oklahoma Nov. 2-4.

"I know folks are feeling overwhelmed in the wake of these storms," Insurance Commissioner Glen Mulready said. "OID is here to help you navigate your insurance claims process or address any issues you might have with insurers."

Anyone impacted by storms can contact OID's Consumer Assistance division at 1-800-522-0071 or by visiting oid.ok.gov. Commissioner Mulready also reminds Oklahomans to report damage at damage.ok.gov.

Here are some post-storm tips for victims:

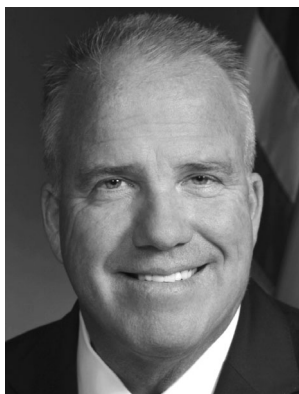
1. Access and document your damage.

Take numerous photos or videos of the damage.

Don't throw anything away unless your insurance company tells you to.

2. Make the necessary repairs to prevent further damage. Cover broken windows, holes, leaking roofs and damaged walls. Do not have permanent repairs made until your insurance company has inspected the property and you have reached an agreement with them on the cost of appropriate repairs. Move undamaged items to a safe location when necessary to avoid theft or additional loss.

3. Have your roof inspected by a trusted roofing contractor. If the damages are below or slightly over your deductible, you will want to pay for the repairs. If they exceed your deductible, turn the claim in to your



Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner Glen Mulready.

insurance carrier.

4. Contact your insurance company or agent after you have an estimate for repairs. Ask what forms, documents and information you need to provide to process your claim. Remember that replacement cost policies require the work to be completed within six months of the date of loss to receive the replacement cost payments that were withheld.

5. Save all receipts. If you made repairs to your property, save all receipts, including those from the temporary repairs that your insurance policy might cover.

6. Ask about additional living expenses. If your home is damaged to the extent that it is unlivable, ask your insurance provider if you have coverage for living expenses incurred while repairs are being made.

Remember these tips when you're dealing with contractors to avoid fraud:

- Always get more than one bid.

- Check references and phone numbers. Contractor complaint information is collected by the Better Business Bureau. You can contact the Construction Industries Board to make sure the contractor has a valid license to do business in the state and that they carry liability insurance.

- Don't pay upfront, and don't make your final payment until the job is finished.

- Avoid contractors who offer to waive your deductible or promise a rebate (It's against the law!).

- Never sign a contract with blank spaces; always keep a copy for your records.

If you suspect contractor fraud, contact the Office of the Oklahoma Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit at 1-833-681-1895.

You can find more information about preparing for storms and reviewing your insurance coverage at oid.ok.gov/GetReady.

SNL Metro Libraries December Events

Senior Events at the Metropolitan Library System - December

This holiday season, the Metropolitan Library System has a festive and lively lineup of programs tailored for seniors. From wellness classes to crafting sessions, there's something for everyone.

Wellness and Fitness Programs

- **Stay Active & Independent for Life (SAIL):** Chair exercises to boost strength and mobility.

- *Almonte Library:* 10 a.m., Dec. 3, 5, 10, and 12.

- *Choctaw Library:* 10 a.m., Dec. 4, 11, and 18.

- **Tai Chi:** Improve balance and muscle strength. Space is limited—register early to secure your spot!

- *Choctaw Library:* 1 p.m., Dec. 4, 11, and 18.

- *Intermediate Tai Chi at Southern Oaks Library:* 10:15 a.m., Dec. 3, 5, 10, 12, and 19.

Support and Safety

- **The 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's:** Learn to recognize the signs of Alzheimer's and next steps.

- *Northwest Library:* 6 p.m., Dec. 16.

- **S.A.L.T. Council (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together):** Discuss scams targeting seniors and how to stay safe.

- *Warr Acres Library:* 10 a.m., Dec. 2.

Crafting and Creativity

Seniors can get crafty this holiday season with these engaging activities.

- **Deck the Bottles: Christmas Wine Bottle Upcycling**

- *Edmond Library:* 6:30 p.m., Dec. 4.

- **Cross-Stitch Ornaments**

- *Southern Oaks Library:* 3 p.m., Dec. 8.

- **Needle Felt Architecture Painting**

- *Almonte Library:* 2 p.m., Dec. 14.

Ongoing Crafting Groups

Connect with fellow crafters through these regular programs.

- **Downtown Crochet and Knit Club:**

- *Downtown OKC Library:* 2 p.m., Dec. 7.

- **Craft Along:**

- *Bethany Library:* 1:30 p.m., Dec. 4 and 18.

- **Beginner-Friendly Crochet Night:**

- *Belle Isle Library:* 6 p.m., Dec. 16.

- **Maker Meetup:**

- *Bethany Library:* 6 p.m., Dec. 11.

Fun with Your Grandkids

Create meaningful memories and enjoy the season with these family-friendly events.

- **Makerspace:** Winter Whittle: Learn how to turn soap into festive works of art.

- *Choctaw Library:* 4 p.m., Dec. 11.

- **Take-and-Make Felt Animal Ornament Kit:** Create adorable woodland decorations.

- *Edmond Library:* Dec. 9-15.

- **Paper Mosaic Holiday Cards:** Craft unique holiday cards as keepsakes.

- *Choctaw Library:* 3:15 p.m., Dec. 12.

- **Resin Ornaments:** Make dazzling resin holiday ornaments.

- *Midwest City Library:* 5 p.m., Dec. 12.

This December, the Metropolitan Library System is your destination for staying active, learning new skills and making meaningful connections. Join us for these events and more!

OPINION

THE SAVVY SENIOR

How to Talk to Your Doctors - and Get Them to Listen

Dear Savvy Senior,

How can I get my doctors to listen better? I just turned 78, and over the past few years I feel more and more dismissed by my doctors. I know I can't be the only one who feels this way. Any suggestions? Dissatisfied Patient

Dear Dissatisfied,

Communication difficulties between patients and their doctors is nothing new. Many older patients feel like their doctors are dismissing their concerns, which can be frustrating and lead to missed diagnoses and delayed care. If you believe your doctor isn't listening to you, here are some tips offered by the National Institute on Aging that may help.

Prepare for your appointment: Before your exam, make a written prioritized list of any questions and concerns you want to discuss with your doctor, or print any online health research you've gathered, and bring it to your appointment so you won't forget anything. If you're in for a diagnostic visit, you should prepare a detailed description of your symptoms, when they began and what makes them worse.

Be honest and upfront: Even if the topic seems sensitive or embarrassing, it's important to be honest and upfront with your doctor. You may feel uncomfortable talking about memory loss or bowel issues, but these are all important to your health. It's better to be thorough and share detailed information than to be quiet or shy about what you're thinking or feeling. Remember, your doctor is used to talking about all kinds of

personal matters.

Ask specific questions: If you and your doctor aren't communicating well, ask specific questions that require a response. For example: What might have caused the problem I'm dealing with? What's the specific name of my diagnosis? Is the problem serious? Will it heal completely or require ongoing management? What future symptoms might suggest you need emergency care or a follow-up visit? When and how will you receive your test results? If you don't understand something, don't hesitate to ask: Can you explain that in simpler terms? Or: Can you give me more details about that?

Take someone with you: Bring along a family member or friend to your appointment. Your companion can help you ask questions or raise concerns that you hadn't considered and listen to what the doctor is telling you and give you support.

Be persistent: If your doctor isn't addressing your questions, repeat them or rephrase them. If you still don't get anywhere, follow up with one of these statements: "I'm worried that we aren't communicating well. Here's why I feel that way." Or: "I need to talk with you about X. I feel like I can't. Can we talk about this?"

For more tips, the National Institute on Aging offers a free booklet called "Talking with Your Doctor: A Guide for Older Adults" that can help you prepare for an appointment and become a better and more informed patient. To order free copy or see it online, visit order.nia.nih.gov/publication/talking-with-your-doctor-a-guide-for-older-adults.

Consider moving on: If you're not making any progress with your doctor and the problem persists, it's probably time to start looking for a new provider. Depending how unsatisfied you are with your care, you could also notify your doctor's medical group and your insurance company or leave feedback on their online profile. If you're dealing with a serious issue - like a doctor who prescribes the wrong medication or fails to provide test results in a timely manner - it might be appropriate to file a complaint with the state medical board.

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

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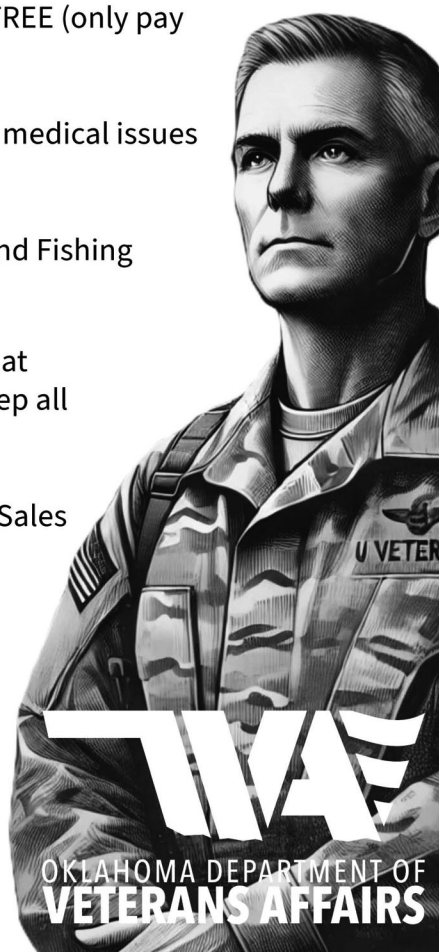
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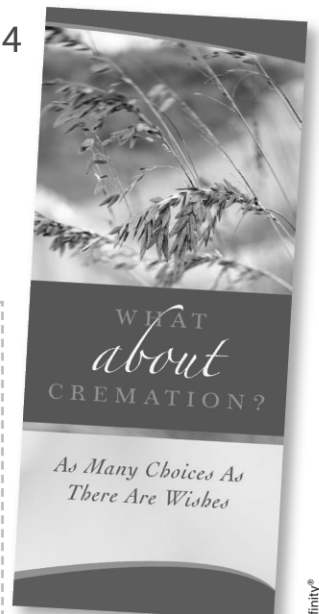
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See Sudoku Answers on Page: 31



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SNL CENTENARIANS OF OK



Patty Stevens

(Right) **100 years old.** Patty Kelly Stevens, born in 1924 in Honolulu, Hawaii, was captured by Japanese soldiers in 1941 and interned in Manila until freed by U.S. troops at 20. She co-authored *Waiting for America* to share her story and proudly flies the U.S. flag, reminding all to "Honor Your Country!" We celebrate her resilience and love for her nation.



Beulah Jones

(Right) **100 years old.** Beulah (Underwood) Jones of Pawnee, born November 3, 1924, dedicated 40 years to hospital maintenance and community service. A devoted homemaker, she loved gospel music, quilting, and with Christmas being her cherished holiday, strengthening family ties. Her advice: "Nurture health through walking, balanced eating, and diligence; and cherish joy."



Dottie Pennington

(Right) **100 years old.** Dottie (Dorothy) Pennington of Tulsa celebrated her 100th birthday with lots of her favorite color - Pink - attire, balloons, cake and more! She was married to a US Air Force Lt. Colonel and moved often to bases around the world. Her extended family calls her Mama Dottie and tells great stories of visiting her on summer vacations. She sang them to sleep with her favorite hymn, *Jesus Loves Me*. Dottie's words of wisdom for us today are: Always be Truthful.



Helen Nigh

(Left) **100 years old.** Meet Helen Nigh of Tulsa. She had a career as a commercial artist and her artwork is still in use for the *Enid Christmas* in July poster. Helen also painted a mural of animals in the Pediatric ward at St. Mary's Hospital in Enid. She loves chocolate and Christmas is her favorite holiday. Helen's words of wisdom to us today are: Never Close the Door.



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A labor of love and determination

By Marise Boehs

This Christmas marks the thirty-eighth annual Norman Christmas Day Community Dinner, which is held at the Norman High School Commons cafeteria and is coordinated by the Paula M. and Bob D. Magarian Norman Christmas Day Community Dinner Foundation, Inc.

This free, traditional Christmas dinner, which is open to everyone, and delivers over 300 meals to residents who are shut-ins. On average, 2000 meals are served through dine in and carry out.

The Dinner is held on Christmas Day from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Guests are greeted and served by 300 volunteers. There is a large toy room where children walk through and select what they want. Gloves, caps for children and adults, socks, scarves, and adult grooming items are distributed by our volunteers. Santa is there to take pictures with the children and hand out candy while a local band plays Christmas songs to bring joy to the families.

Through the years, for some families, this is their only Christmas.

Banks, businesses, and private donations along with 300 volunteers make the dinner possible.

But it hasn't always been so. In 1987, the Magarian family of six, got together with a few caring individuals and together they organized a free community Christmas Dinner to benefit those who were alone, or those who were unable to prepare a Christmas meal.

"On Christmas Eve 1987 we had the church all set for the dinner. It was decorated and the women of St. Michaels had prepared the food. Toys were in place. It was all arranged and I went home," said Bob Magarian.

Norman
Christmas Day
Community Dinner
Foundation, Inc.



*"No One Should Eat Alone
on Christmas Day"*

"The next morning I woke up early to the worst ice storm in the history of Norman to date. It was horrible. Ice was hanging from everything. Trees where down," he continued, "But I started for the church. It took me a long time to get there. It was 5am when I arrived and Howard Moore, my right hand man, was the only one there. He was heating up the roasters."



Bob Magarian, President

But the day did not go smoothly. The bus sent to the designated pickup spots only had one rider and then the bus caught fire. So the men from St. Michaels got in their cars and drove, sliding and dodging fallen limbs, around Norman.

In the end, 20 people came and 24 volunteers served them. "One family with children told me if it wasn't for that dinner they would have not had Christmas because he had been laid off from his job two weeks earlier," Magarian said.

Thus the Annual Christmas Dinner was decided.

In 2017 the Magarian family lost their only son, Bob Dwight, unexpectedly, and in 2020 their oldest daughter, Paula Marie, from brain cancer.

The family decided in 2021 to honor their memory by establishing the "Paula M. and Bob D. Magarian Norman Christmas Day Community Dinner Foundation, Inc."

This traditional Christmas meal is open to everyone who may need a place to eat, or just someone to eat with and share in the joys of Christmas.

Bring the family and a friend.

Meals may be delivered to local residents who are shut-ins.

Please call Bob Magarian at 405-364-3273 to make arrangements.

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Mother Starts Blanket Drive to Honor Daughter and Help the Homeless

story and photo by
Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Sherri Law, a disabled U.S. Army veteran, believes in giving back to help others.

Her late daughter Sicily Whatley embodied that trait every day, and Law is carrying on that commitment via a blanket drive helping the Homeless Alliance of Oklahoma City.

Whatley died Aug. 19, 2023, at age 39, due to prolonged untreated blood pressure.

"It was very unexpected," Law said.

Whatley, who worked at Homeless Alliance of Oklahoma City, left behind three children.

"She really enjoyed working with the homeless," Law said. "Her death was traumatic for her children and for me. I wanted to do something in her memory because she was so well-liked at the Homeless Alliance. Last year we did a blanket drive and just friends and family donated blankets to the Homeless Alliance."

Law said she was determined to make the blanket drive an annual event.

"It's just a way to give back, to pay it forward, to do something for someone less fortunate than ourselves," she said. "We've gotten over 100 blankets, and we're partnering this year with BrightStar Care of Oklahoma City, and Hope for the Future, which is a non-profit for children who have been removed from the home. We're going to present them to the Homeless Alliance Dec. 3 at 11 a.m."

Law said she wanted her grandchildren to learn from grief.

"They were going through such horrible, intense grief. They couldn't seem to get past the fact that they had lost their mom," she said. "I wanted them to see that even though you are going through something like this, that there are people worse off than us who don't have a home, that don't have a bed to sleep in and



Friends and family of the late Sicily Whatley helped organize a blanket drive in 2023 in Whatley's honor benefiting the Homeless Alliance. A second blanket drive was held this fall with blankets delivered to the Homeless Alliance Dec. 3.

that don't have food on the table. Let's try to get out of this valley that we are in emotionally and give back."

Law believes her daughter would be proud of her family's efforts.

"I think she's up there smiling. I'm sure she would've never thought that her family would come together and do something like that in her memory," Law said. "I really think that she would just have the biggest smile on her face."

Law said the Homeless Alliance is appreciative of her family efforts.

"I try to accommodate what their needs are," she said. "They send us thank you letters. They're very grateful."

The Homeless Alliance operates a multi-agency homeless resource campus with access to multiple nonprofit and government agencies providing services including health clinics, veteran services, budgeting and legal assistance. The campus

also includes Oklahoma City's only low-barrier Day Shelter which serves breakfast and lunch, offers showers, mail service, lockers, phones, computers, a pet kennel and access to classes and other service providers. The Homeless Alliance also has a street outreach team which goes out into the community to find people and connect them with services and operates four low-barrier employment programs including the Curbside Chronicle, Curbside

See DRIVE Page 21

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SNL TINSELTOWN TALKS

Like the Singer who Made it Famous, the Novelty 80s Grandma/Reindeer Christmas Song Still Going Strong

By Nick Thomas

'Tis the season when television channels bombard us with round-the-clock Christmas movies while radio stations across the country add festive tunes to their daily playlists. In the latter case, one divisive ditty has been traditionally considered naughty or nice.

Elmo Shropshire didn't write "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer," but he's been singing the jolly jingle with the not-so-jolly lyrics since first hearing it in Lake Tahoe in the late 70s. The song was released in 1979 and credited to duo Elmo & Patsy, with Elmo's then-wife Patsy Trigg.

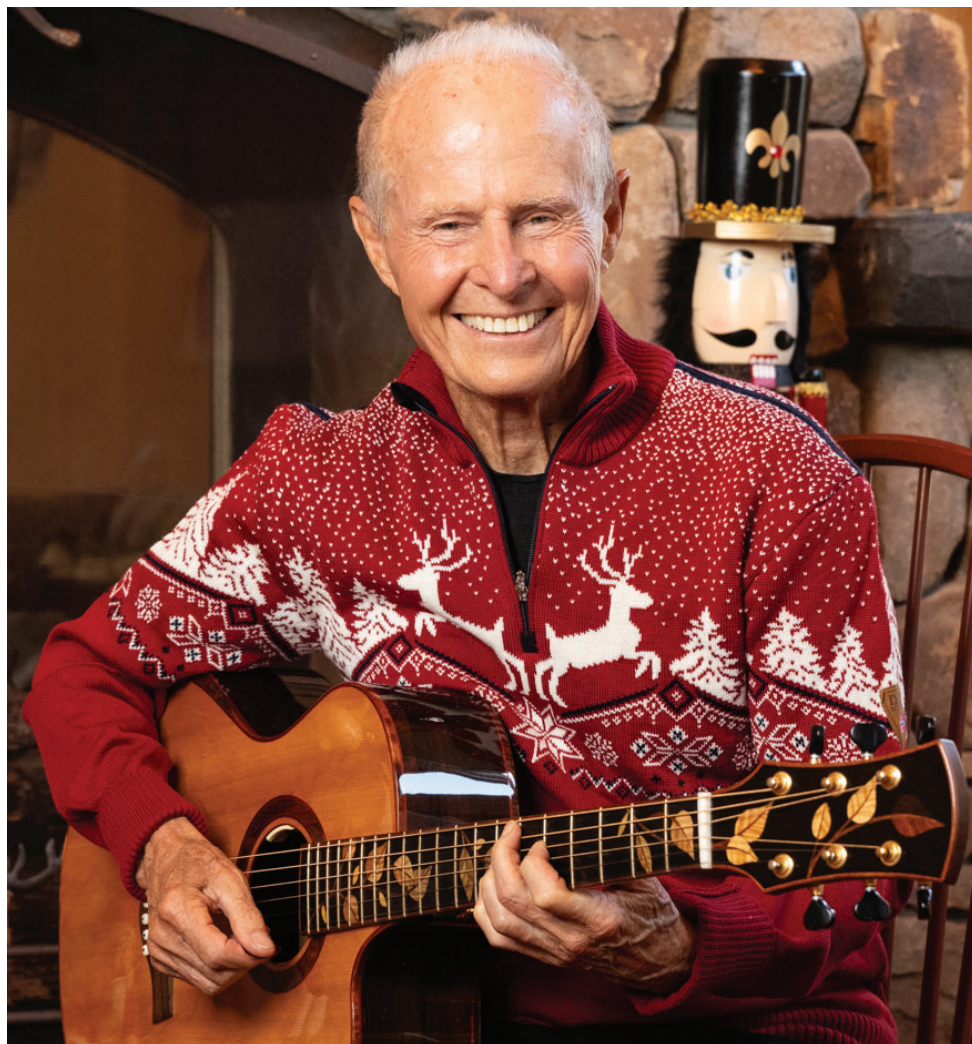
Turning 88 this year, Shropshire (known also as "Dr. Elmo") is a competitive distance runner, too, gathering several national and world titles in his 80s. He still performs music and for several years has traveled to the East Coast in November/December with a group of musicians called The Holiday Express presenting

shows at soup kitchens, hospitals, and schools for kids with special needs, where they also distribute food and gifts.

While he readily acknowledges that not everyone is a fan of his now-classic Christmas song, audiences would probably riot if he didn't include the novelty ballad - a catchy tune wrapped around witty and admittedly macabre lyrics, featuring Shropshire's distinctive raspy voice.

"I had no musical background or sang before moving out to California in the 60s," said Shropshire, a Kentucky native and graduate of Auburn University's veterinary college, and now lives in Novato, north of San Francisco.

After graduating from Auburn, he worked with horses at racetracks around New York, then moved to the West Coast after a trip to San Francisco and later opened an animal clinic in the Bay Area. He soon became interested in bluegrass music,



Elmo Credit - Prismic Photography



Elmo and wife Pam. Credit - Prismic Photography

learning to play the banjo and began performing with Patsy, although the couple later divorced in the 80s. Shropshire even hosted a bluegrass radio show recorded from his boarding house.

When songwriter Randy Brooks played his reindeer song for the couple when they were all stranded in a Lake Tahoe hotel due to bad weather in 1978, Shropshire knew he wanted to record his own version.

"I just made this funny Christmas recording as a gag and a friend took it to a radio station and they started playing it," he recalled. "People began calling in to say they loved it, but so did others who hated it. After that first Christmas, I thought that would be the end of it. But every Christmas the stations would play it again. Unbeknownst to me, they were copying the song on cassettes, and radio stations began playing it all over the country in the early 80s."

Shropshire knew he had a hit. In 1983, he sold his vet clinic and used \$30,000 to produce a video of the song with one modification: "Grandma survives in the video!" he said. "And I played grandma and grandpa." Patsy played Cousin Mel.

The original video currently has over 15 million YouTube views (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=MglwLeASnkw), while the song has sold millions of units over the years in various formats - vinyl, cassette, CD, digital, and ringtones.

"It's impossible to tell the exact number because it's been used so much and on so many different albums and online recordings," said Pam Wendell, Shropshire's wife since 2000. But the royalties keep coming anytime his version is used - in movies, TV shows, and even a plush toy reindeer that plays the song.

While Shropshire has recorded many other songs including various versions of his 'grandma' theme - "The Ballot of Grandma" and "Grandma's Killer Fruitcake" - he takes the controversy of the original in his stride.

"It's just wonderful to have a hit song, even if you only have one," he says. "I never thought I could still be making a living from it. It's just one of those things you could never predict."

And for those of you grinchers who still can't warm up to a Christmas novelty song about a granny taken out by a hit-and-run reindeer, just be grateful her encounter wasn't with a John Deere.

That really could have been gruesome.

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery, Ala., and has written features, columns, and interviews for many newspapers and magazines. See https://www.getnickt.org.

DRIVE

Continued from Page 18

Flowers, Sasquatch Shaved Ice, and Curbside Apparel.

Each year, Oklahoma City takes one day to count and survey people who are experiencing homelessness. The intention is to provide a snapshot of homelessness in Oklahoma City, of both the number of people and their characteristics. A large team of community volunteers from more than 25 organizations surveyed people in emergency homeless shelters, transitional housing facilities, hot meal sites, crisis facilities, encampments, and various street locations.

In 2024, there were a total of 1,838 "countable" people who were experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma City on the night of the Point in Time count.

Law works at the Homeless Alliance Winter Shelter located at 1724 NW 4th Street, which is open Nov. 1-March 31.

"The shelter opens at 4 p.m. and they give them a warm bed, a blanket, and a meal," she said. "We can hold 270 people,

but when the temperature drops below 32 degrees, we don't turn anyone away."

As a disabled veteran, Law receives home healthcare from BrightStar Care of Edmond/Oklahoma City, via her VA benefits.

"Because of some health issues, I do have to have a home care health aid, which the VA provides for me because it's medically needed," she said. "I'm able to use my motorized wheelchair, and that's how I'm successful on the job."

Law said faith has helped guide her through her military experience, as well as the loss of her daughter, and led her to a job at the Homeless Alliance.

"I do believe in God, and I do believe He is still on the throne. He still hears prayers," she said. "I applied for a job there and got it. I'm working. They all remembered Sicily. They loved my story. I am very grateful for this experience to work and honor my daughter."

For more information about donating blankets to the Homeless Alliance call (405) 415-8410 or visit www.homelessalliance.org.



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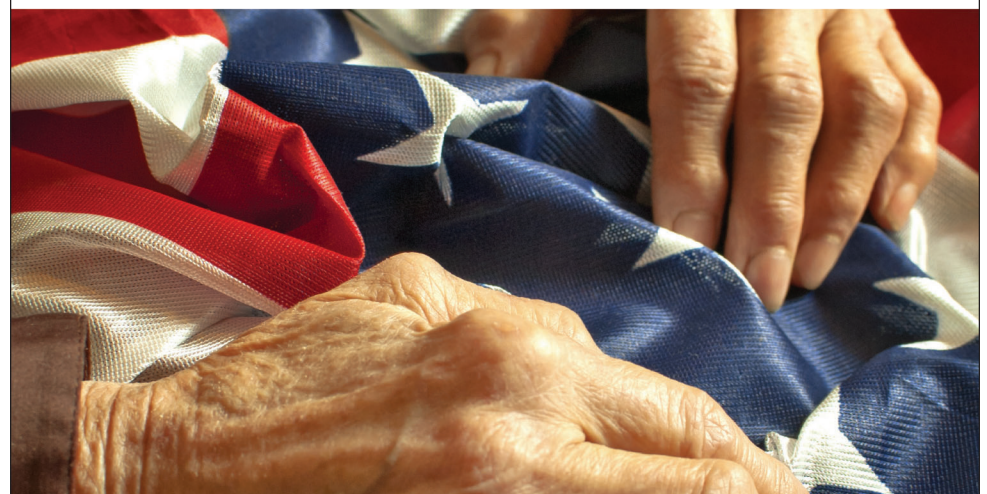
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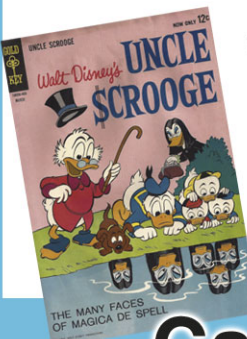
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Take a Hike! To Skydance Bridge, OKC

story and photos by
Nick Thomas

With over 90 miles of trails weaving through the area, Oklahoma City's numerous parks are a haven for walkers, joggers, and hikers alike. While the green urban spaces invite exploration of the hidden gems and points of interest throughout the city, one must-see landmark for visitors - day or night - is the iconic Skydance Bridge.

Arriving late in the afternoon, we parked on SW Second Street before heading south on foot through Scissortail Park, named after Oklahoma's state bird - the scissor-tailed flycatcher. Our destination was the 380-foot-long pedestrian Skydance Bridge that spans I-40 and connects the north (40-acre) and south (30-acre) portions of the park. Opened in 2012, the state bird also inspired the bridge's design with its striking V-shaped steel sculpture towering nearly 200 feet above the walkway, resembling the flycatcher's distinctive forked tail feathers.

After admiring the bridge, we continued through the park and surrounding area waiting for sunset since the bridge is especially stunning when lit by LED lights during the evening. But there was no shortage of dazzling sights to fill the remaining daylight hours,

including a walk around a lake with surrounding trees teeming with colorful chirping birds. Rental pedal boats, canoes, and kayaks glided slowly over the water as their occupants absorbed the relaxing view dominated by Oklahoma City's tallest building. The sleek 50-story Devon Tower, also completed in 2012, is a skyline scene stealer with its reflective glass exterior. The Vast Restaurant occupies the top two floors offering both meals "sourced from local producers" and spectacular views of the city.

Myriad Botanical Gardens, just a couple of blocks north of the park off Reno Street, was intriguing. Since originally conceived by city leaders in the late 1960s, the 17-acre plot most recently underwent an \$11 million renovation in 2022 and features immaculate landscaping, a children's garden, a restaurant area, fountains, sculptures, and the dazzling Crystal Bridge Tropical Conservatory encased in a shell of over 3,000 translucent acrylic panels housing an impressive exotic plant collection.

The "Taking Flight: Light as a Feather" art piece, installed 2 years ago at the north end of Scissortail Park, was a delightful surprise find. The 6-ton 31-foot-tall metal sculpture is the artist's



Taking Flight Light as a Feather sculpture.



Skydance Bridge by day.

vision of a delicately curved feather gently floating earthward. Stunning any time - and especially at night when fiber optic lights illuminate its intricate details - the sculpture truly comes to life just prior to sunset when we happened to walk past. As the sun hung in the darkening sky behind the sculpture, its dying rays filtered through the figure highlighting the steel bars comprising the feather's ribs, offering an inspiring picture-perfect moment we were lucky to experience.

For many visitors, however, the star of Scissortail Park will be the illuminated Skydance Bridge straddling the busy Interstate below. The remotely controlled lights, programmable for holidays and special events, displayed a

vibrant deep blue glow during our visit, dramatically highlighting the structure's sweeping design. But the color varies from night to night. When viewed from the bridge's south end and set against the backdrop of city lights, it was the perfect conclusion to our 2-mile urban nature walk around Oklahoma City.

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and has written features, columns, and interviews for many newspapers and magazines. His hiking column describes short trails, hikes, and walks from around the country that seniors might enjoy while traveling.

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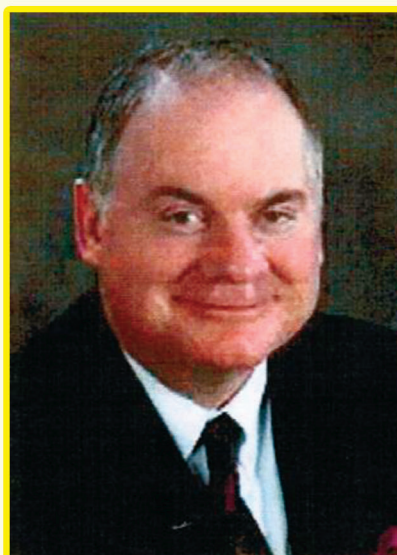


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Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Celebration Events Set

story by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Historic authenticity meets holiday festivity during A Territorial Christmas Celebration, an annual tradition for over 35 years in Guthrie.

From a costumed Christmas parade to Victorian home tours, this celebration immerses visitors in the city's lively Territorial period.

The 2024 edition of Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Celebration spans three weekends Nov. 30, Dec. 7 and Dec. 14.

The first event was a Gatlin Brothers Christmas and Country concert on Friday, Nov. 29 at 7 p.m. at Guthrie's Scottish Rite Temple. Doors opened at 6 p.m.

Opening Night kicked off Saturday, Nov. 30 at 6 p.m. with the Territorial Christmas Parade.

The parade started at the Scottish Rite Temple, led by the Territorial Governor candidates. From there, a promenade of illuminated cars, trucks, dune buggies, and even be-lighted people went west along Oklahoma Avenue, which included an appearance by Santa Claus.

The parade ended at the State Capital Publishing Museum and was immediately followed by the Territorial Governor ceremonies.

The Guthrie Territorial Christmas Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)(3), operates the yearly Celebrations.

Each year Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Foundation nominates a few citizens to run for Territorial Governor and Junior Governor. Votes are sold for \$1 each, and candidates compete to buy their way to the title.

After the parade on the steps

of Guthrie's Post Office, this year's Territorial Governor and Junior Governor was announced and the lighting of the Territorial Christmas tree.

This year's celebration includes the "Territorial Tots: Baby Governor Photo Contest."

Unlike the Territorial Governor and Junior Territorial Governor campaigns and activities, this is purely an online contest for Guthrie babies to dress in their Victorian best and claim the honor of Territorial Tot!

Voters had until Nov. 27, to vote for their favorite tot by donating online! You can find the name and age of each little one under their photo.

All proceeds are funded for Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Celebrations: Opening Night, Victorian Walks, and Distinctive Homes Tour.

The Distinctive Homes Tour offers you an opportunity for an exclusive look inside some of Guthrie's most impressive homes and historic buildings that are specially selected by Guthrie's Territorial Christmas and are dressed up for the holiday season.

According to the GTCC Facebook page "The tour is our largest fundraiser and, as such, we only invite the best and most beautiful homes in Guthrie to participate!"

This year's Homes Tour is Dec. 7 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$20 each.

Proof of purchase is required for entry into the homes/buildings.

Reserve your tickets online for



The 2024 edition of Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Celebration spans three weekends Nov. 30, Dec. 7 and Dec. 14. The celebration features a lighted Christmas Parade, Victorian Walk, Christmas Market, Victorian Home Tours, and more.

pickup on the day of the event, or purchase in person on Dec. 7 between 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Guthrie City Hall located at 101 N 2nd Street.

Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Victorian Walks will be held Saturday Dec. 7 and Saturday Dec. 14.

During Guthrie's Victorian Walk Evenings, visitors will step back into the Victorian era with carolers in early-1900s dress and decorated store windows complete with re-enactors depicting Victorian-era Guthrie. Participants can enjoy treats from peanut vendors lining the downtown streets.

Guthrie's Christmas Market will open three weekends at 117 E Oklahoma Avenue on the corner of Wentz and Oklahoma Avenue with vendors and food trucks.

The Christmas Market will be open Saturday, Nov. 30 from noon to 6 p.m.; and Saturday, Dec. 7 and Saturday Dec. 14 from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Over 30 years, 1,000 performances, and 150,000 patrons "A Territorial Christmas Carol" is back in this reimagining of Dickens' classic tale at Guthrie's Pollard Theatre.

The show runs Nov. 22 through Dec. 22.

As a not-for-profit organization, the Pollard Theatre's mission is to produce meaningful, entertaining, and diverse theatre within the City of Guthrie and the greater state of Oklahoma. Honoring the legacy of the Guthrie Arts and Humanities Council, their work strives to engage and inspire audiences within their community and beyond.

"These events are so special because our downtown absolutely comes to life with visions of times gone past," Economic Development Director Shawnda Rooney said. "The Victorian talent along the street closures and the Victorian talent that make up all of the live windows create such a magical atmosphere for visitors and locals alike."

For more information about Guthrie's Territorial Christmas Celebration visit www.guthriesterritorialchristmas.com or visit www.thepollard.org

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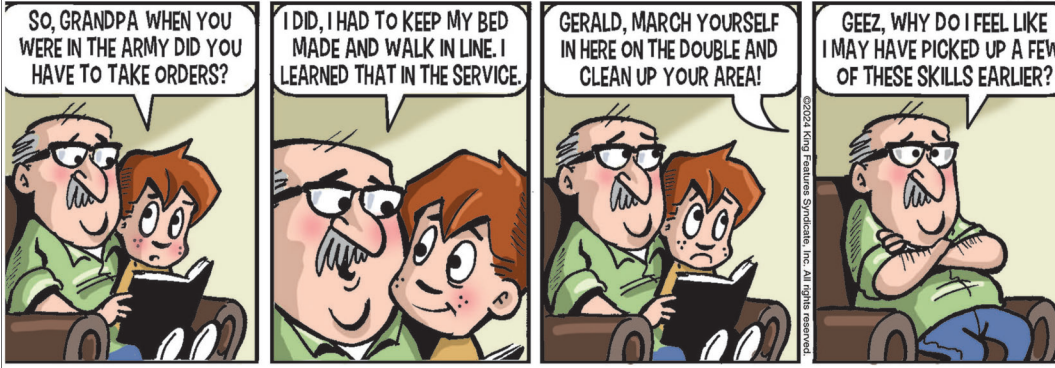
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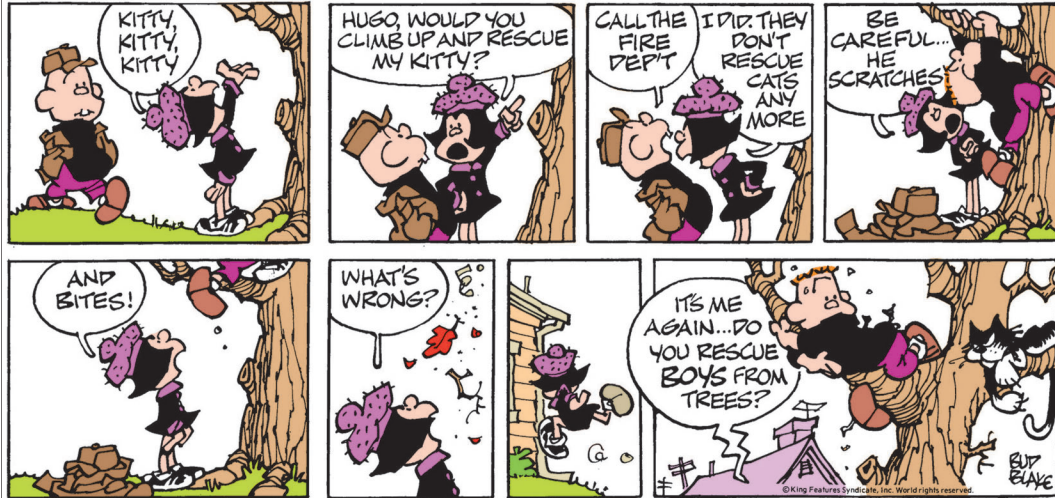
Amber Waves

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BIBLE WORD SEARCH

by Elie's Spiritual Treasures

Psalm 35:5-6

May they be like **chaff** before the wind, with the angel of the LORD **driving them away**; may their path be **dark and slippery**, with the angel of the LORD **pursuing** them.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION



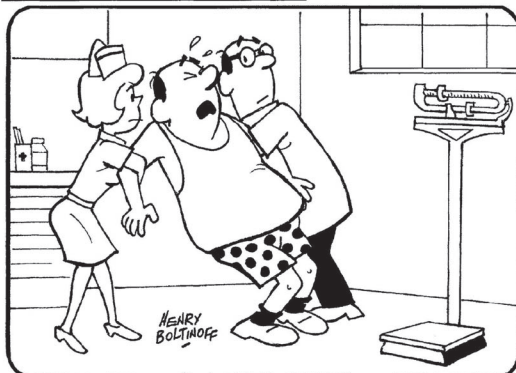
Find the **bolded/underlined** words in the diagram. They run in all directions — forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

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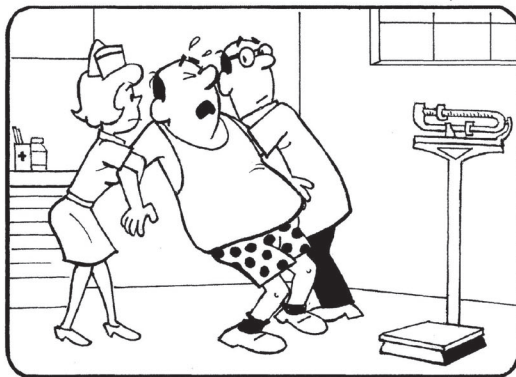
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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.

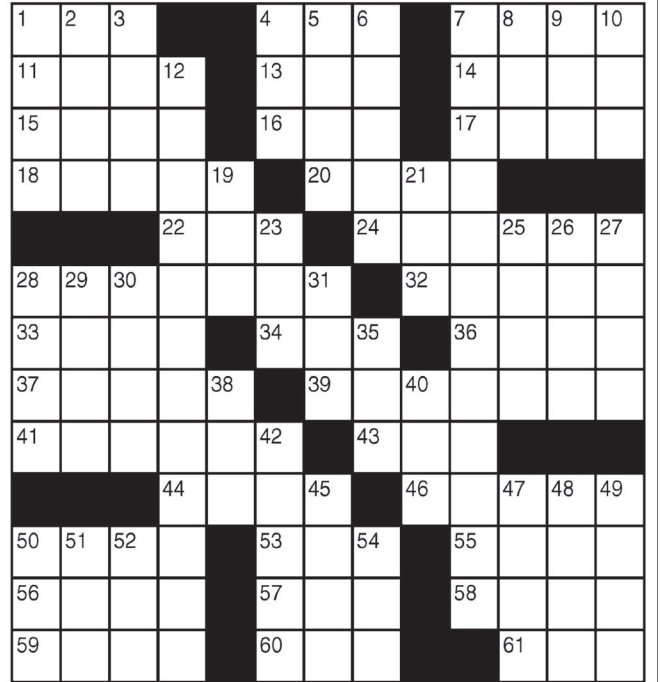


Differences: 1. Leg is moved. 2. Scale is shorter. 3. Nurse's foot is shorter. 4. Cabinet is not as wide. 5. Window is smaller. 6. Sock is shorter.

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Newt
- 4 Former Delta rival
- 7 Very dry
- 11 Bjorn of tennis fame
- 13 Documentarian Burns
- 14 Portrayal
- 15 Afrikaner
- 16 Fire sign?
- 17 Pinnacle
- 18 Lieu
- 20 Trumpet
- 22 Actress Vardalos
- 24 Trite
- 28 Basking venue
- 32 Skiing spot
- 33 Twistable treat
- 34 TV's Danson
- 36 Autobahn auto
- 37 Open-mouthed
- 39 Swiss cheese
- 41 Wards off
- 43 Resort
- 44 Pleasing
- 46 Batter's dry spell
- 50 Spiced tea
- 53 Vitamin stat
- 55 Bangkok cuisine
- 56 Hayloft site
- 57 Whatever



- 58 Christmas
- 59 Unforeseen problem
- 60 Skillet
- 61 Chart-topping song
- 8 Sinbad's bird
- 9 City on the Danube
- 10 Golf peg
- 12 Banner at a new store
- 19 Conk out
- 21 "Kidnapped" monogram
- 23 Play part
- 25 Aspiration
- 26 Mimic
- 27 Prefix with conference
- 28 Fly high
- 29 Incite
- 30 Tide type
- 31 Small barrel
- 35 Hosp. workers
- 38 Football's Manning
- 40 Boom times
- 42 Discard
- 45 — St. Vincent Millay
- 47 "Nopel!"
- 48 Algeria's neighbor
- 49 Artist Mondrian
- 50 "CSI" airtel
- 51 Solo in space
- 52 Altar constellation
- 54 Novelist Rand

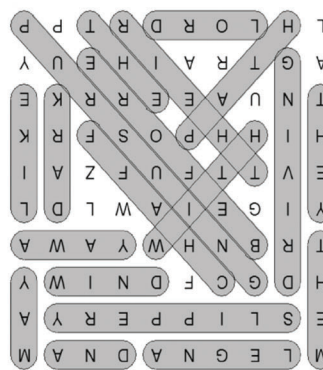
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Trivia test

by Fifi Rodriguez

1. GEOGRAPHY: In which country would you find the Angkor Wat temple?
2. SCIENCE: Which vitamin aids in blood clotting?
3. MUSIC: Which pop music icon has a Pantone color named after him?
4. TELEVISION: Which 1990s TV comedy series features the theme song "Cleveland Rocks"?
5. U.S. STATES: Which state is last alphabetically?
6. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is an adult female turkey called?
7. MOVIES: Which popular 1994 movie features a character named Red?
8. AD SLOGANS: Which company's advertising slogan is "Like a Good Neighbor"?
9. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: How long is the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade route?
10. ANATOMY: What are beta cells?

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Answers



Solution time: 22 mins.

Answers

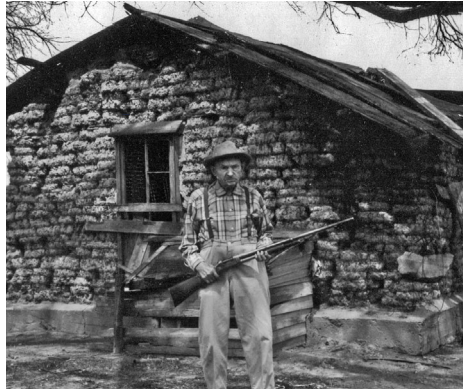
King Crossword

1. Cambodia; 2. Vitamin K; 3. Prince ("Love Symbol #2"; a purple shade); 4. "The Drew Carey Show"; 5. Wyoming; 6. A hen; 7. "The Shawshank Redemption"; 8. State Farm; 9. 2.5 miles; 10. Specialized cells in the pancreas that produce insulin

Trivia Test Answers

Oklahoma's Only Remaining Sod House Turns 130 Years Old

NEAR ALINE, Okla. - The Sod House Quilters are stepping in to celebrate and commemorate the 130th anniversary of the Sod House the "quilted way." Christmas trees throughout the museum will be decorated with quilt blocks such as log cabins, yo-yos, four patches, stars and Christmas tree blocks. The Sod House itself will have seasonal decorations on display.



"A Quilter's Christmas" open house will be on Saturday, December 14, from 1-3 p.m. The Friends of the Sod House Museum will celebrate this milestone with cookies and cider and door prizes. Visitors can buy raffle tickets for a queen-sized quilt with the theme of "Chickadees and Trees," made by the Sod House Quilters. Tickets are \$2 each, three for \$5 and 6 for \$10. Tickets can be purchased by visiting the museum or calling 580-463-2441.

The Silver Strings and Friends musical group will share their love of music with guests at the Christmas Open House. They will play folk, traditional Christmas music, gospel, country and unusual instrument music throughout the day. As part of the celebration, the audience will be encouraged to join in during the musical presentation.

The museum is located southeast of Aline on State Highway 8. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

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7	2	1	4	5	6	9	3	8
6	3	5	1	9	8	4	2	7
4	9	8	2	7	3	1	6	5
2	1	3	8	6	9	5	7	4
5	8	4	7	1	2	6	9	3
9	7	6	5	3	4	8	1	2
8	4	7	9	2	1	3	5	6
3	5	9	6	8	7	2	4	1
1	6	2	3	4	5	7	8	9

Sudoku Answers


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By Marilyn Olson,
VillagesOKC Executive Director

Carissa Burns, 22, will be a December graduate of Southern Nazarene University with a bachelor of science degree in psychology. As part of her study, she completed a three-month practicum with VillagesOKC, learning about active older adults and the many connection opportunities VillagesOKC provides.

Admittedly reluctant at first, Burns finished the practicum with an enlightened understanding of the realities of positive aging. She said initially she had hoped to work with middle-aged adults, but working with older adults has been rewarding.

"I've never worked with just older adults," Burns said. "Never attended nonprofit events before.

Never done any real volunteering. Working with Marilyn and the others has really changed my perception."

She supported the VillagesOKC team at a Senior LifeSkills Learning workshop and the daylong Positive Aging: Inflammation workshop. In addition, she volunteered to help register and check-in participants at the Second Half Expo, which was attended by 1,675 people and more than 100 exhibitors.

"Our goal was to expose her to as much of the 50+ world as possible," said Executive Director Marilyn Olson. In addition to supporting team member projects, she was given books to read and videos to watch. Books included *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande and *The Mindful Body* by Ellen J. Langer.



Carissa Burns answers a computer question for VillagesOKC member Faye Horn.

Burns' goal is to become a clinical therapist after she earns her master's degree. This was her second practicum. The first was at Bethany High School working with students with learning disabilities.

She said her early reluctance was because she wasn't sure the practicum at VillagesOKC would give her the experience she needed for her psychology degree. However, after talking with Olson and her practicum advisor Dr. Delilah Joiner Martin, Program Director Family Studies & Gerontology, they came up with plans on how to get her the experience she needed.

"I have learned so much from my time with VillagesOKC. It's knowledge that I'll be able to use as I work toward my career goal," Burns said.

During the practicum, Burns has continued a full course load at SNU, participated with the track team and worked two part-time jobs. She has worked at the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club for the past four years. She also works three days a week in the fitness center at Expand Energy, the former Chesapeake Energy.

She is a graduate of Bethany High School and ran track all four years, finishing first in 4A State in the 100 meter sprint and second in the 200 meters. From an athletic family, both her parents are personal trainers. Her dad, Dutch Burns, is a track coach at Southwestern Christian University. Her mother, Denise Penczak Burns, is a personal trainer and Pilates instructor.

Olson said working with Burns has been rewarding and she hopes to continue the connection.

"We love being able to influence and encourage younger adults so they have role models for aging with vitality and purpose," she said.

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ZOO DOCTOR RECEIVES HIGHEST CERTIFICATION

Dr. Daniela Yuschenkoff earned American College of Zoological Medicine board certification as zoological medicine specialist.

The Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden is proud to announce Dr. Daniela Yuschenkoff is the third member of the Zoo's veterinary medicine team to earn the prestigious title of Diplomate of the American College of Zoological Medicine (DACZM). There are only about 300 board-certified zoological medicine specialists in the world, and Oklahoma now has six.

"We are very excited to welcome Daniela into the American College of Zoological Medicine," said Dr. Jennifer D'Agostino, the Zoo's Chief Animal Programs Officer and ACZM vice president. "This distinction is a testament to all of her training and hard work and we are thrilled that we have another Board Certified Specialist in Zoological Medicine™ on the OKC Zoo vet team."

Associate Veterinarian Yuschenkoff joins D'Agostino and Dr. Gretchen Cole, the Zoo's Director of Veterinary Services, as diplomates of the ACZM.

"This is the highest level of certification for a zoo veterinarian," Yuschenkoff said. "As soon as I knew I wanted to be a zoo vet, this has been my ultimate goal."

It's an intense certification program requiring years of veterinary schooling, internship, and residency, culminating in a comprehensive two-day exam.

"It's a very rigorous process," she said. "It's been three years of compiling and organizing information, and six weeks of intense study just cramming all that material in my head before the test. It's been my goal for more than nine years of my veterinary training, and now that I've achieved it, I'm very excited to continue growing, learning, and improving for the sake of our animal family."

Having three ACZM diplomates

at the OKC Zoo indicates the Zoo's animal family is receiving the best possible veterinary care available, Yuschenkoff said.

In addition to exemplary training, being a diplomate also opens doors for communication and collaboration between veterinarians.

"The zoo veterinarian group is a very small community, but it's a close-knit community," she said. "When we're up against a problem we don't know how to solve, we can reach out to each other, across specialties, to get the help we need to provide the best care possible for the animals at the Zoo."

Yuschenkoff detailed the amount of intense study and training necessary to complete her certification in a blog at www.okczoo.org.

Guests have the opportunity to view animal exams and procedures at the OKC Zoo's state-of-the-art Joan Kirkpatrick Animal Hospital and watch the Zoo's expert veterinary care team in action. Scheduled animal exams are posted on the Zoo's Facebook page and Instagram stories, and are dependent upon animal participation or other emergencies.

Spend the most wonderful time of the year with OKC ZOO SAFARI LIGHTS, open nightly through January 1, 2025. The Oklahoma City Zoo is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily with the last entry no later than 4 p.m. The Zoo will be closed to the public during the daytime on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day as well as Tuesdays and Wednesdays from December 3 through February 5, 2025.

Purchase advance Zoo admission tickets at okczoo.org/tickets and avoid the entry lines. Located at the crossroads of I-44 and I-35, the OKC Zoo is a proud member of the Association of Zoos and



OKC Zoo Dr. Daniela Yuschenkoff recently earned the prestigious title of Diplomate of the American College of Zoological Medicine (DACZM).

Aquariums, the American Alliance of Museums, and Oklahoma City's Adventure District. Zoo admission is \$16 for adults and \$13 for children ages 3-11 and seniors ages 65 and over. Children two and under are admitted free. Membership has its perks! As a ZOOfriends member of the Oklahoma City Zoo, enjoy free admission all year-long, plus many additional benefits and discounts. You will also be supporting the

Zoo's animal family, education programming and conservation initiatives both locally and globally. Join or renew today at www.okczoo.org/membership.

Stay connected with the Zoo on Facebook, X, Instagram, Linktree and TikTok, and by visiting our blog stories. To learn more about Zoo happenings, call (405) 424-3344 or visit <https://www.okczoo.org>.

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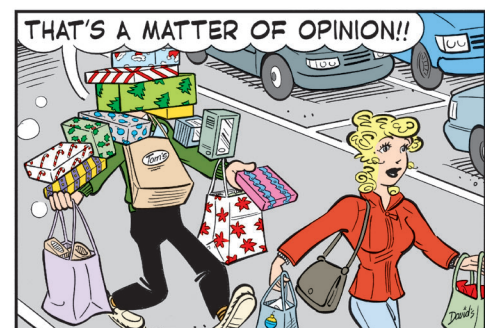
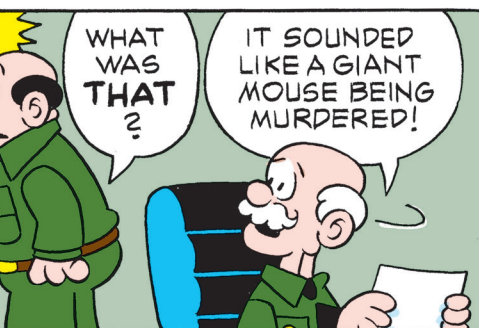
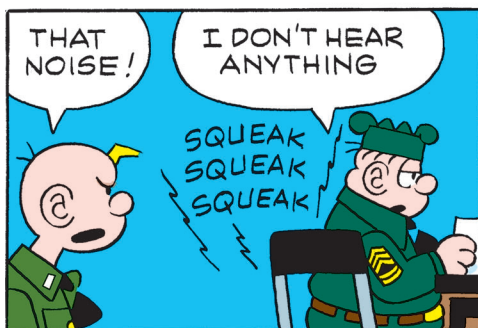
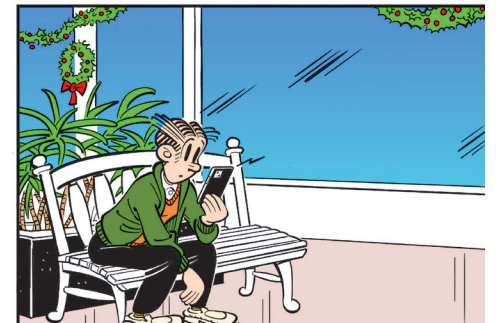
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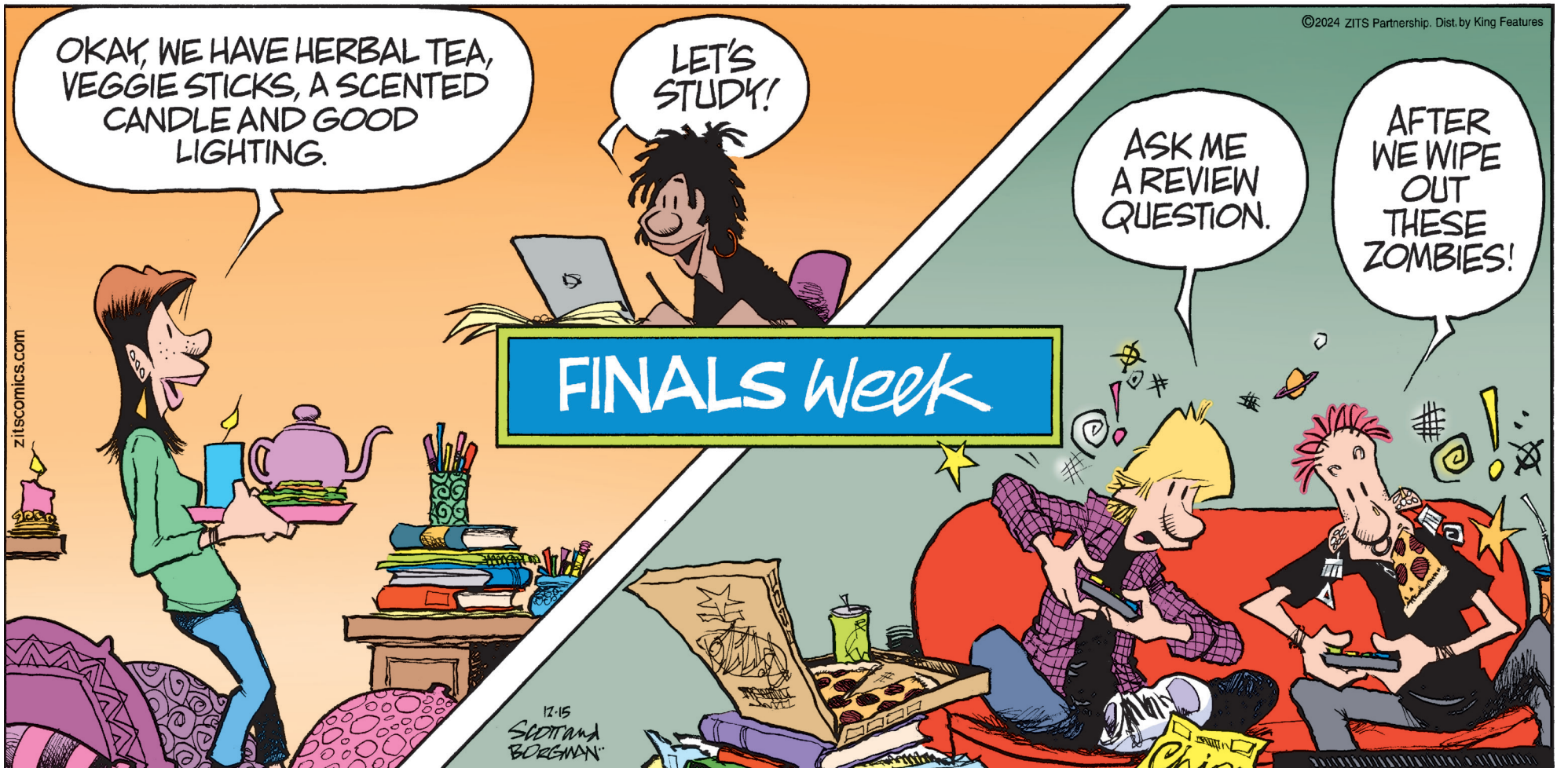


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