

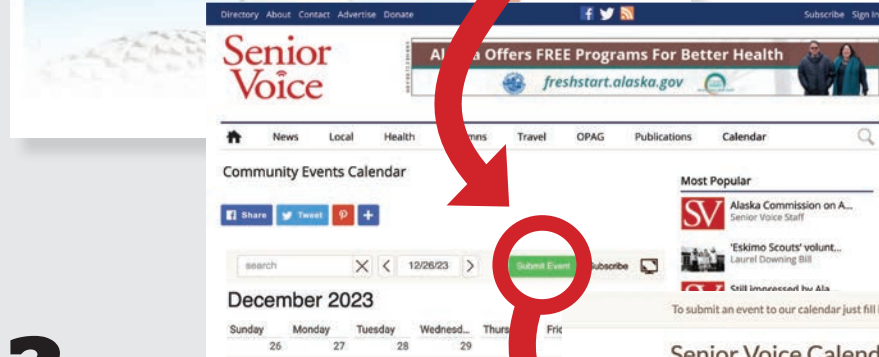
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Senior Voice

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Senior Voice

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Serving Alaskans 50+ Since 1978

Volume 47, Number 2 February 2024

Priority senior bills and issues in the state legislature.

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A personal connection with her community library.

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Anchorage Bonsai Study Group member Robert Fowlkes prepares to work on a current project, a Privet tree (*ligustrum sinensis*) at his Knik home. Read more about Fowlkes and his fellow bonsai enthusiasts on page 14.

Michael Dinneen photo for Senior Voice

2023 National Mature Media Awards Winner





Meet your Older Persons Action Group board of directors

Eileen Hosey, Juneau

After a long and varied career in Juneau, I retired in 2006. By 2009 I was back at work, and this time I had found my niche. I went to work for Southeast Senior Services, a division of Catholic Community Service and began work as a care coordinator for seniors on the Medicaid Waiver, then transitioned to case manager. I intended to work for at least two years and have actually just begun my 15th

year in this field.

I've done hundreds of home visits and helped people put together a plan to help them stay independent and I'm continually amazed at the tenacity, strength and wit of seniors. From the start I was intrigued, impressed, and committed to help seniors, elders, their families and friends, as they navigated the often choppy waters of retirement, aging issues



Courtesy Eileen Hosey

and personal situations. Over the years, certain challenges stand out as

important: Availability of in-home services to assist a senior stay in their own home; specialized medical services to address the unique needs of seniors; a surprisingly significant amount of food insecurity, and loneliness and isolation. How can we as a society reach out to provide what would make things easier and safer?

I'm one of the lucky seniors because my three adult children and their families also reside in Juneau. So I can make a

call and have someone come over to help, and I understand the enormous value of this. My hope is to advocate for Alaska's seniors, let everyone know of the many valuable contributions they have made, and continue to make to our communities and state a welcoming and positive place for all of us to live.

If you are interested in serving on the Older Persons Action Group, Inc. board of directors, send a query and resume to executivedirector@opagak.com.

AARP Alaska legislative priorities in 2024

By MARGE STONEKING

AARP Alaska

AARP 2024 legislative priorities focus on sustainable funding for senior safety net programs, adequate healthcare access, improved public services, and financial security.

Senior safety net programs

While most older Alaskans are self-supporting, some need financial assistance or no-cost services to remain independent. Senior safety net programs like Meals on Wheels, senior transportation, and the Senior Benefits Program provide foundational support to help low- and moderate-income elders remain in their homes and communities.

Senate Bill 170 (HB242), Alaska's Senior Benefits Program. This program pays cash assistance tied to the Alaska Federal Poverty Guidelines to low-income Alaskans age 65 and older who are not in Pioneer Homes or other institutional care. Cash payments for the past five years have been \$76, \$175, or \$250 each month depending on

The Senior Benefits Program is set to sunset in June 2024 according to state statute, and the Governor's budget does not fund the program at all for FY25. Reauthorizing legislation is needed to extend and fund the program.

income, which is especially critical for the more than 10% of Alaskan elders who fall at or near the federal poverty line. In 2022, the program served 9,000 seniors at an average of 75 years old with the oldest participant aged 104.

The Senior Benefits Program is set to sunset in June 2024 according to state statute, and the Governor's budget does not fund the program at all for FY25. Reauthorizing legislation is needed to extend and fund the program.

Senior & Disability Community Grants. These grants fund supportive services such as Meals on Wheels, congregate meals, transportation, light housekeeping, chore services, adult day programs, and education and respite for family caregivers that help keep seniors in their homes and communities. These grants effectively provide much

needed support services to seniors and their unpaid caregivers, costing much less than assisted living or nursing home care services. Senior grant services reach nearly 20,000 older Alaskans whose incomes or assets are too high to qualify for Medicaid, but too low to be able to afford private services.

The FY25 Governor's budget reflects a cut to the Senior & Disability Community Grants that would result in older Alaskans losing services critical to remaining independent at home. Losing independence risks vulnerable seniors being driven to higher, more costly levels of care. AARP and other senior advocates are asking the legislature to increase the governor's budget for senior community-based grants 13% to meet the needs of Alaska's aging population growth and growing food insecurity.

ty. From 2013-2023, the number of meals provided under the Senior & Disabilities meals grant for older Alaskans around the state increased 13%, and the cost of food increased 27%, forcing providers to waitlist seniors or cut staff.

House Bill 149 (SB130), Nurse Licensure Compact. AARP Alaska is prioritizing the Nurse Licensure Compact bill because the current nursing shortage reduces healthcare access, drives up costs, and threatens the quality of care. This risks the health of our growing senior population and increases the burden on family caregivers. Joining this 40-state compact would help Alaska recruit and retain the nurses we badly need.

Retirement readiness

Retirement readiness is good for Alaska and good for Alaskans. Having enough savings or income to retire is consistently the top financial concern for older Alaskans. Additionally, programs that ensure a secure retirement help employers with recruitment and retention and reduce reliance on state funded public assistance.

Senate Bill 88, Public Employee Retirement Benefits. Retirement readiness for public employees means modest pension benefits. Public workers earn up to 14% less than private-sector workers. Providing a defined benefit pension helps to bridge that

next page please

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Mission statement:

"To work statewide to improve the quality of life for all Alaskans through education, advocacy and collaboration."

Vision statement:

"Promote choice and well being for seniors through legacy and leadership."



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Beau Bassett: Outward bound to a full life of service

Series: Working past retirement in Alaska

By **LAWRENCE D. WEISS**
For Senior Voice

Beau Bassett is 74 years old. He spent the past 27 years training over 1,000 students in community leadership across Alaska through the Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute (PYLI). visit: alaskapyli.org

What made you think about coming to Alaska?

I came up with this idea that I would combine my law background and adventure education, and I would aspire to create an adventure-based program. It all came together with setting off for Alaska. That was part of my sort of 10-year plan. I would like to be able to create a program that would work with young people, all kinds of



Anchorage's Beau Bassett moved to Alaska in 1976. He says comfort comes from being in an "environment which we come alive in, we're inspired by. Every day Alaska is that kind of environment for me."

Photo courtesy Beau Bassett

diverse young people, and especially divert young people from the juvenile justice system where the

law came in.

So that was an exciting possibility. I didn't know what it was going to require. But I had the experiential base working in Outward Bound. I had an educational background. I did get the law degree. What I discovered through experiential education was I was

highly motivated around working with people, was really good at it, and by golly, I was really happy.

What happened when you first got here?

Well, I came here in August 1976. When I arrived in Alaska, I discovered the VISTA national service program. I was a Volunteer in Service to America lawyer for a public interest law firm.

And you've been in Alaska ever since?

I left Alaska in 1997 to work nationally in youth development and I had a range of wonderful opportunities. I found my way back to Bellingham, Wash., brought in by the PYLI [Points of Light Youth Leadership Institute]. At that point it was called the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute. I ran a training for 64 high school students from Whatcom County. It was a three-day experiential leadership training, teaching the skills and tools to do high-quality service projects.

And why did you come back again?

I had always realized I was going to come back to Alaska, so I introduced PYLI up here in the summer of 1997, and created an advisory committee—school district, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Girl Scouts—created a community network that might be interested in creating the first Alaska PYLI. The summer of 1998, in August at Birchwood camp, I became a full-fledged master trainer in this program as a volunteer. None of this is paid work. We offered it to 42 Alaska students diverse. And it was exceptionally successful.

Even though we've lost a lot of federal funding, Points of Light foundation has gone away, the spirit of community Prudential has gone away. I'm the last PYLI trainer in the United States. Wow. I'm the last one in the world. Which is to say that I've been in the

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AARP

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wage gap in the long-term and would make state jobs more competitive. As the only state without such a program, Alaska's state services are suffering, and public access to benefits and services is threatened by staffing shortages.

Senate Bill 135, Alaska Work and Save Retirement Savings Program. Retirement readiness for private sector employees requires having access to a workplace retirement savings option. Nearly 60% of households have no assets saved for retirement. Without access to a retirement savings plan at work, nearly all workers fail to save. Only 5% of people without a workplace retirement plan save in an IRA. Nearly half of private-sector workers

in Alaska don't have access to a way to save from their regular paycheck at work.

The Alaska Work and Save program is designed to address the retirement savings gap using proven tools, such as payroll deduction. Work and Save programs are state-facilitated retirement savings options that are operated through a public-private partnership similar to a 529 college savings plan.

On behalf of Alaskans age 50-plus – as well as future generations – AARP Alaska is continuing the fight to ensure that Alaskans are empowered to choose how they live as they age.

To add your voice to our advocacy priorities and stay informed, sign up to become an e-activist at aarp.org/getinvolved

Marge Stoneking is the AARP Alaska Associate State Director for Advocacy.

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Find the music in you

By KAREN CASANOVAS

For Senior Voice

Q: Singalongs and musical performances are offered at my community center. I don't normally participate in group activities, but am thinking about going to an event for something to do.

A: Yes! You should go. From prehistoric times, music has served as entertainment, a practical function, or part of religious rituals. Historical sites have uncovered bones or carving implements used to create instruments. Horns and conch shells were some of the first wind instruments. Pipes, whistles and clay drums have been discovered, too.

Why is music important?

It benefits your physical, mental and emotional health. Light jazz, classical or nature sounds calm the mind. Research tells us that listening to music



engages the brain—that's why it's so beneficial for infants to hear musical notes to sharpen their linguistic development at an early age. A child's language comprehension is enhanced by music, and it expands their auditory memory capabilities.

What are the benefits of music?

Scientists believe that listening to music increases mathematical capacity by the introduction of math concepts (heard in musical rhythms, patterns and sequences). Classical music introduces a range

of emotions experienced when the beats switch from soft, then to a louder volume, tone or pitch. Higher scores in emotional intelligence, creativity and spatial awareness by children who were enrolled in musical lessons at a young age compared to those in technology classes.

While young persons benefit from listening to music, it connects us to others at any age. When people are at a sporting event, a concert, or any public performance, certain songs bring us together, uniting people in many ways, from protest marches to hymnal music at places of worship.

Studies have shown that memory retention increased when people listened to classical music while reading a list of items, then reciting that list out loud later—they had better recall than those listening in silence or with white noise, reports a 2020 Healthline article. "The

same study tracked how fast people could perform simple processing tasks—matching numbers to geometrical shapes—and a similar benefit showed up. Mozart helped people complete the task faster and more accurately," the article notes. While music cannot reverse the effects of Alzheimer's or dementia-related illnesses, it has been shown to slow cognitive decline, while calming dementia patients and building trustful relationships with them.

Additionally, neuroscientists confirm hearing music reduces anxiety, improves overall brain function and regulates mental health by triggering the release of neurochemicals. When this happens, brain changes occur: dopamine alters pleasure and reward regulation; cortisol has an effect on stress response; serotonin controls mood, sleep, memory; oxytocin influences bonding with others.

Here are some ways to learn more.

Books about music

Music Is History (Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson)

The History of Musical Instruments (Curt Sachs)

A Little History of Music (Robert Philip)

The Story of Music (Howard Goodall)

Museums

Musical Instrument Museum, Phoenix, Arizona. I highly recommend visiting and exploring their 15,000 instruments from 200 countries and territories.

Country Music Hall of Fame, Nashville, Tennessee.

The American Jazz Museum, Kansas City, Missouri.

Motown Museum, Detroit, Michigan.

Grammy Museum L.A. Live, Los Angeles, Calif.

The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, Ohio.

Movies about musicians

Song of Summer, 1968 (Eric Fenby)

The Buddy Holly Story,

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People 60+ can get the RSV vaccine by contacting their health care provider or local pharmacy. For questions, call the Alaska Health Resource Helpline toll-free at 1-833-482-9546 or visit vaccinate.alaska.gov



5 basic steps to improving digestion

By **DR. EMILY KANE**
For Senior Voice

1. I know you’ve heard this before, but it is so important that it bears repeating: Chew, chew, chew. This means both slowly and thoroughly. To be totally graphic about it, you want anything you swallow to be a soupy consistency.



Unlike cows, birds and certain lizards, we mere humans do not have small sharp objects in our stomachs to help pulverize food into smaller morsels. We have those small sharp objects in our mouths. So, please do use your teeth to grind and pulverize every mouthful of food.

Especially meat. For starters, digestion starts in the mouth. There are thousands of tiny neuro-receptors in the mouth that send messages to the

brain about what is about to come down the pike. These messages “prep” the entire digestive system to gear up for the meal or snack that’s on the way. Fatty foods will trigger the liver to produce extra bile, and cause the gall-bladder to contract and

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Boosting brain health and mood with chocolate

By **JOHN SCHIESZER**
Medical Minutes

If you would characterize your relationship with chocolate as complicated, you’re not alone. Sweet, velvety and smooth, chocolate thrills the senses, making it very popular, especially at Valentine’s Day. There is mounting evidence that a few nibbles of dark chocolate can not only satisfy a craving, but can also be beneficial for your health. Lee S. Berk, an associate dean of research affairs at the School of Allied Health Professions and a researcher in psychoneuroimmunology and food science at Loma Linda University has been studying chocolate and its effects on human health for many years. His team has found that con-

suming dark chocolate that has a high concentration of cacao (minimally 70% cacao, 30% organic cane sugar) has positive effects on stress levels, inflammation, mood, memory and immunity. “Consumption of 70% cacao has been shown to increase gamma brain frequency, which is associated with reducing incidence of dementia, memory loss and recall. Brain gamma frequency is positively associated with inducing some of the higher levels of cognitive processing in the human brain,” said Berg. “Cacao is also associated with increasing beneficial neuropeptides in the brain and thus enhancing mood state.” Plant-based bioactive compounds called flavan-3-ols found in dark choc-



© Tasakorn Kongmoon | Dreamstime.com

olate and other foods are known to promote health. While you don’t need these compounds to survive, studies have shown that bioactives can play a role in reducing chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Studies show that eating foods that contain flavan-3-ols may improve blood pressure, cholesterol concentrations and blood sugar.

How much is best? Researchers have not come up with a hard and fast recommendation of how much dark chocolate should be consumed to achieve the potential health benefits. Experts recommend minimally processed dark chocolate with at least 70% cacao content, and maybe have an ounce as an occasional treat. You should always check the label to be aware

of the calorie, fat and sugar content, which could potentially affect the overall health benefit. Eating chocolate at least once a week has been linked with a reduced risk of heart disease, according to research published this month in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, a journal of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) in 2020. The researchers conducted a combined analysis of studies from the past five decades examining the association between chocolate consumption and coronary artery disease (the blockage of the coronary arteries). The analysis included six studies with a total of 336,289 participants who reported their

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What’s new in Medicare benefits for 2024?

By **SEAN McPHILAMY**
Alaska Medicare Information Office

Medicare coverage and costs change each year, so it’s important to understand and review your benefits. Here’s an overview of what’s new in 2024.

Medicare Part A and Part B costs in 2024

Medicare Part A covers inpatient hospital services, skilled nursing facility services, home health care, and hospice. Most people don’t owe a premium for Part A, but if neither you nor your spouse have 10 years of Social Security work credits, you may owe a monthly premium. If you’re admitted to the hospital as an inpatient, you’ll



owe a deductible of \$1,632 at the beginning of your stay. If you have multiple hospitalizations, you may owe the deductible more than once during the year. After you meet your deductible, your first 60 days in the hospital and your first 20 days in a skilled nursing facility cost you nothing. After that, you owe an out-of-pocket cost each

day for your continued stay. Medicare Part B covers outpatient costs, such as doctor visits, lab tests and durable medical equipment. In 2024, the standard Part B premium is \$174.70. If your modified Adjusted Gross Income is above \$103,000 as a single person or \$206,000 as a married couple, you may pay a

higher premium. The Part B deductible is \$240 for all of calendar year 2024. You’ll continue to owe a 20%

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These are threats to your hearing



By **DONNA R. DEMARCO**
Accurate Hearing Systems

Several things can contribute to hearing loss. Here are some tips to help you protect your hearing.

Noise exposure. If you must raise your voice to hear, it's too loud. Limit your exposure to loud sound. The longer you're in loud noise the greater your risk for permanent damage. Wearing hearing protection or taking breaks from loud noise can protect your hearing. Activities such as mowing the lawn, blow-drying your hair, snowmachining, rock concerts and dirt bikes need hearing protection.

Ototoxic drugs. Some medications are toxic to your ears and can cause hearing loss. Ask your pharmacist or physician if the medication

you are taking is ototoxic and if there is a substitute medication. Signs that your medication may be ototoxic:

- ▶ Tinnitus develops in one or both ears or existing tinnitus gets louder or becomes a new sound
- ▶ If your ears feel full or pressured, and it's not caused by infection
- ▶ If you develop vertigo or you get a spinning sensation that can be aggravated by motion and accompanied by nausea.

Smoking. Research shows smoking can make you more likely to lose your hearing. Secondhand smoke can also result in hearing loss.

Earwax. Buildup can muffle or deaden sound. Do not use a cotton swab. That just shoves wax in further or you could puncture your eardrum.

Call for more information and a free hearing test, 907-644-6004.

Donna R DeMarco, AAS, BC-HIS, Tinnitus Care Provider, holding a certificate from the International Hearing Society.



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Alaska law permits a hearing aid dealer who is not a licensed physician or a licensed audiologist to test hearing only for the purpose of selling or leasing hearing aids; the tests given by a hearing aid dealer are not to be used to diagnose the cause of the hearing impairment.

Medicare

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coinsurance for most services covered by Part B.

For both Medicare Part A and Part B, you may also apply for Medicare Supplement Insurance (also known as Medigap) coverage through private insurance companies which may help you to "buy down" your risk of uncertain costs through additional monthly premiums. The State of Alaska publishes a consumer guide to these Medigap policies, updated annually; contact our office to obtain a copy.

Prescription drug coverage costs in 2024

Medicare Part D covers outpatient prescription drugs. In 2024, the national average premium for the Part D basic benefit is around \$30 per month. Your premium and drug costs vary based on your plan and your prescription drug needs.

If your Part D plan has an annual deductible, it can be no higher than \$545 in 2024. If you reach the catastrophic coverage phase in 2024, you then won't owe any of the cost of your covered drugs. This is a new change and means that your Part D out-of-pocket spending will be capped at \$8,000.

Looking ahead, this cap will be further lowered to \$2,000 in 2025. If your income is limited, you may qualify for help with your Medicare costs. One of these cost-saving programs is called Extra Help. In 2024, full Extra Help will be expanded so that even more people are eligible.

If your income is limited, you may qualify for help with your Medicare costs. One of these cost-saving programs is called Extra Help. In 2024, full Extra Help will be expanded so that even more people are eligible.

Be wary about Medicare scams

Some of you may remember that new Medicare cards were sent to people on Medicare in 2018. These new cards removed Social Security numbers to better protect people with Medicare. While the rollout of new Medicare cards ended years ago, scams about Medicare cards continue. You will not be getting an updated Medicare card this year, but scammers may try to convince you otherwise.

For example, scammers may falsely tell you that Medicare is again issuing new cards—perhaps plastic ones, metal ones, or chipped cards. The scammers may tell you that you must verify your identity for them to send your new Medicare card. This is an attempt to gain your personal or financial information. Beware of unsolicited calls, such as anyone claiming to be from Medicare, needing you to verify your identity, or sending you an

updated Medicare card. Please report any suspected Medicare card scams to our office.

This new year is a welcome opportunity to look ahead, while also reflecting on the years gone by. If you find yourself overwhelmed by any Medicare issue, please feel free to contact the State of Alaska Medicare Information Office at 800-478-6065 or 907-269-3680. Our office is also known as the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), and the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) program.

If you are part of an agency or organization that assists seniors with medical resources, consider networking with the Medicare Information Office. Call us to inquire about our new Ambassador program.

Sean McPhilamy is a volunteer and Certified Medicare Counselor for the Alaska Medicare Information Office.

Medicare counseling by phone

By **LEE CORAY-LUDDEN**

For Senior Voice

I am a Certified Medicare Counselor working under SHIP. My office is in the Soldotna Senior Center, but I serve the state

via phone. If you are local, I can help you as a walk-in.

I am here Mondays through Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Fridays, 8 a.m. to noon.

Call with your Medicare questions, 907-262-2322.

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Embracing simple steps for a healthier heart

Also: Health fairs this month

Alaska Health Fair, Inc.

February, the month of love, is also an opportune time to show some love to your heart. As we observe Heart Health Month, we're reminded of the critical role heart health plays in our overall well-being. Here are some simple, actionable steps you can take right now to embark on a journey toward better heart health.

Step it up with walking. A stroll might seem mundane, but it's a powerhouse of heart health benefits.

Walking is a wonderfully accessible form of exercise that bolsters heart strength, aids weight management and uplifts your mood. Start small – a brisk 10-minute daily walk is a great beginning. As you grow comfortable, gradually increase your pace and duration. Remember, every step counts.

Heart-healthy eating made easy. Your heart loves good food just as much as your taste buds do. Incorporate a rainbow of fruits and vegetables into your

diet, and choose whole grains over processed ones. A little change, like swapping out salty snacks for nuts or using olive oil instead of butter, can have big impacts on your heart's health. Think of it as a culinary adventure for both your palate and your heart.

Stress less. Our hearts are sensitive to stress. Integrate simple stress reduction techniques into your daily routine. This could be as easy as taking five minutes to breathe deeply, practicing mindfulness, or finding joy in a hobby. Remember, a happy heart is a healthy heart.

Keep a check on your blood pressure. Knowledge is power, especially when it comes to blood pressure. Regular monitoring can be a game-changer for heart health. If you're unsure about how to start, our team at Alaska Health Fair can guide you. We also have resources available on our website (www.alaska-healthfair.org, search for

“blood pressure”). Keeping track of your numbers at home is a proactive way to stay on top of your heart health.

The gift of good sleep. Never underestimate the power of a good night's sleep. Quality sleep plays a crucial role in heart health. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, dim those screens, and let your body and heart rest. Sweet dreams indeed lead to a healthy heart.

Rethink your drink and smoke. If smoking or alcohol are part of your routine, consider cutting back. Your heart will thank you for it. Resources are available if you need support, including Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line (1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-800-784-8669).

Remember, heart health is about progress, not perfection. Each positive change is a victory for your heart. Let's walk this journey together, one heart-healthy step at a time, toward a future where our hearts beat stronger and healthier.

Upcoming health fairs

Affordable blood tests, starting at \$20, are available at all health fairs. For a complete schedule, blood test details, and to make an appointment, visit www.alaskahealthfair.org.

Feb. 3, Anchorage First Christian Church, 3031 Latouche, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Feb. 13, Fairbanks – 8am – 1pm at Alaska Health Fair Fairbanks Office Draw, 725 26th Ave., Suite 201, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Feb. 14, Dillingham Dillingham Community Health Fair in the high school gym, 7 a.m. to noon.

Feb. 17, Fairbanks Fairbanks Community Health Fair, Volunteer Clubhouse, 2216 S. Cushman St., 8 a.m. to noon.

Feb. 27, Fairbanks Alaska Health Fair Fairbanks Office Draw, 725 26th Ave., Suite 201, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

March 2, Meadow Lakes Meadow Lakes Elementary School, 1741 Pittman Rd., 8 a.m. to noon.

Center for the Blind events in Fairbanks

Senior Voice Staff

Staff from the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired will be in Fairbanks **Feb. 6 and 7** to conduct support group meetings and conduct home visits.

A support group meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 6, at the Southhall Manor building, 401 7th Ave., from 10 a.m. to noon. Another support group meeting will be held in the afternoon at the Golden Towers building, 3303rd Ave., at 2 p.m.

Staff will be available for home visits throughout the day. Home visits include an

assessment of the living space to eliminate falling dangers and other hazards; placement of tactile dots to make appliances easier to navigate; assistance enrolling in the free Talking Books program.

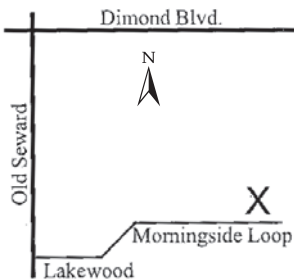
On Wednesday, Feb. 7, there will be a support group meeting at the Golden Ages building, 1271 9th Ave., at 10 a.m. Staff will be available afterward for home visits.

Home visit appointments fill up fast. To reserve your spot, or if you have questions, call Pete McCall, Older Blind Coordinator, 907-771-4306.

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New research on brain health and lower back pain

By JOHN SCHIESZER

Medical Minutes

Improving brain health through exercise

A new study is suggesting a fascinating link between regular exercise and better brain health. Researchers looked at 10,125 Individuals with MRI brain scans and found that being physically active is related to increased size of brain areas important for memory and learning. The study revealed that those who regularly engaged in physical activities such as walking, running or sports had larger brain volumes in key areas.

This includes the gray

We found that even moderate levels of physical activity, such as taking fewer than 4,000 steps a day, can have a positive effect on brain health. This is much less than the often-suggested 10,000 steps, making it a more achievable goal for many people.

– Dr. David Merrill, Pacific Neuroscience Institute's Brain Health Center, Providence Saint John's Health Center, Los Angeles, Calif.

matter, which helps with processing information, and the white matter, which connects different brain regions, as well as the hippocampus, important for memory. Exercise not only lowers the risk of dementia, but also helps in maintaining brain size, which is crucial as we age, according to the researchers.

"We found that even moderate levels of physical activity, such as taking fewer than 4,000 steps a day, can have a positive effect on brain health. This is much less than the often-suggested 10,000 steps, making it a more



achievable goal for many people," said study co-author Dr. David Merrill, who is with the Pacific Neuroscience Institute's Brain Health Center, located at Providence Saint John's Health Center, Los Angeles, California.

Study co-author Dr. Somayeh Meysami, an assistant professor of neurosciences at Saint John's Cancer Institute and the Pacific Brain Health Center, said this new research links regular physical activity to larger brain volumes, suggesting neuroprotective benefits.

"This large sample study furthers our understanding of lifestyle factors in brain health and dementia prevention," said Dr Meysami.

A Lancet Study in 2020 found about a dozen modifiable risk factors that decrease risk for Alzheimer's disease, including physical activity. This work builds upon previous work by this group, linking caloric burn from leisure activities to improved brain structure.

"This study demonstrates the influence of exercise on brain health imaging and when added to other studies on the role of diet, stress reduction and social connection offer the proven benefits of drug-free modifiable factors in substantially reducing Alzheimer's disease," said George Perry, Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

A proactive approach to dealing with forgetfulness

Mental health experts

next page please

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Research

from page 8

recommend a variety of techniques to cope with changes in memory and mental skills. They include learning a new skill, following a daily routine and using memory tools such as calendars and notes. They also recommend staying involved in activities that can help both the mind and body. Volunteering in your community, at a school, or at your place of worship can be highly beneficial. Spending time with friends and family and getting enough sleep (generally seven to eight hours) each night. Exercising and eating a balanced diet are paramount.

Some older adults have a condition called mild cognitive impairment (MCI), meaning they have more memory or thinking problems than other people their age. People with MCI can usually take care of themselves and are able to carry out their day-to-day tasks. MCI may be an early sign of Alzheimer’s disease, but not everyone with MCI will develop Alzheimer’s.

Currently there are no drugs or lifestyle approaches that can prevent Alzheimer’s or a related dementia. In the meantime, generally leading a healthy lifestyle, including controlling high blood pressure, being physically active, and making healthy dietary choices, can help reduce your risk of many chronic health conditions and may help reduce your risk of dementia.

What is causing your lower back pain?

A new study may have cracked the mystery surrounding the cause of a specific type of back pain. Almost 40% of the adult population experiences low back pain due to degenerating disks in the spine, but medical science hasn’t understood exactly why the disks become painful. In a new study published in the journal Science Translational Medicine, Cedars-Sinai investigators point the way to an answer and possibly a step toward targeted treatment.

“We’ve identified for the first time particular cells that could be the key to

Almost 40% of the adult population experiences low back pain due to degenerating disks in the spine, but medical science hasn’t understood exactly why the disks become painful.

understanding disk pain,” said senior study author Dmitriy Sheyn with Cedars-Sinai Health Center, Los Angeles, Calif. “Learning more about how these cells work could lead to the eventual discovery of new treatment options.”

The bones making up the spine are interspersed with jelly-filled spacers, known as intervertebral disks, that act as shock absorbers. Due to age, overuse or injury, the jelly starts to dry out and degenerate, but this doesn’t mean that the disk necessarily becomes painful.

“This is because the inner jelly-like layers of the disks contain no nerve endings,” said Sheyn, who is also an assistant professor of Orthopaedics, Surgery, and Biomedical Sciences at Cedars-Sinai. “But sometimes, when disks degenerate, nerve endings from the surrounding tissues invade the disk, and we believe this causes pain.”

Several cell types exist in this jelly-like layer, and when investigators compared cells from patients with pain-free degenerated discs and patients with disk-associated low

back pain, they found that patients experiencing low back pain had greater numbers of a certain subtype of cell that might be involved in the onset of the pain.

Future treatments based on this new information might focus on reprogramming pain-associated intervertebral disk cells into healthy cells, or on adding healthy cells to painful disks to overwhelm the pain-associated cells.

Precisely targeting the ‘bad’ cell subtype or supplementing the ‘good’ cell

subtype may provide useful strategies for treating disk-based low back pain, according to the researchers. This current study validated some knowledge in classical disk or pain biology and could be a step toward a targeted cell therapy that addresses the root causes of low back pain.

John Schieszer is an award-winning national journalist and radio and podcast broadcaster of The Medical Minute. He can be reached at medicalminutes@gmail.com.

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Digestion

continued from page 5

squirt bile into the upper small intestine. Bile is potent stuff (so precious to the body that 95% is recycled—the other 5% is responsible for the wonderful deep brown color of a healthy poop bowel movement) and the main agent for digesting fat.

Unlike cows, birds and certain lizards, we mere humans do not have small sharp objects in our stomachs to help pulverize food into smaller morsels. We have those small sharp objects in our mouths. So, please do use your teeth to grind and pulverize every mouthful of food. Then, you mix the thoroughly pulverized food with as much saliva as you can muster. You want that saliva, which is loaded with amylase, the starch-digesting enzyme, to head down the esophagus and into the stomach where phase 2 of good digestion occurs.

2. Try to avoid antacids, and this includes TUMS, Rolaids, Nexium, Protonix, and so forth. Nature is not wasteful. You absolutely require stomach acid which serves three critical functions. It sterilizes food, it breaks down protein into amino acids which can then be absorbed into the blood stream, and it provokes the pancreas to dump “neutralizing” bicarbonate of soda into the upper small intestine to allow the ab-

Folks chronically popping antacids eventually impair their digestion, which leads to poor nutrient absorption, which ultimately leads to malnutrition including protein, mineral and vitamin deficiencies — despite getting plenty of calories.

sorption of nutrients into the blood.

Stomach acid is caustic—a pH of about 2, optimally, which starts being secreted right after swallowing food. The stomach is designed to handle this level of acidity. If you suffer from heartburn, you need to repair the sphincter between the end of the esophagus and the stomach. If you have gastric ulcers, you need to heal the lining of the stomach so that it can again accommodate the acid levels required for proper digestion.

Folks chronically popping antacids eventually impair their digestion, which leads to poor nutrient absorption, which ultimately leads to malnutrition including protein, mineral and vitamin deficiencies—despite getting plenty of calories.

3. Please don’t drink while eating. This goes along with rule # 2, above. Fluids will dilute your stomach acid and all the digestive enzymes—amylase for starch in the saliva, proteases for protein from the pancreas and lipase for fats in the bile. The best time to drink, and pure water is definitely the ideal drink, is first thing in the morning, during or around workouts, and between

meals. Sure, you can have a sip or two with meals to lubricate your swallowing. But keep the fluids with food down to a minimum.

4. Try to eat sitting down and in a relaxed environment. Please don’t watch the news or have a heavy conversation during mealtime. Try to establish a “mealtime” pattern for yourself. Try not to eat within two hours of going to bed (four is better). Make sure to “fast” for 12 hours daily to give your digestive system needed rest. It is enormously “expensive” to digest food, especially protein. That’s why people usually lose weight on high protein diets. It takes almost all the calories in the meat to digest that meat. Extra digestion, over a lifetime, will wear you out sooner. To date, the only proven method of life extension remains calorie restriction. This doesn’t mean draconian self-denial, but it does mean no pigging out, and, as a general rule, stopping

before you feel “full.”

If you feel peckish between meals, try drinking water before reaching for a snack. If you are hypoglycemic you may need to eat smaller, more frequent meals. Keep in mind that you need to be calm and relaxed for the digestive juices to kick in optimally.

5. Strive to poop at least once a day. Excuse me: Evacuate a large, easy-to-pass, dark brown, slightly fluffy, bowel movement — optimally three times daily but most of us can’t find the time for that kind of enjoyment. By fluffy I mean somewhat floating. If you have a “sinker” — just hits the bottom of the porcelain pronto — then it (the poop) has been in there too long, compacting and getting altogether too dense. My favorite poop fluffers include freshly ground flax seeds (1 to 3 tablespoons of the stuff in water or tea in the morning), or celery, or the good old apple a day. If you prefer to have sticky, foul-smelling BMs, then make sure to include plenty of refined carbohydrates (including candy bars) in your diet.

A quick mnemonic for improving digestion is HOPE:

H for high fiber. This

can be ground flax seeds or acacia seeds added to soups, salads, oatmeal or yogurt, or an apple, or several sticks of celery.

O for Omega 3 oils such as in fatty fish. Eat SMASH fish twice a week: salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines and herring.

P for probiotics which ideally come from fermented foods like kimchee, sauerkraut, yogurt, pickles or kombucha beverages.

E for enzymes. I particularly like a “multi” enzyme that helps digest all the macros, such as “Similase,” which can be taken with every meal (1 to 4 depending on the size of the meal or the amount of protein).

Emily Kane is a naturopathic doctor based in Juneau. Contact her online at <http://www.dremilykane.com>.

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Free support, resources for family caregivers

Senior Voice Staff

The Kenai Peninsula Family Caregiver Support Program will hold the following support group meetings in February:

Feb. 2, Soldotna Senior Center, with a training on transfers, by Annett Brookshire from Nettie’s Care Coordination, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 6, Tyotkas Elder Center, round table discussion, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 15, Sterling Senior Center, “Alzheimer’s and Diet,” with Cindy Harris from the Alzheimer’s Association, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 20, Kenai Senior Center, “All About Medicaid,” with Valerie Flake from Val’s Care Coordination, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 21, Seward Senior Center, round table discussion and bingo, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 23, Nikiski Senior Center, “Alzheimer’s and Dementia,” with Cindy Harris from the Alzheimer’s Association, 1 to 2 p.m.

Support meetings allow you to share your experiences as a caregiver, or support someone who is a caregiver. If you are helping a family member or friend by being a caregiver, learn what kind of help is available. There is no charge for these services and everyone is invited to attend. For more information or to offer suggestions on training topics, call Dani Kebschull at the Nikiski Senior Center, 907-776-7654 or email kpfcsp@nikiskiseniorcenter.org.

The **Homer** caregiver support group meets at the Homer Senior Center on the second and fourth Thursday of each month (Feb. 8 and 22), from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Contact Pam Hooker for information, 907-299-7198.

Kodiak Senior Center in partnership with Hospice and Palliative Care of Kodiak hosts the caregiver support group, Feb. 15, at 1 p.m. Call for information, 907-486-6181.

Around the state

Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska (ARA) organizes caregiver support meetings around the state, including Anchorage, Eagle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau/Southeast, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su Valley, Seward, Sitka, Soldotna, Talkeetna, Willow. Call 1-800-478-1080 for details.

ARA also hosts a statewide call-in meeting on the first Saturday and third Wednesday of every month, 1 to 2 p.m. For information, call Gay Wellman, 907-822-5620 or 1-800-478-1080.

In Southeast Alaska, the Southeast Senior Services Caregiver Support Group meets every Thursday, 1 to 2 p.m. via Zoom. The

group is available to all caregivers in the region. For more information and a Zoom invitation, call Denny Darby at 907-463-6181 or email Denny.Darby@ccs-juneau.org.

The national Alzheimer’s Association operates a 24-hour helpline for caregivers, staffed by specialists and Masters-level clinicians, at 800-272-3900.

Asking for and accepting help

When people have asked if they can be of help to you, how often have you replied, “Thank you, but I’m fine”? Many caregivers don’t know how to marshal the goodwill of others and are reluctant to ask for help. You may not wish to “burden” others or admit that you can’t handle everything yourself.

Be prepared with a mental list of ways that others could help you. For example, someone could take

the person you care for on a 15-minute walk a couple of times a week. Your neighbor could pick up a few things for you at the grocery store. A relative could fill out some insurance papers.

When you break down the jobs into very simple tasks, it is easier for people to help. And they do want to help. It is up to you to tell them how.

Help can come from community resources,

family, friends and professionals. Ask them. Don’t wait until you are overwhelmed and exhausted or your health fails. Reaching out for help when you need it is a sign of personal strength.

Tips on how to ask

Consider the person’s special abilities and interests. If you know a friend enjoys cooking but dislikes

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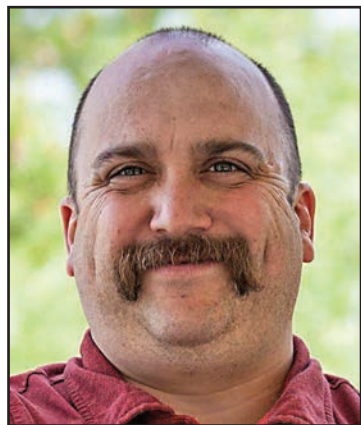
Options for assistive devices for mobility

By CHRISTIAN M. HARTLEY

For Senior Voice

Getting around and maintaining our independence gets more challenging every year. During some times of the year, it gets worse by the hour and the weather forecast. Fortunately, there is equipment to help people of all levels of mobility. These items, called assistive devices, are available through insurance or self-pay and can often be found in pharmacies. They range widely in price and upkeep needs, so here is some information on several types.

Canes (\$15-\$75) are the most affordable option. Traditional straight canes provide stability through the arms and upper body when walking. You can get them with one, three, or four legs at the end of the cane. Heights can be adjusted for each person. You will need to regularly tighten screws and inspect



the tips. Replacement is needed if materials crack or warp. Some people do make canes from trees on their property, but if untreated they will not last long.

Walkers (\$50-\$300) offer a sturdier frame to hold onto. Standard and wheeled walkers have lightweight aluminum construction and are normally foldable for easy storage and transport. Handles, seats and customized accessories provide more support. Check the walker legs and wheels weekly for signs of loosening or wear and tear. Replace tennis ball tips when worn down.

Rollators (\$150-\$500) are a mix of walkers and wheelchairs, for a more versatile mobility. Larger wheels and rolling motion reduce strain while seats allow resting. Handlebars, handbrakes and adjustable heights provide comfort for each user. Routine brake adjustment and wheel oiling improve the safety of the rollator. Regular replacement of wheels, brakes or seats may be needed if you use it a lot.

Manual wheelchairs (\$100-\$500+) enable mobility when walking is difficult. Standard chairs are propelled by users or caregivers. Cushions and posture supports add comfort for long-term use. Inspect the tires for wear and look over the upholstery for any tears. Lubricate wheel axles and bearings as the manufacturer's handbook tells you.

Power chairs (\$1,500-\$20,000+) use electric motors to propel and steer



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There is equipment to help people of all levels of mobility. These items, called assistive devices, are available through insurance or self-pay and can often be found in pharmacies. They range widely in price and upkeep needs.

the chair. Those motors may be controlled by your hand, voice command, or a remote control operated by someone aiding you. Options like powered re-

cline and tilt accommodate disabilities. Battery care is key, especially in our colder climates. Perform regular

page 27 please

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Anchorage Community Theatre remembers “Our Town” in 1964 with a new production 60 years later

ANCHORAGE COMMUNITY THEATRE

Since fall of 2023, Anchorage Community Theatre (ACT) has been making quite a big deal about its 70th year of creating community theatre in Anchorage, Alaska.

Born out of The Anchorage Little Theatre in the 1940s and a significant Alaskan Armed Forces production of Rogers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific in 1952, ACT has gone through much to still remain—leadership changes, economic ups and downs, a worldwide pandemic, and the second largest recorded earthquake in the world.

The premise behind the choosing of the plays that would run during the 70th season were all based on shows that were pivotal to ACT’s founding. These plays

that defined ACT’s legacy as Alaska’s longest running theatre company were Arsenic & Old Lace, A Christmas Carol, and Our Town.

Arsenic, which played last September, commemorated ACT’s 1957 production with none-other-than Boris Karloff himself. A Christmas Carol commemorated the 1953 production from ACT’s very first season.

ACT is currently in the process of remounting Our Town. It’s not just rehearsing that’s part of the process, but also getting the word out to the community on the significance of this show to ACT, and even more, Alaska’s history.

One of the most iconic photographs in the aftermath of that 9.2 magnitude quake, known as the Great Alaska Earthquake, is one that has ACT all

over it. It is the one that depicts 4th avenue in shambles, with a banner remaining, slung across the street that simply and ironically states, “Our Town.”

For some this symbol has come to represent the endurance of Alaskans in the aftermath of that catastrophic event. More than that, is the real story behind that production as told by Jim Polsky. Jim had started his theatre career at the age of 15 in the 1952 production of South Pacific, which toured to Anchorage from Kodiak.

In an interview with ACT’s executive director Matt Fernandez last August, Jim stated that he was the lighting designer of the show on that fateful day.

“It was Good Friday, of course, you know when the earthquake hit, and

we were going to open that night. Well, needless to say, of course, that wasn’t going (to happen). But, by God, we opened the next Friday night and the joint was packed! I mean, we couldn’t squeeze another one in.

The banner on 4th and F was famous because of photos taken by the press that came in from the Lower-48 to cover the earthquake, Fernandez continued. “They saw this banner from Our Town, and all the rubble.”

He said the city volunteer fire department had hung the banner as a promotion for the play, charging a small fee. “They would come with the ladder-truck and stretch a banner across for whatever, a few bucks’ what they charged, wasn’t much. But that’s why the banner was up there on the

earthquake. And it...it survived!”

Today, director Fernandez is attempting to talk the city into raising another “Our Town” banner across 4th and F in remembrance of that day in Anchorage history to promote the 60th anniversary production of Our Town. Let’s hope we see it again; a symbol of that spirit of survival all of us holds as Alaskans.

The 60th anniversary production of Thornton Wilder’s Our Town will run at the ACT Studio Theatre from March 15 to March 31. Showtimes are 7 p.m., Thursdays through Saturdays. Matinees at 3 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

Tickets can be reserved and purchased at actalaska.org, or by calling Matt or Jasmine directly at 907-344-4713.

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Patience, enjoyment are key for local bonsai group

By **MICHAEL DINNEEN**
For Senior Voice

Robert Fowlkes, 75, has been an Alaska resident since 1975 and is a member and past president of the Anchorage Bonsai Study Group. Fowlkes has some 20 trees he maintains. It can take years to create a successful bonsai tree, he says.

With 18 years of leadership, past club president Paul Marmora says people have been doing bonsai in Alaska for many years. The bonsai group became a club in 1998, and membership exploded since that time. Anchorage resident Tim Pack is in his second year as current club president.

"We have displayed at the Alaska State Fair, the Midtown Mall Spring Garden Show, the Botanical

Garden Fair, the Palmer Garden and Art Festival, and have had workshops at various schools and assisted living homes over the years," Marmora says.

He offers the following advice: The word bonsai means "tree in a tray." In Alaska there are two types of bonsai, hardy and tropical trees. One cannot keep a hardy tree in the house, nor a tropical tree outdoors, which is one of the mistakes many people make. Bonsai is an exercise in patience. The main key is to enjoy oneself, he says.

The club meets monthly at the Dimond Greenhouse at 1050 W Dimond Blvd. Contact them via their Facebook page "Cook Inlet Bonsai Study Group" or email pmarmora@aol.com or ol.fowlkes@gmail.com to find out more.



Robert Fowlkes, right, shows off some of the bonsai plants in his home in Knik, while Paul Marmora watches on. Both have been bonsai enthusiasts for many years.

Michael Dinneen photo for Senior Voice



Some of the Anchorage Bonsai Study Group's plants on display at last year's Alaska State Fair in Palmer.

David Washburn photo



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By **MARALEY MCMICHAEL**
Senior Voice Correspondent

In August 2023, I was listening to my kitchen radio one morning as usual, when the Wasilla Mayor’s weekly information blurb came on. Near the end, she said people who had a library card could read the *Frontiersman*, as well as other newspapers, for free, to check out additional local activities. My ears perked up. Read the *Frontiersman* for free!

Several years ago, when the yearly subscription came due (with notice of a rate increase) my husband Gary decided the *Frontiersman* would no longer be delivered to our house. I had greatly enjoyed reading it since our move back to Palmer in 2011, and was disappointed. In the ensuing years, I wondered what interesting stories and information I’d been



The interim building housing the Palmer Library, Sept. 2023.

Photo courtesy Maraley McMichael

missing. Now the Wasilla Mayor reminded me I could read it for free. Of course. A library always keeps the local paper on hand. Why hadn’t I thought of that before? I was driving to Palmer every other day to visit Gary at the Pioneer Home. Perhaps I could coordinate my trips with library hours.

But, it would have to be at the interim library, because the Palmer Library

building suffered a partial roof collapse in mid-February 2023, caused by drifting snow on top of an already heavy snow load. Thankfully a family of four and the three library staff were able to escape without injuries. A broken pipe flooded the floor, weakening the support beams throughout the building and causing the entire

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Rambles

News from the Grapevine

Seward area seniors can participate in one-on-one technology trainings with students from the AVTEC Information Technology program. Improve your **tech skills** with smartphones, laptops and other devices. Classes started on Jan. 29 and run through March 3 in the **Seward Senior Center** dining room, Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 4:15 to 5 p.m. For information and registration, contact **Natalie Mezzetti** at AVTEC, 907-224-6152 or call the senior center, 907-224-5604 ... The annual **Fairbanks North Star Borough Senior Recognition Day** is May 9 at the **Carlson Center**, featuring presentation of **achievement awards** in several categories: Outstanding Senior Volunteer; Lifetime Fitness, female; Lifetime Fitness, male; Honored Caregiver. Nomination forms are available from area senior centers and the borough’s Parks and Recreation senior program. This year, the event will be followed on May 10 with the **50+ Art and Science of Aging Summit** and Senior Health Fair. Mark your calendar and stay tuned for more details. Contact **Marya Lewanski**, 907-459-1136 or email Marya.lewanski@fnsb.gov ... **Anniversary congratulations in North Pole!** **Santa’s Senior Center** notes in its January 2024 newsletter that **Willard and Jane Simmons** celebrate 58 years of marriage on Jan. 22 and **Roger and Jo A Havens** celebrate 59 years on Jan. 30 ... **Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc.** sent a shout-out and photo on Facebook to **Gust and Judy Larson** for their 66th anniversary. Congratulations! ... **Kodiak Senior Center** notes in its February newsletter that the annual **Valentine’s Day party** is one of their biggest

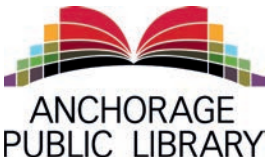
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SENIOR POETRY PROJECT

4TH TUESDAY OF THE MONTH, 2-3:30 PM
MOUNTAIN VIEW LIBRARY

Join local poet and facilitator Brian Hutton for free, monthly, poetry workshops, including exercises and discussions on creativity and mental well being.



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FEBRUARY 22, 4-5:30 PM
MULDOON LIBRARY

This month we’re diving into the wide world of e-audiobooks. Learn how to listen on your personal device with your library card and free the Libby and hoopla apps.



REMEMBER:
Seniors ride People Mover FREE on Wednesdays! Catch Routes 10, 25, 30, 31, and 51 to the Muldoon Transit Hub.





Rambles

News from the Grapevine

continued from page 15

events of the year. Come together on Feb. 14, noon to 1 p.m., for lunch, a Valentines Day dessert, door prizes, special recognition for those age 80 and older, and the crowning of the **2024 Valentines King and Queen**. Call for more information, 907-486-6181 ... **Homer Senior Citizens, Inc.** needs **volunteers** for its **Friendship Center adult day program**, and there are many ways to help: Bring kids and pets for visits; lead a mens breakfast group once a month; assist with recurring events like birthday parties, playing games, crafts like crocheting and knitting, baking. Or maybe you have your own idea? Email **Debra Rowzee** to discuss, debra@homerseniors.com or call 907-235-4556 ... The **Anchorage Pickleball Club** is holding free **"Intro to Pickleball"** classes for **military veterans and wounded warriors** who have never played before. Learn how to serve, keep score and the basic rules to get you going. All equipment provided. Wear court shoes, dress comfortably and bring hydration. The Sunday, Feb. 25 session is at Alaska Pacific University Moseley Sports Center, 3 to 5 p.m. In March, it's Saturday, March 23, at the Arctic Rec Center, 4855 Arctic Blvd., noon to 2 p.m. For information and registration, visit anchoragepickleballclub.com. Questions? Email anchoragepickleballclub@gmail.com ... Days are getting longer but it's still plenty dark out there. Pedestrians can improve your visibility and safety with **reflective tape**, which is being provided **free** by the **Center for Safe Alaskans**. The tape comes in strips that can be cut into various sizes and easily applied to outerwear clothing, mobility aids like canes, walkers and wheelchairs, backpacks and other items. Order now from <https://safealaskans.org>. *Rambles is compiled from senior center newsletters, websites and reader tips from around the state. Email your Rambles items to editor@seniorvoicealaska.com.*

MASST opens doors for Fairbanks advocate

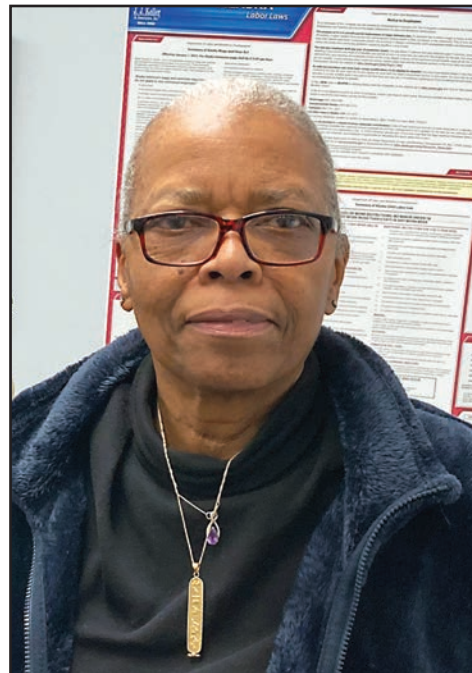
By JIM WARREN

For Senior Voice

Linda Webb escorted me into a conference room at Access Alaska in Fairbanks. There were photographs on the walls and a Christmas tree in the corner. Outside, it was still an hour before sunrise; the temperature hovered at -15 degrees, and ice fog hung above the roads. Inside, Linda talked warmly and easily about her journey from Georgia to Alaska.

She came to Fairbanks in late summer of 1999 to help her daughter-in-law while her son was on military duty in South Korea. She decided to stay because she "fell in love with weather we don't have in Georgia." There was something familiar about Fairbanks, too. It was slow-paced, and it reminded her of home. She never felt like a stranger.

In 2018, after she had already retired, she heard about the MASST program, Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training, and she signed up because



Linda Webb is the independent living advocate for Access Alaska in Fairbanks.

Photo courtesy MASST

she wanted to see if she could learn how to use the new-fangled computers. Tom Howard, the MASST coordinator, thought she should give it a shot, so she took classes and started her first community assignment with the Division of Public Assistance. Most of the work involved filing, sorting and archiving records, but Linda enjoyed getting out to help DPA customers with their paperwork. She started to ask herself, "what do I do next?" She knew she wanted to keep learning, and she liked people more than paperwork.

Tom saw the drive and human touch in Linda, and he asked her to move to Access Alaska, a non-profit center that supports individuals experiencing disabilities who are striving to live independently in the communities of their choice. Linda started as a morning receptionist, welcoming all kinds of people into the downtown office to have a cup of coffee, warm up, think about their next step. Very soon, the staff at Access Alaska saw what Tom saw. As Linda explains, "They saw more in me than I saw in myself."

Within a few short months, Access Alaska asked Linda to take a regular staff position. Once again, she started as a part-time receptionist, but they kept pushing her. Soon

she was full-time, and that kept her busy during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic eased, she took on a new job, heading the core service of Information and Referral in Fairbanks and the Interior. Her job was to meet potential customers, listen to their needs, and offer them the resources to meet those needs. Some of that was on the phone, some in person. She would assess the needs of the clients, help them with referrals to other

agencies, tell them about the Loan Closet, providing free durable medical equipment to the community. And she would joke with them, "like talking to your mama or grandmama."

Nowadays, Linda has added a third position, Independent Living Advocate. She meets clients, from teenagers to seniors, veterans and young adults, all who experience various disabilities. Always, she is helping folks, listening to what they need, showing them how they can be independent and stay independent. She thinks of herself as an advocate, and she tries to show her clients how to be advocates for themselves.

About a year ago, Linda realized that she had always been an advocate. She had made a good life by advocating for herself all her life. And she had always been an advocate for those in need. "Our doors are open," she says, "to anybody and everybody."

For me, Linda is another kind of advocate. She shows how MASST participants and host agencies can advocate for one another. She shows how to listen and how to talk. She shows how to see more in people than they see in themselves. She shows how to keep the doors open.

Jim Warren is the MASST Coordinator for the Northern and Interior regions in Alaska.

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Art of the North Galleries photo by Oscar Avellanada-Cruz



Lifelong learning with OLE and OLLI

Senior Voice Staff

Spring semester is here for older (aka “lifelong”) learners, with registration underway both in Fairbanks, through the OLLI program, and in Anchorage’s OLE.

OLE stands for “Opportunities for Lifelong Education” and while courses are open for all ages, they are designed for learners age 50 and older. Members pay \$200 per year, which allows them to register for as many courses as they like.

Spring semester classes begin the week of Feb. 12. A full catalog with course descriptions is available on the OLE website. There truly is something for everyone, including perennially popular language learning, fitness and art classes. But if you’re looking for something new or different, how about an everything-you-need-to-know primer on raising chickens, exploring the various breeds and discussions on meat vs. eggs, housing, predator management, and medications to keep your hens healthy? There is also a four-week class, “Backyard Beekeeping in Alaska,” taught by Tim Huffman, who manages the 49th State Brewery’s thriving apiary near Ship Creek and teaches local beekeepers how to keep

their colonies alive and well.

Some classes are virtual via Zoom, others in-person in a classroom setting, or a hybrid of both.

For more information, visit www.oleanchorage.org, call 907-231-0095 or email info@oleanchorage.org.

OLLI in Fairbanks

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Fairbanks offerings are for adults age 50 and older and the class descriptions and schedule are on its website.

OLLI uses a lottery-based registration system, with applicants submitting their request and classes assigned by drawing. The drawing was held Jan. 25. Names of those not drawn, or registering later, will go onto a waitlist and enrolled in remaining open seats on a first-come, first-served basis.

Class sessions begin Feb. 12.

Members pay \$35 per year plus \$15 tuition per course. Or Unlimited Memberships are available, \$185 for the year with no per-course tuition. You must be a member to register for classes.

For more information, call 907-474-6607, email uaf-olli@alaska.edu or visit <https://uaf.edu/olli/>.

Calendar of Events

Feb. 3 Nationwide Quilts of Valor Foundation National Sew Day. Check your local sewing and quilting groups to see if they are participating. Visit the national website for information and to sign up for prize drawings, conducted throughout the day. www.qovf.org

Feb. 10 Anchorage 5th Annual Bettye Davis African American Summit, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School. Speakers, sessions, vendors, more. This year’s theme is “Marching Until Equity, Equality and Justice is Won!” Program and information at alaskablackcaucus.com

Feb. 10 Fairbanks 2nd Annual “Ties and Tiaras” dance at the Carlson Center, 6 to 8 p.m. For parents/grandparents and children age 13 and younger. Live DJ, dancing, refreshments, photo station, door prizes, games, crafts and more. Dress code: Red Carpet. \$20 per couple in advance, \$25 at the door. Call North Star Fairbanks Parks and Recreation, 907-459-1109

Feb. 13 Juneau SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) meal distribution and outreach. Noon at Glory Hall, 8715 Teal St. Food Bank of Alaska SNAP specialists will be on site to assist and answer questions. www.foodbankofalaska.org

Feb. 14 Anchorage U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs presents Veterans Winter Bingo at Col. Mary Louise Rasmuson Campus, 1201 N. Muldoon Rd., 6 to 7 p.m. Sponsored by Elks Lodge.

Feb. 14 Anchorage Anchorage Senior Activity Center open forum, noon in the ballroom. Call for information, 907-770-2000

Feb. 16 Statewide Elizabeth Peratrovich Day

Feb. 16 Fairbanks Senior potluck at Mary Siah Recreation Center, 2 to 4 p.m. Organized by Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation. 907-459-1070

Feb. 19 Nationwide Presidents Day

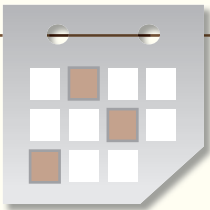
Feb. 20 Anchorage Access Alaska Senior Resource Fair at Fairview Recreation Center, 1121 E. 10th Ave., 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Transportation available. Call 907-248-4777 or info@accessalaska.org

Feb. 21 Soldotna “Reducing Your Risk of Dementia” presentation at Soldotna Public Library, 3 p.m. With Dementia Trainer Ruthann Truesdell. Cohosted by Hospice of the Central Peninsula. Call for information, 907-262-4227

Feb. 24 Seward Alaskan Art and Beautiful Cake Auction at the Seward Gateway Hotel. Collectible, historic and valuable art donated by Alaskan artists and collectors, with proceeds benefiting Seward and Moose Pass senior nutrition programs. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., dessert service at 7 p.m., live auction begins at 7:30 and silent auction ends at 8 p.m. Tickets \$15 per person, 6-person table is \$100. Purchase tickets at Seward Senior Center or at the door. To reserve seats, 907-224-5604.

Feb. 23-March 3 Anchorage Anchorage Fur Rendezvous. Sled dog races, snow sculptures, fireworks display, amateur photo contest, Pioneers of Alaska Pancake Feed, fur auctions, Charlotte Jensen Native Arts Market, Royal Tea, Hold ‘Em poker tournament, Great Alaska Talent competition, Melodrama, Miners and Trappers Country Jam, Running of the Reindeer, Big Fat (bike) ride, outhouse races, snowshoe softball, ice bowling, pickleball tournament, much more. Full schedule of events and dates at www.Furrondy.net. Check with Anchorage Senior Activity Center for their activities schedule.

Feb. 27 Anchorage Age Smart, Let’s Talk forum at the Anchorage Senior Activity Center, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. This month’s topic: “Let’s Talk Taxes,” with Roger Marks of AARP Alaska’s Tax Aide program. Call for information, 907-770-2000.



Send us your calendar items

Send to: Senior Voice, 3340 Arctic Blvd., Suite 106, Anchorage AK 99503
editor@seniorvoicealaska.com

Deadline for March edition is February 15.

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on the west side of the St. Mary's Episcopal Church Campus

Japanese Alaskans interred during WWII

By LAUREL DOWNING BILL
Senior Voice Correspondent

Following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and six months later at Kiska and Attu, wartime hysteria and fear of sabotage and espionage ran rampant across the country.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942. It ordered the removal of more than 112,000 Japanese Americans – also called Nikkei—from the West Coast. Those with Japanese ancestry were taken from their homes, businesses and schools and put in internment camps.

Alaskans were not immune to the order. After a short stay at Fort Richardson near Anchorage, the territory’s 193 detainees were transferred to the Puyallup Assembly Center in Washington. They then boarded trains bound for the Minidoka Relocation Center.

The Minidoka internment camp, 20 miles northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho, was built on a dry, desolate, sagebrush plain. It housed those of Japanese ancestry from Alaska, Washington and Oregon, as well as 50 seal and whale hunters who were half Alaska Native, according to the National Park Service.

When the detainees arrived at the camp in August 1942, they found it still under construction with no running water or sewer system.

“When we first arrived here, we almost cried, and thought that this is the land God had forgotten,” one evacuee said. “The vast expanse of nothing but sagebrush and dust, a landscape so alien to our eyes, and a desolate, woebegone feeling of being so far removed from home and fireside bogged us down mentally, as well as physically.”

The camp’s superintendent of education saw the despair in the detainees, as well.

“... these people are living in the midst of a desert where they see nothing except tar paper covered barracks, sagebrush and rocks. No flowers, no trees, no shrubs, no grass,” wrote Arthur Klienkopf in a diary. “The impact of emotional disturbance as a result of the evacuation . . . plus this dull, dreary existence in a desert region surely must give these people a feeling of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair which we on the outside do not and will never fully understand.”

There were shortages of food and medicine in the camps, which meant many sick people were left untreated. Some died. At least five other internees were shot and killed because of illness or because they tried to escape, according to

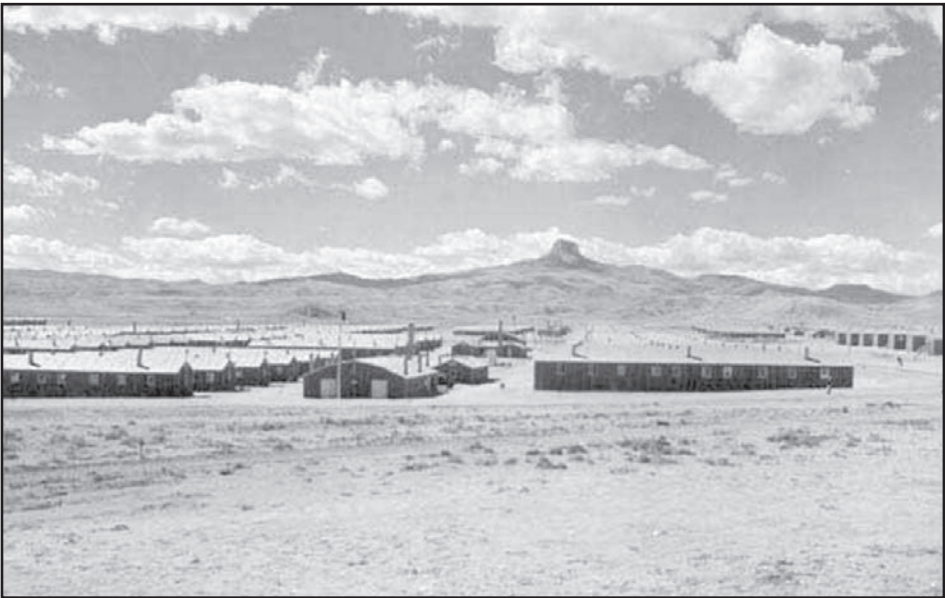
government records.

For almost two years, the country detained them because the government questioned their loyalty. But even though these Japanese Americans endured hardships while being interred, their loyalty to the United States remained steadfast. About 1,000 volunteered to serve in the military – dozens died for their country.

And when it was all said and done, only 10 Americans were convicted of spying for Japan during the war—all Caucasian.

Most Alaskans could not believe their Japanese neighbors were enemy spies. So in the spirit of friendship and caring, they watched over the homes and businesses of those removed from the territory. But only about 80 of the almost 200 Alaska detainees returned north after the war ended.

This column features tidbits found in Aunt Phil’s Trunk, a five-book



One of 10 internment camps for Japanese Americans, Minidoka originally housed people from Seattle, Portland, Puyallup Valley, and Alaska. Located 20 miles northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho, it was built on a dry, desolate plain.

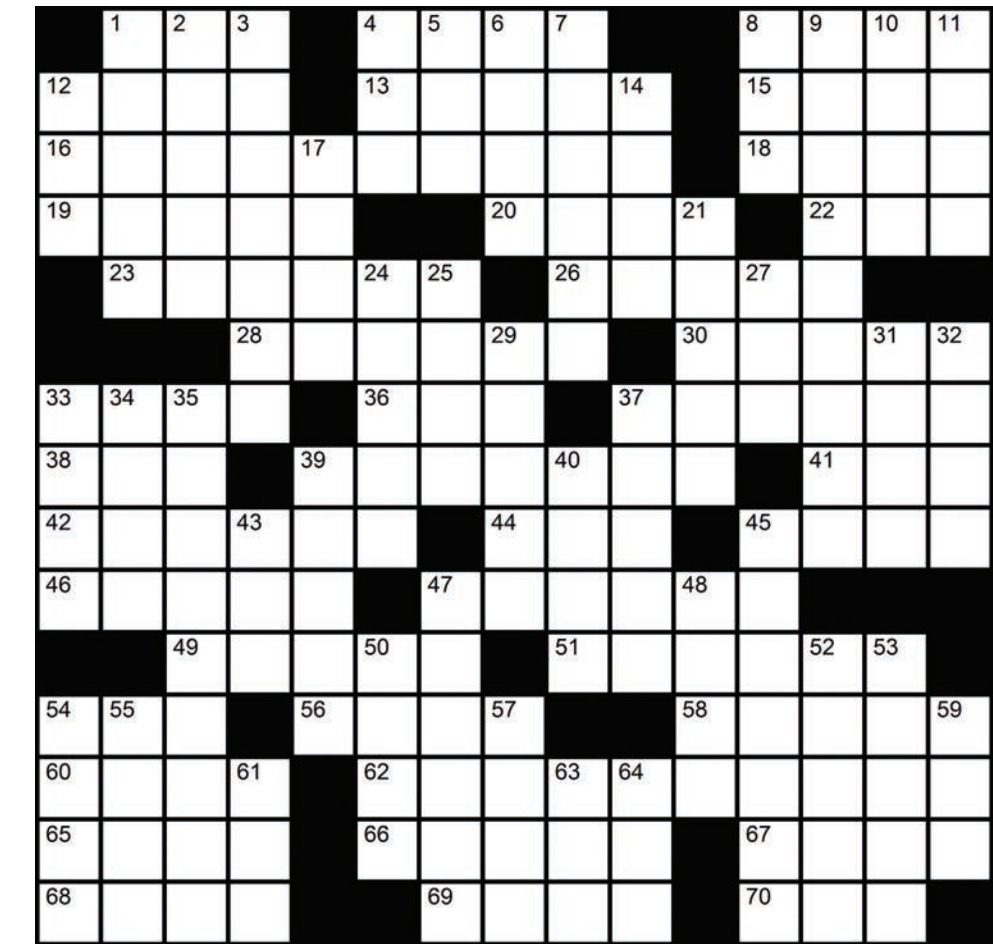
University of Washington, Wing Luke Asian Museum Collection, 1992.041.004 CJ

Alaska history series written by Laurel Downing Bill and her late aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson. The books are available at bookstores and gift shops throughout Alaska, as well as online at www.auntphilstrunk.com.

For Crying Out Loud!

Across

- 1 Canada’s Grand _____ National Historic Park
- 4 Junkyard dogs
- 8 Wirehair of film
- 12 “The Black Stallion” boy
- 13 Ruckuses
- 15 Kind of loser
- 16 Exclamation of success
- 18 Fit of pique
- 19 Case starter
- 20 “My Name Is _____” (William Saroyan story collection)
- 22 Harvest goddess
- 23 Those living elsewhere, for short
- 26 Bundle
- 28 Military adornment
- 30 Calf catcher
- 33 Foam at the mouth
- 36 Gardner of “The Barefoot Contessa”
- 37 Sad songs
- 38 Lively card game
- 39 Exclamation of disgust
- 41 North Yorkshire river
- 42 Ballyhoo
- 44 Uncle, in Madrid
- 45 Oscar winner Paquin
- 46 Benny started there
- 47 Male honker
- 49 Really irk
- 51 Bottled spirits
- 54 Elton John, e.g.
- 56 Soaks (up)
- 58 No-brainer?
- 60 Drudgery



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- 62 See 16 Across
- 65 Suffixes with social
- 66 Wait on
- 67 Badger’s burrow
- 68 Carling float
- 69 Cut the crop
- 70 Give it a whirl
- 9 Exclamation of surprise
- 10 Kind of wire
- 11 Aardvark’s fare
- 12 Sounds of understanding
- 14 Deposed leader
- 17 Quod _____ faciendum
- 21 Kind of raise
- 24 Start of a refrain
- 25 Part of the Hindu trinity
- 27 Make public
- 29 Ziti, e.g.
- 31 Relative of a gull
- 32 On the briny
- 33 Essen’s river
- 34 Dwarf buffalo
- 35 Shocked exclamation
- 37 Electron tube
- 39 Printing woes
- 40 Bell sound
- 43 It has a shell
- 45 Most desiccated
- 47 Pouched rat
- 48 Arthurian lady
- 50 Drags
- 52 Pond denizen
- 53 Like smokestacks
- 54 Cookbook direction
- 55 Greek letter
- 57 Hot under the collar
- 59 Tyke
- 61 Mil. transport
- 63 Egg cells
- 64 Gusto

Down

- 1 Part of a service
- 2 Chill, so to speak
- 3 Solar follower
- 4 Sports league north of the border (Abbr.)
- 5 Eskimo knife
- 6 Important Indian
- 7 Meager
- 8 Exercise target

Crossword answers on page 26



Carole Wells remembers ‘Oomph’ actress Ann Sheridan

By NICK THOMAS
Tinseltown Talks

Born 109 years ago this February, glamorous actress Ann Sheridan (1915–1967) was destined for branding as the “Oomph Girl” following a mock contest organized by the Warner Brothers publicity department in 1939.

Stunning on-screen and becoming a favorite pin-up girl of World War II troops, Sheridan could play any character—tough or tender, funny or flirty, sassy or seductive. She delighted audiences with her witty wisecracks and clever comebacks. While she certainly possessed an abundance of entertainment oomph, her feelings were mixed about the public label throughout her life.

The Texas native starred in some memorable films of the 40s such as “The Man Who Came to Dinner,” “Angels with Dirty Faces,” and “I Was a Male War Bride,” but never really landed a lead role in a true Hollywood blockbuster in her more than 80 feature films.

In declining health at just 50, Sheridan ended her career in the little-remembered TV comedy western “Pistols ‘n’ Petticoats,” that ran for one season in the 1960s. Co-starring with Carole Wells, the former “National Velvet” series actress was one of the last to work with Sheridan and



Carole Wells
Universal Pictures publicity photo

played her daughter in the CBS show.

“I’d never met her before that,” Wells told me in 2020. “In fact, I didn’t really know who she was—she had been a star before I was born.”

The two first met the first day on set.

“We sat around a big table and read the script with the producers, writers and director, and she was very charming but rather quiet,” recalled Wells. “We would do this every week before filming and she was always just a down-to-earth sort of person.”

Wells says the two chatted often but never became very close during the months they worked together.

“I’d see her in the mornings in the make-up department and give her a hug and say, ‘How ya doin’ Annie?’ And she’d say something like ‘wish I felt as good as you sweetie’—she called everyone sweetheart or sweetie. She was never well from the



The cast of “Pistols ‘n’ Petticoats,” with Carole Wells top right, Ann Sheridan bottom right.

CBS publicity photo

beginning of the series.”

In the mornings Sheridan was usually okay, according to Wells, but by noon usually couldn’t work.

“It took a lot out of her and she would have to go back to her dressing room,” said Wells, who would spend lunch hour learning Sheridan’s lines that would be rewritten for Wells to work into the

and kept getting thinner as the series progressed. Basically, I watched her die in front of me. But with all she was going through, I never heard her complain and she was always very kind and respectful to me.”

Sheridan struggled through most of the series but was too ill for the final half-dozen episodes.

“I knew she wasn’t going to be around much longer,” said Wells. “One day she was on the set, then the next day she wasn’t and we never saw her again. When we heard she had passed away, the cast had a lunch to memorialize her.”

Wells believes doing the show was good for Sheridan, who still bravely displayed plenty of ‘oomph’ despite her failing health.

“Before the series started, she had a facelift and got herself together,” says Wells. “I think being part of the show might have helped her live a little longer.”

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and has written features, columns, and interviews for numerous newspapers and magazines (see www.getnickt.org).

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Additional information is available at:
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Romance and dating scams are booming

By MICHELLE TABLER

AARP Alaska

Romance scams are big business for criminals because millions of people are using dating sites. According to the Federal Trade Commission, \$547 million was lost to romance scams, up 80% from 2020, with much of that money paid with gift cards and cryptocurrency. And this is just the tip of the iceberg—many people never report scams because they are too embarrassed, or because they don't know where to report the theft. Both men and women are susceptible to these types of scams.

It's estimated that there are over 120 million fake online profiles on social media sites. Scammers

post fake profiles online, often by hijacking photos and text from existing accounts. The most sophisticated scammers will create social media accounts under their fake names to create a wider footprint. Often, they claim to be local but temporarily working overseas or in the military and currently deployed—that's why they can't meet the victim in person.

Once engaged with a potential victim online, they will suggest moving the "relationship" to personal emails and text messaging. All the while, they are building a romantic relationship with their victim and garnering trust. They move quickly to intensify the relationship. Before long, they will come up with a reason for the



Once engaged with a potential victim online, the scammer will suggest moving the "relationship" to personal emails and text messaging. All the while, they are building a romantic relationship with their victim and garnering trust.

© Lacheev | Dreamstime.com

victim to send money: cash for airfare to visit, a family emergency, a business deal that needs upfront cash and their money is temporarily tied up (but they will pay you back very soon).

In one local scam, the con artist purported to be building the couple's dream home but ran into cost overruns and needed more cash to finish "their" home. The victim had never met her boyfriend in per-

son, but (she thought) they were in love and engaged to be married.

Three red flags jump out in these scams: the romantic interest is not able to meet with you in person; they ask for money once they gain your trust; and they need your money quickly. The scammer will ask you to wire the money, put the money on gift cards and give them the PIN codes, or have you use a money transfer app. Wiring money or filling prepaid cards is the same as sending cash—you'll never get it back.

If you are using online dating services, avoid sending money no matter what reason is given, especially to someone you have never met. Be wary if the person finds excuses not to communicate other than by text or email. You can enter the person's

photo and text from their profile into a reverse image search. Fake profiles tend to have a recent join date and just a few friends listed. Remember, many of these profile photos and other information may have been hijacked from a legitimate site or a real person. It's also important to never to give out personal information or any bank or credit card account numbers.

Social media and online dating sites have made meeting new people easier. Just be cautious, protect your personal information, and do your research.

The AARP Fraud Watch Network is a free resource for all. Visit aarp.org/fraud for tips on proactively spotting scams, expert guidance if you've been targeted, and "The Perfect Scam," a weekly podcast that tells the stories of people who find themselves the target of a scam, featuring leading experts who pull back the curtain on how scammers operate. To report a scam to the Fraud Watch Network helpline, call 877-908-3360.

Michelle Tabler is an AARP Alaska Fraud Education Expert.

Retirement

continued from page 3

fortunate position that it was my pot of gold. I have had a lot of advantages in my life. I don't have my own children. I don't have a spouse that's dependent on me. So I've been able to fully focus on how I can sustain the program. The other thing that has been sustained is the President's Volunteer Service Award. One of the things that people enjoy is being recognized.

When you turned 65 or thereabouts, why didn't you just kind of kick back on the chaise lounge as opposed to keep on doing what you're doing?

Yeah, well it's a great question. You know, I think from a motivation state, endpoints in life keys into what motivates us. Money is not a motivator for me. Recognition is not a motivator. For the material things that others might aspire to, I adopted a philosophy of simplicity. And I live below my means. Having fell in love with the outdoors and wilderness, there's a simplicity of living that goes along with that—whether it be comfort in sleeping in a tent or in a sleeping bag. More comfort comes from being in an environment which we come alive in,

we're inspired by. Every day Alaska is that kind of environment for me.

Many of the readers of the Senior Voice are thinking about retirement, or they've already retired and they're thinking about going back to work. What advice or comments do you have to say to these people?

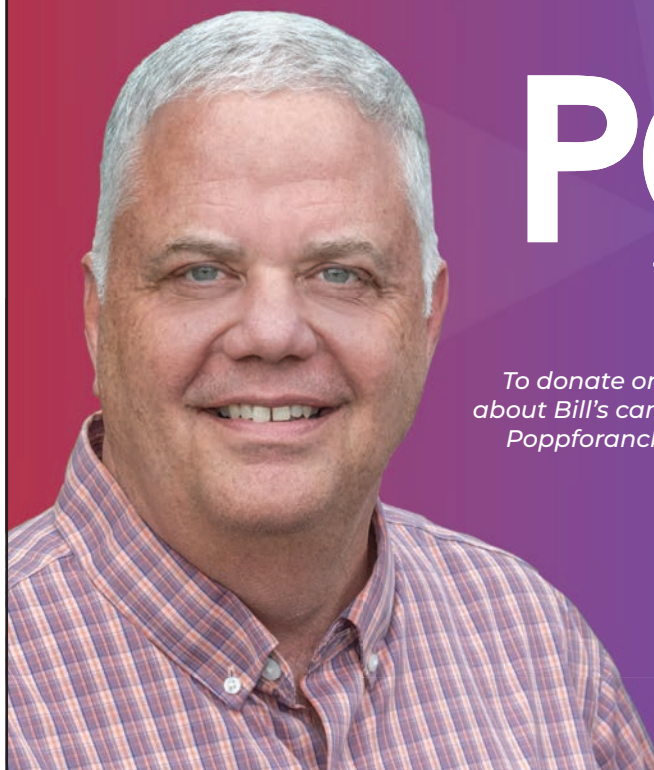
Well, I think, you know, in a nutshell, that's a career guidance question. And there's a traditional format for career guidance. This is three overlapping circles, that Venn diagram. The upper left, your interests, the things that make life interesting, things you do in your free time, things that you love to do, things that make you an interesting person. The upper right, your skills and abilities, what you're really good at, what you love to do, what your expertise is, what your mastery is, what's easy. And then the core circle of course, your values. What do you really care about? It's the intersection of the things that are interesting, give us great joy, with the things that we have mastery around, and that we can offer easily and well.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Lawrence D. Weiss is a UAA Professor of Public Health, Emeritus, creator of the UAA Master of Public Health program, and author of several books and numerous articles.

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Chocolate

continued from page 5

chocolate consumption.

During a median follow-up of nearly nine years, 14,043 participants developed coronary artery disease and 4,667 had a heart attack (when coronary artery disease progresses and the flow of blood to the heart is suddenly blocked). Chocolate appears promising for prevention of coronary artery disease, but more research is needed to pinpoint how much and what kind of chocolate could be recommended, report the researchers.

While it's not clear how much chocolate is optimal, experts warn against overeating. While moderate amounts of chocolate may protect the coronary arteries, it's likely that large quantities do not, due to the calories, sugar, milk and fat in commercially available products.

A treat from and for the heart

Consuming moderate amounts of chocolate has been associated with significantly lower risk of being diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AF), a common and dangerous type of irregular heartbeat. In a large study of men and women in Denmark led by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, researchers found there were benefits from chocolate and its ability to lower the risk of arrhythmias.

The study included 55,502 men and women participating in the Danish Diet, Cancer, and Health Study. Researchers considered study participants' body mass index, blood pressure and cholesterol, which were measured at the time participants were recruited between December 1993 and May 1997. They also looked at participants' health conditions, including high blood pressure, diabetes or cardiovascular disease, and data on their diet and lifestyle, from questionnaires.

There were 3,346 cases of AF among the study participants over a 13.5-year follow-up period. Compared with those who ate a one-ounce serving of chocolate less than once per

While it's not clear how much chocolate is optimal, experts warn against overeating. While moderate amounts of chocolate may protect the coronary arteries, it's likely that large quantities do not, due to the calories, sugar, milk and fat in commercially available products.

month, men and women who ate one to three servings per month had a 10% lower rate of AF. Those who ate one serving per week had a 17% lower rate and those who ate two to six servings per week had a 20% lower rate. The benefit leveled off slightly with greater amounts of chocolate consumption, with those eating one or more servings per day having a 16% lower AF rate. Results were similar for men and women.

Beth Czerwony, RD, registered dietitian for Cleveland Clinic, recommends avoiding anything with a lot of chemicals. The less ingredients, the better. Another added perk, dark chocolate with 85% cocoa has been shown to have mood boosting effects. For those wondering about white chocolate, Czerwony said that's not really even chocolate at all. It's more of a wax and tends to have the most sugar and fat.

Ancient treasure

The history of chocolate, which is derived from the beans of the cacao tree, can be traced to the ancient Maya, and even earlier to the ancient Olmecs of southern Mexico. Much later, Christopher Columbus encountered the cacao bean on his fourth mission to the Americas on Aug. 15, 1502, according to Wikipedia. He and his crew seized a large native canoe that proved to contain among other goods for trade, cacao beans. Columbus' son Ferdinand commented that the natives greatly valued the beans, which he termed almonds. Later, chocolate became popular in the courts of Europe and the streets of colonial America and chocolate soon evolved into the universally loved commodity it is today.





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The dreaded CTA is here

By KENNETH KIRK

For Senior Voice

What's your favorite dystopian fiction? Can you imagine a future like 1984, where the government watches and controls every aspect of your life? Or more like Brave New World, where the government uses sex, drugs and entertainment to keep the populace docile? Maybe Mad Max is more your style, with a barren post-apocalyptic landscape? Or do you go for Idiocracy, in which the world has just become dumber and dumber?

Why am I asking these questions? Because I just went through filing my initial report for the new Corporate Transparency Act. And that has put me in a very bad mood.

Before I tell you about my experience, let me answer the biggest questions people have been asking about the new CTA: When do you have to report, and who has to report?

The "when" is easy: The initial report has to be filed during 2024. After that if there is a change to the information, you have to file an update. Why did I file at the beginning of 2024? Because I am a glut-ton for punishment. But also because, as a lawyer, I wanted to be able to inform my clients about how the process works.

As to who has to file this



report, almost any corporation or LLC has to do it. There are a few exceptions (23 of them, to be specific). You don't have to file if you are a bank, brokerage firm, insurance company, or nonprofit. And you don't have to file if you are a big company, with over 20 employees and at least \$5 million in revenues each year. Why do those big corporations not have to file? Because they already have to file that information with other agencies, so there's no reason for them to have to duplicate. People assumed that with a name like Corporate Transparency Act, this was something that would apply to big, Wall Street-type companies, but actually it's the opposite.

But that means that your little bitty Limited Liability Company, which you use to hold your rental unit, has to file. And so does the corporation which you use for your freelancing work. As long as it has something in it, even just a bank account, it has to file.

Trusts, by the way, do not usually have to file. However if the trust owns an LLC or corporation, the LLC or corporation will still have to file.

So let me recount my experience. I figured Kenneth Kirk, PC would be an easy one. After all it is a simple corporation, I am the sole shareholder, director and officer, and I had all of the information at hand. And not only am I a lawyer who is used to dealing with government forms, but I already read a lot of the relevant parts of this Act. This should be easy-peasy, right?

Spoiler alert: It wasn't.

I did manage to get through it. It took me about 35 minutes, which I suppose is not too bad. I think I did it correctly; at least so far the FinCEN SWAT team has not showed up on my doorstep (I assume they have a SWAT team, since almost every other federal agency seems to have one. I'm pretty sure the Congressional Library Advisory Board has its own SWAT team).

There are several ways to do this. You can file it

directly online by typing in the information, or you can download it as a PDF. I took the first option, but if you have the necessary software, I recommend doing a PDF, so you can save it and go back if you're interrupted. There was also an option of calling the agency but I cannot imagine how long that would take, so I didn't try.

The direct online version has little "help" links throughout, but they aren't always helpful. One of the first problems I ran into was that it asked if this was an ongoing reporting entity. The help button told me that the answer was yes if the entity was created before Jan. 1, 2024. However when I answered yes (since I created the corporation years ago), I wasn't able to do anything after that. Apparently what they meant was, this entity had already filed one of these reports before Jan. 1. That is not what the help button said though.

And there were just a lot of these little annoyances. I missed the fact that even though I had entered Alaska on an address, I also had to clarify that it was in the United States. When I was informed at the end that the form was incomplete, and I backtracked and

found that error, I clicked on United States, but then it emptied the box that said the state was Alaska. I didn't discover that until the end, so I had to go all the way back and check the box for Alaska again. You get the picture.

So I don't know how difficult this will be for people who don't normally deal with this kind of stuff, and perhaps have a more complicated scenario, such as multiple owners. But it does appear to be doable, with some effort.

They did make one improvement over the last few months. Originally the online reporting system was going to be called the Beneficial Ownership Secure System. The acronym was BOSS. Apparently their PR department figured out the problem with that, and now it is called a Beneficial Ownership Information Report.

But it's still a big pain in the boss.

Kenneth Kirk is an Anchorage estate planning lawyer. Nothing in this article should be taken as legal advice for a specific situation; for specific advice you should consult a professional who can take all the facts into account. Meet the new boss... oh wait, I used that one last year.

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Cookies, private browsing, Apple Notes

By **BOB DELAURENTIS**
Bob's Tech Talk

Q. When I am online, I frequently see a message that asks me to accept cookies. What are cookies?

A. A cookie is a small bit of data that a website stores on your computer. The name itself dates back to the earliest days of the web, when names were chosen by programmers. The original job of a cookie was to make web surfing easier. Unfortunately, they have become one of the primary ways that you are tracked online. Tracking people online is a big business. Surveillance is nearly invisible to users, but it can have a profound impact on individuals and society in general.

To give you an idea of scale, consider that folks who spend time researching trackers observed a test device on which Google Chrome collected nearly 11,000 cookies in a single week. Not all of those cookies were the result of the “accept cookies” messages you see on many websites. Cookies can be set without your explicit permission.

There is no simple solution for users to avoid tracking. The best you can do is choose a web browser that has an emphasis on personal privacy. As of this writing, most users should use Firefox, which is a free download from mozilla.org. Users of Apple products should stick with Apple’s Safari, which is pre-installed on web capable devices.

Q. My web browser has the option to open a “Private Window.” Are private windows really private?

A. Not really, but the complete answer is more complicated than yes or no. All modern web browsers feature some kind of private browsing capability. Private Window and Incognito Window are two common names for this functionality, but there are probably at least a dozen more. There are minor differences, but private browsing typically means private relative to other users of the same device. It is not private from your Internet Service Provider

(ISP) or the network of services that record you as you surf the web. This means that when you turn on a private mode, the web history stops recording. Anyone you share the computer with would not stumble across any of the sites you visited in private mode. But that is about the limit of what private browsing accomplishes. Your ISP knows which sites you visit and for how long. So does software that employers or institutions use to track their equipment. This kind of software is not always installed on the computer, it may be part of the network the computer uses to access the Internet. Private browsing is a user convenience, and that’s all. There are tools such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that can make tracking difficult. However, the bottom line is that truly anonymous browsing is nearly impossible.

Q. I use Apple’s Notes app. Over time the number of notes has grown into a disorganized jumble. Is there an app to help me get organized?

A. I will let you in on a secret: Apple Notes is a powerhouse organization tool. If you started using it a few years ago, you may not be aware of how powerful it has become in recent versions. First, make sure you’re using the latest version of iOS, which can be checked in Settings -> General -> Software Update. The features I am about to highlight were added in the last couple of years, so your Notes app may differ on any version of iOS less than 17. Notes can be sorted into folders. Open the sidebar and create a folder, then manually drag and drop notes into their appropriate folder. Notes also support hashtags. Just type something like #birthdays into any note, and the hashtag will appear in the left sidebar as an instant search. Hashtags are one example of metadata, or information about the note itself. Smart folders can be created based on metadata.

For example, you can create a smart folder to group together all the notes created in the last month that also include the hashtag #dinner_menu. A feature that makes Notes work a bit like a personal Wikipedia are links. You can add links from almost anywhere, including other notes. To explore these and other features, search YouTube for “Apple Notes Tutorial” to find dozens of helpful examples. *Bob has been writing about technology for over three decades. He can be contacted at techtalk@bobdel.com.*

Wander the Web

Here are my picks for worthwhile browsing this month:

Browser Security Report
This site will show you a detailed explanation of what your browser reveals about you.
coveryourtracks.eff.org

Virtual Tours
Yorescape is a service that provides virtual tours of museums and other interesting places. Works on everything from smartphones to VR headsets.
flyoverzone.com

Play Ancient Games Online
Recover from flying over Ancient Rome by playing a quick game of XII Scripta like a Roman.
locusludi.ch



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Wasilla Senior Center
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Now is a great time to go to Hawaii

Alaska Airlines mileage will take you there

BY DIMITRA LAVRAKAS

Senior Voice Travel
Correspondent

Hawaii is the perfect place to go in February—only six hours out of Anchorage, to a nearby time zone just one hour behind, where you land with nary a hint of jet lag and ready to again experience the warmth of the sun.

Islands with distinctive differences

While Mokoka'i is quiet and not very touristy, Kaua'i bustles with tourist shops and excursions, O'ahu is home to the state's capital Honolulu with its royal palace and of course the famous Diamond Head commanding the harbor, Lāna'i has a luxury resort with a botanical garden nearby, and the Island of Hawai'i has active volcanoes.

Healing and helping

Mau'i's main town Lahaina, as we all know, was destroyed by a fire in August 2023. Should you visit Maui right now is the question.

The professional travel agent site GoHawaii says that with the exception of Lahaina, Maui is open and there is plenty to see and experience. "However, we urge visitors to be especially respectful and mindful in the following ways:

- visit with aloha, compassion and empathy.
- support local businesses. Visit mauinuifirst.com for suggestions.
- mālama (care for) Maui and give back to the community by signing up for an enriching volunteer experience."

Go to <https://handson-maui.galaxydigital.com/>

Several organizations offer opportunities for visitors to pay it forward, like beach clean-ups, or native tree planting to experience Hawai'i on a much deeper and connected level. Through the program, you could qualify for a special discount or even a free night from a hotel when participating in its dedicated volunteer activity.



Let the kids loose on the beach to discover what's washed ashore.

Photographs by Dimitra Lavrakas

Bring family for a big welcome

Hawaiians are very family oriented and family, or 'ohana, is core of Hawaiian culture. So, bring yours.

When I took my mother on two trips, one to Moloka'i and the other to Kaua'i, we were treated the best I have ever experienced in all my travels.

Consider a family reunion on one of the islands that will give the youngest to the eldest a wide variety of things to do that will make treasured memories for years.

You don't have to travel to California or Florida to experience the magic of Disney. Aulani Resort on Oahu in Ko Olina is also a spa, so when the kids go on an adventure you can unwind.

Included in your stay is Disney character experiences, Aunty's Beach House and complimentary kids club activities, no resort fees, five pool areas and a beach, and family and children's activities at the Pau Hana Room in the community hall.

There's also the Māka'ika'i Nature Tour to learn about the birds, ocean inhabitants and wildlife of the islands.

Learn to play the ukelele, listen to live Hawaiian music and see hula dancers.

Take it all in at www.disneyaulani.com, and make sure to look at the room deals in February and March where the longer you stay the more you save.

A full moon is on Feb. 24 and March 25. Hawaii is breathtaking under a full moon.

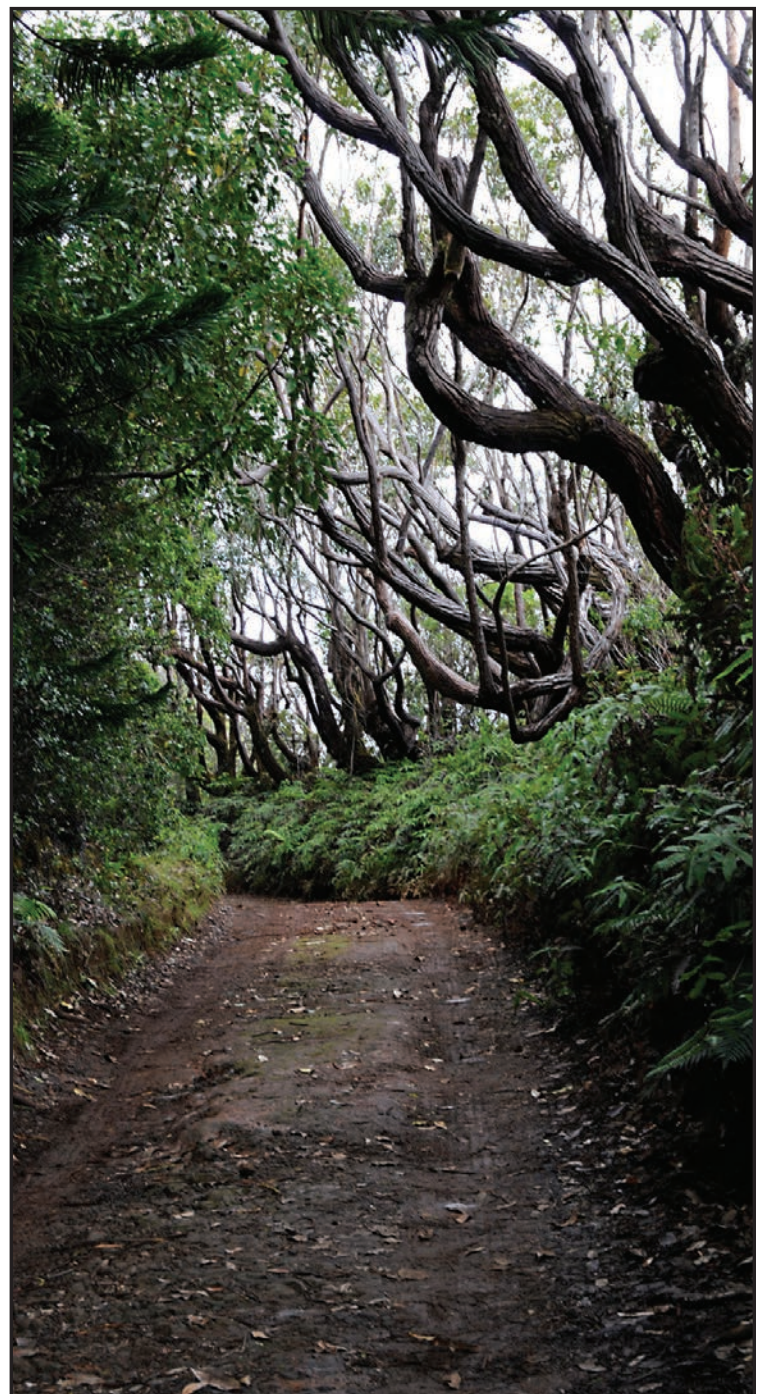
Peace and quiet in Moloka'i

Unlike other islands, Moloka'i is quiet and without the hustle and bustle of other islands.

What it does have is the 500-acre Moloka'i Coffee Plantation and, if you like coffee, order three 2-ounce samples for \$26 from them by mail. Go to https://www.coffeesofhawaii.com/Sampler-Box--1-Island_p_558.html.

The organic farm Pu'u O Hoku (Hill of Stars) Ranch is a family-owned biodynamic and organic ranch as well as a retreat center surrounded by 14,000 acres of protected land. It offers a lodge and cottages for stays.

Go to <https://puuohoku.com/>.



The Moloka'i Forest Reservation Path is a 25-mile trail, but once past the five-mile road, there is a picnic area with bathrooms, but no water.

next page please



Hawaii

from page 24

The Alaska connection

Don't be surprised if Hawaiians you meet know about Alaska. I was on Kaua'i when I was living on the North Slope and people knew about Utqiagvik, then Barrow, saying "I heard you can make good money there."

You'll find lots of Alaskans on all the islands, recognizable by their Eddie Bauer swimsuits and pale bodies.

And for Alaskans, the news that Alaska Airlines is trying to buy Hawaii Airlines is welcome.

"This brings together two great companies steeped in history—both 90 years in service," Alaska



More than 80 species of birds live on Kaua'i plus migratory birds. Photographs by Dimitra Lavrakas

Airlines chief executive Ben Minicucci said in a press release. "We share the same values—connecting communities and connecting people."

Peter Ingram, chief executive of Hawaiian Airlines, said in a press release that his airline has expanded over the years, adding a hub in Maui and more

international flights, but hasn't been able to offer its customers access to more destinations on the mainland. The deal with Alaska will make that possible.

"There is something really unique about this combination when you think about the origins of these two companies," Ingram said. "There are no two states in the country that are more reliant on transportation than Alaska and Hawaii."

The exact details of how the merged loyalty programs would work haven't yet been announced and won't be released until after the deal is approved. Until then, nothing about the programs will change, says Alaska Airlines.



Spectacular Hawaiian sunset photographs will impress friends and family.

Music

continued from page 4

- 1978 (Buddy Holly)
- Coal Miner's Daughter, 1980 (Loretta Lynn)
- La Bamba, 1987 (Ritchie Valens)
- Bird, 1988 (Charlie Parker)
- The Pianist, 2002 (Wladyslaw Szpilman)
- Ray, 2004 (Ray Charles)
- Walk the Line, 2005 (Johnny Cash)
- What Happened, Miss Simone? 2015 (Nina Simone)
- Elvis, 2022 (Elvis Presley)

Films about events or genres

- The Sound of Music, 1965 (Von Trapp Family Singers)

Amadeus, 1984 (rivalry of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri)

Latcho Drom, 1993 (history of flamenco)

Backbeat, 1994 (portrayal of Beatles' early days)

Whiplash, 2013 (cut-throat world of music education)

Score, 2016 (film score development)

La La Land, 2016 (musical romance)

A Star is Born, 2018 (musical romantic drama)

Where words fail, music speaks. –HC Andersen. Add music to your life!

Karen Casanovas, PCC, CPCC, CLIPP is a health and wellness professional coach practicing in Anchorage. If you have questions write to her at info@karencasanovas.com.

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Interested in learning more about fellow businesses and agencies providing senior services in the Anchorage and Mat-Su area? Want to get the word out about your own service? The monthly Service Providers Breakfast, sponsored by Older Persons Action Group, Inc., is an opportunity for all the above. Informal, early and free, the event begins at 8

a.m., second Wednesday, at a different host location each month. Breakfast provided. The next date is Feb. 14, hosted by the UAA Trust Training Cooperative.

Call Older Persons Action Group, Inc. at 907-276-1059 for location information and to RSVP for this event, or for more information on future events and to be added to our e-mail reminder list.



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Library

continued from page 15

structure to destabilize—a sad situation for the whole town, as the Palmer Library was much loved by many. Even the parking lot was used for numerous community events, especially during the summer months.

Gary and I and our two children moved to Palmer from Cooper Landing in 1984. We visited the little public library in the back part of the City Hall building, but it was miniscule and so crowded. So, we were just as excited as everyone else during the grand opening in 1986 of the beautiful new library building on S. Valley Way. However, we didn't check out many books. The kids had their school libraries, my parents had given us a set of encyclopedias for any necessary school research projects, and I was too busy in those years to do much reading.

It wasn't until Gary's and my return to Palmer in 2011, that I frequented the Palmer Library more often, but without the need of trying to use my outdated library card. For years I attended the monthly Palmer Historical Society meetings in the community room, until they outgrew the space and had to move to the Palmer Moose Lodge. I also stopped by the library sometimes just to use the wonderful restrooms during a busy day of errands around town. Other times, I would drop off used magazines from my house

to the designated area on shelves to the left of the entry doors, check to see if there were any magazines I was interested in, and pick up an extra copy of the Senior Voice, if I needed one. And, I'd come across some great "finds" during the annual used book sale.

When in high school one year, daughter Erin created a variety of stuffed dolls and animal toys. At that time, she and I made a huge soft doll of fabric. She didn't want it and I was tired of storing it. One day while in the library, I noticed above the cupboards in the children's section, a decorative arrangement of toys. I could imagine Erin's doll fitting right in. My next trip to Palmer, I took the doll into the library, offered it to the staff, and it was happily accepted. At a later date, I was thrilled to see the doll in place, took photos, and sent them to Erin.



Erin McMichael's handmade doll finds a home in the children's section of the Palmer Library.

About 2014, I helped orchestrate a donation to the library of a complete collection of Ron Wendt's books about gold panning and mining. After the collection was sent to me by previous bed and breakfast



Demolition in progress of the damaged portion of the Palmer Library, Sept. 2023.

Photos courtesy Maraley McMichael

guests of ours (from Spain), I took it to the library (as prearranged) and was given a tour of the fabulous "Alaska Collection," housed in a separate room in the library.

Finally, in September 2023 I had time to visit the interim library. While the lady at the front desk processed my application for a new card, I browsed the temporary facilities. It didn't take long. All the rooms were small and the upstairs computer lab was temporarily closed. As I wandered back to the front desk, another lady asked if I was being helped. I told her yes, but reading the Frontiersman was really what brought me in. When

she told me that I could do that in my own home, I was flabbergasted. It seems I'm pretty ignorant about the digital world. I even asked how the Frontiersman felt about that, since it would cut down on subscriptions. She said they were fine with it.

She took me to a nearby computer at the front desk and showed me the process to go through to read it at home. Then the first clerk had questions for me about my application. The three of us had a delightful conversation. I even mentioned Erin's doll, saying that the photos I'd seen in the newspaper looked like the cupboard it sat on would have been at

the edge of the damaged area and I wondered about its survival. I was told that unfortunately, even the items not damaged by the collapse were damaged by water spray. I thanked them for my new card, the lesson about how to access the Frontiersman, and the tour of the interim library.



It wasn't until January 2024 that I finally attempted to read the Frontiersman, using my new library card number. Not surprisingly after all that time, I didn't understand a simple note I'd written about the prearranged passcode, and was not successful. But after a quick call to the library, a patient clerk walked me through the process again, discovering my error. Then I sat at my own desk and browsed several recent issues to my heart's content.

P.S. A December 2023 radio news blurb stated that it has been decided to build a completely new building rather than repair the damaged one. The cost of the project is estimated to be \$15 million, with a grand opening date of 2026.

Maraley McMichael is a lifelong Alaskan currently residing in Palmer. Email her at maraleymcmichael@gmail.com.

Crossword answers from page 18

	P	R	E		C	U	R	S		A	S	T	A	
A	L	E	C		F	L	A	P	S		B	O	R	N
H	A	L	L	E	L	U	J	A	H		S	N	I	T
S	T	A	I	R			A	R	A	M		O	P	S
	E	X	P	A	T	S		S	H	E	A	F		
			S	T	R	I	P	E		R	I	A	T	A
R	A	G	E		A	V	A		D	I	R	G	E	S
U	N	O		B	L	A	S	T	I	T		U	R	E
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		G	E	T	T	O		G	E	N	I	E	S	
S	I	R		S	O	P	S			I	D	I	O	T
T	O	I	L		W	H	O	O	P	D	E	D	O	O
I	T	E	S		S	E	R	V	E		S	E	T	T
R	A	F	T			R	E	A	P		T	R	Y	



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Help

continued from page 11

driving, your chances of getting help improve if you ask for help with meal preparation.

Resist asking the same person repeatedly. Do you keep asking the same person because she has trouble saying no?

Pick the best time to make a request. Timing is important. A person who is tired and stressed might not be available to help. Wait for a better time.

Prepare a list of things that need doing. The list might include errands, yard work, or a visit with your loved one. Let the “helper” choose what she would like to do.

Be prepared for hesitation or refusal. It can be upsetting for the caregiver when a person is unable or unwilling to help. But in the long run, it will do more harm to the relationship if the person helps only because he doesn’t want to upset you. To the person who seems hesitant, simply

say, “Why don’t you think about it?” Try not to take it personally when a request is turned down. The person is turning down the task, not you. Try not to let a refusal prevent you from asking for help again. The person who refused today may be happy to help at another time.

Avoid weakening your request. “It’s only a thought, but would you consider staying with Grandma while I went to church?” This request sounds like it’s not very important to you. Use “I” statements to make specific requests: “I would like to go to church on Sunday. Would you stay with Grandma from 9 a.m. until noon?”

(Source: Family Caregiver Alliance.)

People want to help but don’t always know the best way. These tips can help not just you, the caregiver, but the people who want to assist but don’t know what you need.

—Dani Keschull, Kenai Peninsula Family Caregiver Support Program Coordinator

Mobility

continued from page 12

recharging and avoid exposure to extreme temperatures. Lifespan for the batteries is around three to five years. Regularly inspect controllers, motors and electrical connections for damage.

Scooters (\$800–\$2,500) are compact seated power mobility devices ideal for navigating tight spaces. Handlebars control speed and direction. Transport wheels and foldable frames enable portability. Battery and electrical maintenance is similar to power chairs. Inspect tires and seats regularly for wear. Plan on replacement costs every five to 10 years. Also, remember that the wheels are extremely small and bind up easily in soil, sand and gravel.

Advanced aids like exoskeletons (\$15,000–\$50,000) and smart canes (\$250–\$600) are starting to come out now as tech-

nology moves us forward, but at a much higher cost. The specialized maintenance needs can be an obstacle as well.

When it comes time for you to obtain an aid, involve your primary healthcare provider so you can pick a product that matches your mobility levels, terrain and desired independence. Selecting the right support promotes activity and engagement. If you will be traveling outside alone, make sure to tell someone where you’re headed and check in when you return. There have been times I have called out to help someone in a powered chair or a scooter who got stuck in sand or whose wheel slipped off the sidewalk.

Christian M. Hartley is a 40-year Alaska resident with over 25 years of public safety and public service experience. He is the City of Houston Fire Chief and also serves on many local and state workgroups, boards and commissions related to safety. He lives in Big Lake with his wife of 19 years and their three teenage sons.

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