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Senior Voice

A publication of
Older Persons
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Serving Alaskans 50+ Since 1978

Volume 48, Number 12 December 2025



COVID-19 is still with us. - page 11

Vinyl revival unites generations. - page 13

Balloon bombs drifted over Alaska during World War II. - page 18

Know your financial institution's arcane rules. - page 20

*Colony High School filled with bazaar booths and attendees. Holiday bazaars have a way of capturing you in a festive atmosphere.
Photo by Maraley McMichael*

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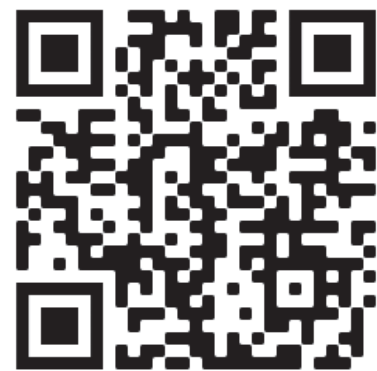


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Photo by Maralee McMichael*





Let's strengthen Alaska's health care workforce by joining multistate nurse licensure compact

By JULIE SANDE

Opinion

Alaskans value resilience. We know what it means to work together in tough times, and we require solutions that meet the unique challenges of our vast and remote state. Few areas demonstrate this need more clearly than health care.

Our mission at the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development is to promote a healthy economy, strong communities, and protect consumers in Alaska. Our ability to achieve this mission depends on factors across many sectors, but one key indicator is the stability of our health care system. Health care

workers, and nurses in particular, are the backbone of that system. We cannot deliver quality patient care without them. In five short years, Alaska is projected to have the largest shortage of nurses in the nation, while many other states are projected to meet demand or have a surplus of nurses.

We know that the challenges we face in Alaska often tend to have complex solutions—retention and recruitment of nurses is no different. In addition to workforce training, we will also need to continue to address childcare and housing needs. However, there is one very simple tool to help us combat Alaska's nursing shortage. It's a tool utilized by

more than 40 other states and it would create a clear pathway to bringing more nurses to Alaska.

The multi-state nurse licensure compact (NLC) allows registered nurses and licensed practical nurses who meet the highest standards to hold one license, recognized across the majority of states in our country. For Alaska, joining the compact would:

- Improve access to care: Hospitals and clinics could more competitively recruit and quickly hire qualified nurses from other NLC states without the delays of duplicative licensing. This is especially critical during emergencies like natural disasters or a pandemic.
- Support rural Alaska:

Small hospitals and clinics often struggle to attract staff. The NLC would expand their recruiting reach, making it easier to fill urgent gaps and allow more Alaskans to receive care close to home.

► Empower Alaska's nurses: When our nurses travel, relocate temporarily, or pursue advanced training, they wouldn't need to apply for multiple licenses. This reduces costs, saves time, and makes it easier and more appealing for them to return to Alaska when ready.

Some have raised concerns about state sovereignty and oversight. Let me be clear, Alaska would retain full authority to enforce our professional and disciplinary standards under the NLC. After 25 years, no state that is a member of the compact has ever left.

respondents are in favor. All of Alaska's hospitals support it, as do the U.S. Department of Defense, the Alaska Chamber of Commerce, our nursing schools, AARP, and many others.

Currently, if a nurse with an NLC license moves to Alaska, they lose their multi-state license—because only residents of compact states can hold one. This creates a disincentive at a time when we can least afford it. By joining the NLC, we can strengthen our workforce, improve care, and ensure that Alaskans—from Southeast to the North Slope—receive the quality health care they deserve.

To voice your support for Alaska joining the NLC, please contact your state legislators. For more information, including where the legislation stands, visit <https://professionallicense.alaska.gov/BoardofNursing/NurseLicensureCompact>

Julie Sande is Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.

Training for direct service professionals in December

Senior Voice Staff

The Alaska Training Cooperative provides non-academic trainings for people who work in Alaska's direct service professional and behavioral health workforce and who work with people who are affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias as well as other mental health issues.

Training and technical staff collaborate with communities and partners to offer trainings and training assistance to agencies, organizations, businesses, and associations. This enhances workforce development blending evidence-based practices with traditional wisdom to meet the needs

of rural behavioral health providers.

The cooperative offers in-person and online trainings. In December, there are two online trainings available. There is a Basic Concepts of Care online course from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Dec. 2. There is an Alaska Core Competency series of trainings between Dec. 8 and Dec.

17, each one from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. You can attend one, two or all of them. The whole series costs \$60.

To register for the trainings, go to <https://chd.app.box.com/s/de1ed1fj45rud9mqxn2fx-a2ezx87li51>

For more information, contact Riki Chapman at 907-264-6257 or racook@alaska.edu.

Senior Voice Alaska will consider submissions to its Perspective pages. Submissions should relate to what we cover: people 50 years old and older and their needs and lives. To submit a piece for consideration, email editor@seniorvoicealaska.com. We require full names, addresses and a contact number and will consider letters from and about Alaska and Alaskans.

Send us your letters

Send letters to the editor to Senior Voice, 401 E. Fireweed Lane, #102, Anchorage AK 99503. Maximum length is 250 words. Senior Voice reserves the right to edit for content and length. Space may be made available for longer opinion piece essays up to 400 words. Contact the managing editor at editor@seniorvoicealaska.com to discuss this. Copy deadline is the 15th of the month prior to publication.

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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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EDITORIAL

Editor Paola Banchemo
editor@seniorvoicealaska.com

Correspondents Laurel Bill, Dimitra Lavrakas
Maralee McMichael

Advertising sales Anne Tompkins
A.Tompkins@seniorvoicealaska.com

Page design Rachel Gebauer, Gebauer Design



Marge Mullen embodies homesteading history

Editor's Note: National Centenarian's Day was Sept. 22. The day honors those who've celebrated 100 birthdays or more. We're publishing several profiles of people who have hit this milestone this fall. The Alaska Commission on Aging is working with the Governor's Office, Pioneer Homes and Long Term Care Ombudsman to celebrate Alaska's centenarians. This interview was made possible thanks to the Alaska Commission on Aging.

By **PAOLA BANCHERO**

Senior Voice

A lot of Alaskans of a certain era can recall driving up the Alcan, their aspirations firmly packed up along with family mementos, a carload of children and not much else.

Margaret “Marge” Mullen has a different story to tell about her journey from the streets of Chicago to the wide-open potential of the Kenai Peninsula. She and her husband, Frank, flew up to their new home in Alaska in a Stinson 105 he piloted in 1945. Veterans like Frank were being offered the chance to homestead in Alaska.

The Mullens wanted to homestead in Alaska because both were city kids looking for new horizons.

“We really jumped at it because our parents had always rented apartments. They never even owned an acre of land,” Marge said. Having a homestead would break generational patterns of renting.

On their 10-day journey, they stopped in Winnipeg, Fort Nelson, Grande Prairie, and other Canadian cities or Royal Canadian Air Force bases along the way on a grand adventure.



Margie at 104 years old with Peggy, Eileen and granddaughter Enid (Eileen's daughter).



With granddaughter Enid in 1979 on a Cook Inlet clam-digging trip.



Marge Mullen picking blueberries in 2010.



Most children in the town of Soldotna in 1956.



The cabin the Mullen family built in 1947.

Photos courtesy of Mullen family

City roots

Mullen, who is 105, is something of an institution in Soldotna. She is known for her generosity, active family life, and strong work ethic.

The eldest of several children, she learned to read early and taught younger siblings how to read when they attended a Catholic girls school where she was raised in Chicago. She headed for the Chicago Public Library when the opportunity for veterans and their families homestead in Alaska came up. Neither she nor Frank had ever heard of the Kenai Peninsula.

That love of reading continues now.

Mullen raised four children in Soldotna but attracts the devotion of a

Marge Mullen with great-granddaughter Anna in 2012.

wide circle of friends and loved ones.

“She’s always watching out for other people,” said daughter Eileen. “On Thanksgiving, she invited every person who did not have a place to go in the whole town. And they squeezed into our cabin for homemade bread and turkey.”

It was in Chicago that she worked as an elevator girl at the Marshall Field department store, with its windows memorably decorated at the holidays. Her brothers used to say they always put her in the middle elevator because she was easy on the eyes.

Mullen also worked at Commonwealth Edison electric company when Frank was deployed in Europe during World War II. He was a B-26 pilot who flew 93 missions over France and Germany.

When he returned home, they decided to give Alaska a try.

Early days in Alaska

When Marge and Frank flew north, they spotted Anchorage from the air. Even then, they were surprised how large it was with

a population of 10,000. They stayed at a hotel Marge described in a tongue-in-cheek way as something like the Waldorf Astoria, famously swanky lodgings in New York City. It cost \$7 a night. At the time, their eldest daughter Peggy was traveling as a stowaway, as Marge was pregnant. During the first two years, they lived in Anchorage and had their second daughter.

Frank worked at Woodley Airways, and he flew about four days a week to destinations such as Nanknek, Homer, Kodiak and Juneau. The initial pay was \$300, but the Mullens could make it because they spent only about \$50 on rent per month on a house with a basement and hot water—middle-class luxuries in post-war Alaska. Even then, the high prices of eggs and milk were fodder for letters she mailed back home.

Marge knew she had found her place in Alaska. “Right away, I was surrounded by so much beauty,” she said.

Both of them knew how to work hard, and they applied that to their new adventure in Alaska. Homesteading didn’t open on the Kenai Peninsula until 1947, so Marge raised children, and got used to canning salmon and picking berries

and all those things to make a go of their new life.

She also learned to shoot a gun to protect her family.

“I didn’t know I was so good,” she said. “I had taken archery in Chicago, and I saw that I was a good shot with a bow and arrow.”

She kept shooting at squirrels until one of them showed up with only three feet. Apparently, he had met her gun before.

A Soldotna institution

Nowadays, Margie stays active by hanging out with her children and grandchildren. Her son, Frank, passed away in 2015, but her two older daughters, Peggy and Eileen, are close by on the Kenai. The youngest, Mary, lives in Oregon.

Her family and community keep her grounded. She likes to read—she recently finished the Lisa Murkowski book “Far from Home”—play cards, and after a hip operation stays mobile. Peggy owns River City Books in Soldotna at the spot where Margie and Frank homesteaded all those years ago.

When asked if she had a secret her longevity, Marge said yes.

“My love of walking, modern medicine and attitude.”



Photos of family and loved ones on the Mullen refrigerator.



Unlocking the benefits of sleep as we age

By KAREN CASANOVAS

For Senior Voice

Q: As I have gotten older, I find myself experiencing more restless nights than restful ones. What can I do about it?

A: Quality sleep is fundamental for our overall brain health and well-being, especially as we age. It plays an essential role in strengthening the immune system, repairing cells and tissues for physical recovery, and enhancing cognitive skills such as focus, problem-solving, and creativity. Eating nutritious foods, engaging in physical exercise, and social activities can further enhance brain plasticity. However, poor sleep may lead to memory issues, irritability, and increase the risk of neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's and dementia.

Sleep is vital for glymphatic flow, the process that flushes toxins from the brain, and for effective memory recall. During rapid eye movement (REM) and slow-wave sleep, our minds integrate new data into long-term memory, leading to a sharper intellect as neural networks are reinforced. The cognitive neuroscience theory of memory consolidation emphasizes that sleep is crucial for this successful transfer and reorganization of information from a fragile, temporary state to a stable, long-term one.

As we age, the importance of sleep becomes increasingly clear, yet many older adults face obstacles to achieving restful slumber. To better under-



stand these challenges, it requires looking at the homeostatic regulation theory, which reveals how our bodies balance wakefulness and rest. Sleep pressure—the natural urge to sleep—grows as adenosine, a neurotransmitter, accumulates during wakefulness. While this desire for rest signals when it's time to sleep, aging adults often face additional challenges, such as anxiety about being alone, personal safety concerns, worries about timely bathroom access, and disturbances from unfamiliar sounds.

Adding more complexity to this picture is our circadian rhythm, the internal clock that dictates our sleeping and waking patterns. These rhythms and sleep pressure work together to define how much sleep we need based on how long we have been awake. This relationship sheds light on why we often feel sleepy by evening, even if we haven't been awake all that long. Appreciating how these systems interact demonstrates the crucial importance of both the quality and duration of sleep—not just for feeling well-rested, but for bolstering cognitive performance and

To attain the restorative sleep our bodies need, it is important to adopt effective strategies that can help overcome the challenges many older adults face, such as environmental distractions and health changes.

emotional health.

To attain the restorative sleep our bodies need, it is important to adopt effective strategies that can help overcome the challenges many older adults face, such as environmental distractions and health changes. Creating a tranquil sleep environment is ideal. Consider transforming your bedroom into a calming sanctuary with soft lighting, comfortable bedding, and minimal noise. The potential benefits of sleep aids such as white noise machines, sleep apps, or relaxation music can create a soothing bedtime atmosphere. Establish a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, helping to sync the body's internal clock for better rest.

Incorporating relaxation techniques can also enhance your ability to

unwind before bed. Gentle stretches or deep breathing exercises can calm your mind and prepare your body for sleep. Additionally, staying active throughout the day with regular physical activity not only boosts your daytime energy levels, but also paves the way for healthier sleep patterns. Getting natural light exposure during the day helps regulate circadian rhythms, promoting alertness in the daytime and aiding sleep at night.

Be mindful of large meals, heavy or spicy foods, and excessive liquids close to bedtime, as these can disrupt sleep. Limiting caffeine and screen time in the hours leading up to sleep is also wise, as both can hinder melatonin production, the hormone regulating sleep.

Ultimately, achieving the peaceful sleep we desire is less about finding the

perfect mattress or pillow, and more about creating practices and environments that nurture undisturbed sleep. By embracing these strategies, you can rediscover the joy of waking up refreshed and ready to face the day ahead. As you embark on this ongoing journey toward improved sleep, seize the opportunity to enhance your life—one restful night at a time.

Karen Casanovas's book she co-authored with Jim Britt, "Cracking the Rich Code," Volume 19, will be available for purchase online and in selected stores. To pre-order go to her website: karencasanovas.com.

Karen Casanovas, PCC, CPCC, CLIPP is a certified resilience coach, author, and speaker dedicated to empowering individuals and organizations with practical tools and strategies grounded in neuroscience, positive psychology, and cognitive-behavioral frameworks. With over 40 years of experience as an award-winning leadership executive in diverse cultural settings, she enables people to thrive amid stress and adversity. If you have questions write to her at info@karencasanovas.com.

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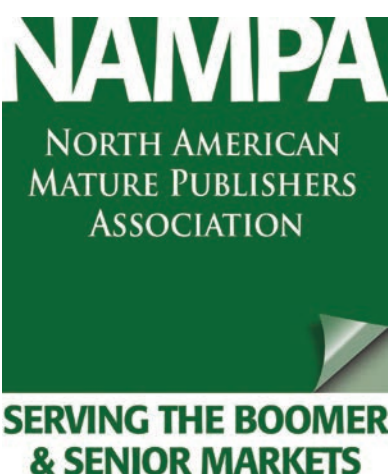
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Image: Ametefe Kukubor, *Buddies*, 2022. © Ametefe Kukubor

Senior Voice

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Keeping yourself healthy during travel season

By Dr. EMILY KANE
For Senior Voice

A reader wrote in that they frequently get sick during travel. Bummer! While there really isn't any good time to get sick, it's especially no fun when you are on vacation. However, this is common because we are exposed to so many people, and their germs, in crowded airports. Once on the plane you're probably OK because airlines have installed fantastic air filtration systems. Airports/bus stations/train stations—not so much. Here are five simple steps to bolster your immune



system and reduce the risk of spending your vacation time sneezing or achy.

Step one

Before you leave do your best to get enough (even extra) sleep in the week to 10 days before traveling.

And take as much vitamin C as possible without getting loose stools. Start with 500 mg at bedtime and add a little more each evening to max capacity. I prefer a buffered (pH rendered neutral with calcium and magnesium) powdered form mixed in water, which is gentler on the stomach and a good format for adjusting dose. All tissue repair requires vitamin C, and humans do not produce this crucial nutrient—we must ingest it. Arguably, England would still be in charge of the world if two-thirds of its navy had not died from scurvy in the two centuries before 1753 when

citrus fruits (limes) were added to the sailors' diet, providing the necessary vitamin C.

Step two

Take herbs for your blood type to bolster your immune system (white blood cells). Your ABO blood type is intimately linked with your immune and digestive systems. This is a fascinating study encompassing human migration patterns, early agriculture and the interplay of exposure (environment) and genetics. For blood type A good old Echinacea spp and goldenseal work great as an anti-viral, and

mucosal anti-microbial, respectively. Most products available in health food stores will list "maintenance" doses. I recommend double doses of whatever is on the label for three to five days at the first hint of a scratchy throat or sniffles. For blood type B, fermented foods are like medicine and work well combined with protein, ideally for your first meal of the day. B's are often emotionally sensitive and can be regulated with chamomile tea (stress-relieving) and elderberry extract (1 teaspoon three to four times daily) at the

page 23 please

Lesson Learned No. 2 Treat your skin well in winter Skin more fragile as we age

BY DIMITRA LAVRAKAS
Senior Voice Correspondent

As we age, our skin transforms from being elastic and plump to sagging and thin. As well, senior skin produces less oil, becoming dry, itchy and flaky. Sorry, that's the reality, but you can make your skin feel better with moisturizing and, again, hydrating by drinking lots of water.

We also get pesky dry spots all over our bodies

that itch and when we scratch too much it bleeds. Best to avoid that.

Consult a doctor for any unusual or persistent skin conditions, as they are common in older adults and could be related to an underlying illness like diabetes, heart disease, or nutritional deficiencies.

Be aware of any pressure sores, painful open sores, caused by lying in one position for a long time. Changing positions and using lambswool because

its natural fibers distribute pressure, wick moisture, reduce friction, and provide a breathable surface, which helps prevent skin breakdown.

For those who tend to be incontinent, use a protective ointment like Vaseline petroleum jelly with cocoa butter, or my old favorite Bag Balm, developed by a Vermont pharmacist to cure cow's dried and cracked udders. I figure if

page 7 please



Fine art artsy photo of Dimitra Lavrakas' old hand in a lake.
Photo by Dimitra Lavrakas

How to safeguard against medical identity theft

By SEAN McPHILAMY
Alaska Medicare Information Office

Identity theft, in particular, medical identity theft can happen to anyone of us. In fact, this month is one of the most likely months for this crime to be committed. The other likely months are January, February, March, April ... yes, any month of the year. And, while a victim of this theft can feel especially vulnerable, most likely "it isn't personal," but more likely a crime of opportunity. However, like a home invasion, medical identity theft can upset your life, disrupt your plans, steal your time and



take your energy to resolve the situation.

What is medical identity theft?

Medical identity theft can happen when someone steals or talks you into giving them your personal information, such as your

name and Medicare number. They can use this to get medical treatment, equipment, or prescriptions and bill Medicare or your prescription drug plan for it. It's important to protect your Medicare number and only share it with trusted individuals. I suggest keeping your medical records and provider statements in a safe place; these documents include the cards you may keep in your purse or wallet; the paperwork you receive following a visit to the doctor or mail your get at home. If you no longer need to keep old billing statements, I recommend destroying these by using a shredder. I also find a bit

of satisfaction watching these burn in the fireplace on a cold winter's evening.

What can I do if this happens to me?

You should report medical identity theft if:

- ▶ You gave out your Medicare number over the phone or internet to someone offering a "new" Medicare card.
- ▶ Similarly, if you provided your Medicare number after you were called unexpectedly to "help you" with durable medical equipment, genetic or dementia testing, cancer screening, or back braces.
- ▶ You are contacted by a debt collection company

for a provider bill you don't owe.

- ▶ You received boxes of braces, testing kits, or other medical supplies in the mail that you didn't request or need.
- ▶ You were denied coverage, services, or benefits because of a medical condition you don't have.

If you think that you have been the victim of medical identity theft, you should contact your local police department; remember to write down the report or case number. You may contact your health care provider(s) and the three nationwide credit

page 6 please



ADVERTISEMENT

Hearing loss can make for a frustrating holiday season

Communication strategies can help

Part 1 of 2



By **DONNA R. DEMARCO**

Accurate Hearing Systems

The sounds of the holidays; joyous music, lively conversation and family gatherings are a cherished part of every holiday season. But if a loved one has trouble hearing in crowded, noisy situations, or suffers any degree of hearing loss, the holidays may lose some of their luster.

A person with hearing loss symptoms may have difficulty hearing the higher pitched tones of children's (and women's) speech. Missing out on a grandchild's recitation of a wish list or not being able to contribute to a family conversation

about holiday memories can be frustrating. That's true for the person suffering from hearing loss and for family members who may not be aware of the hearing problem.

There are ways to help a loved one with hearing problems enjoy the holiday season. Look for part 2 for a list of ways to help.

With the support of family, a person with hearing problems may be more able to accept the need to get hearing loss treatment and may be ready to take the first steps to better hearing—a hearing test, and, if necessary, hearing aids. What a great gift to give a loved one (or yourself) this holiday season.

Avoid unnecessary frustrations this season. Call Accurate Hearing today for a FREE hearing test 907-644-6004. We are here to help.

Donna R DeMarco, AAS, CDP, BC-HIS, Tinnitus Care Provider Holding a Certificate from the International Hearing Society



Accurate Hearing Systems

DONNA R. DEMARCO, AAS, BC-HIS

Your hearing care provider...

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

continued from page 5

reporting companies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion). Additional information on filing a police report and contacting the credit reporting companies may be found at the Federal Trade Commission websites (ftc.gov and identitytheft.gov).

Check your statements for errors, potential fraud, or abuse

Every three months, you should receive a Medicare Summary Notice (MSN), either by mail or through your online Medicare.gov account. This document summarizes the Part A and Part B medical care you have received whether from outpatient services or during inpatient hospitalization. Also, your Part D prescription drug plan typically sends

you an Explanation of Benefits (EOB) statement after you receive your prescriptions. It is important to remember that neither the MSN nor the EOB is a bill. These documents summarize how much your provider billed, the approved amount your plan will pay, and how much you may owe your provider. Compare your statements to your own records. You may prefer to use the My Health Care Tracker pamphlet available from the Medicare Information Office.

It is important to read your MSN and EOB soon after you receive it for accuracy. If you think there has been a billing error, first call your medical provider or your Part D plan to try to get it corrected. If the potential errors are not corrected, if you have additional questions, please call Senior Medicare Patrol professionals at the Medicare Information Office.

The SMP program empowers and assists Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers to prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse.

For any Medicare related questions, please feel free to contact the State of Alaska Medicare Information Office at 1-800-478-6065 or 1-907-269-3680; 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 (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 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

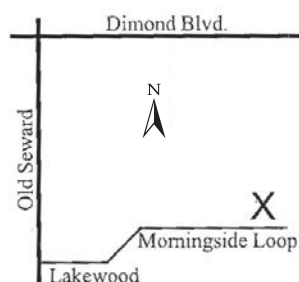
under SHIP. My office is in the Soldotna Senior Center, and I serve the state via phone. If you are local, I can help you as a

walk-in. I am here Mondays through Thursday, 8 am to 3:30 pm. Call with your Medicare questions, 907-262-2322.

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Understanding Social Security spousal benefits

By JIM MILLER

Savvy Senior

Dear Savvy Senior,

How do Social Security spousal benefits work? My wife, who's approaching age 62, has had a few small-paying jobs over the years, but spent most of her time as a homemaker. What is she entitled to?

- Primary Breadwinner

Dear Breadwinner,

Spousal benefit questions are among the most frequently asked and confusing parts of Social Security. The rules that govern qualifying and claiming are knotty, and there are many exceptions. But understanding how these benefits work is crucial for maximizing your family's retirement income. Here's what you should know.

What are spousal benefits?

Social Security spousal benefits are designed to provide retirement income to spouses who either

There are several online calculators that can help you and your wife figure out the best time to claim your benefits to ensure you get the highest possible lifetime payout.

didn't work or worked sporadically/part-time and earned significantly less than their spouses over their working lifetime. A stay-at-home parent is a good example of a spousal benefit recipient.

Who's qualifies?

To qualify for spousal benefits, you and your wife must meet three conditions: Your wife must be at least age 62; you must be married for a year or more; and you must already be collecting your retirement benefits.

Different rules apply for ex-spouses. Ex-spouses (if you were married for at least 10 years and are not remarried) can receive a spousal benefit based on an ex-spouse's record even if your ex has not yet filed for

their own benefits, but your ex must be age 62 or older.

How much are spousal benefits?

The amount your wife would get for spousal benefits will depend on your earning's history and her claiming age.

The maximum spousal benefit is 50 percent of your Primary Insurance Amount (PIA), which is that amount you're entitled to at full retirement age benefit (FRA). But your wife will only get that much if she waits until her full retirement age to file, which is 67 if she was born in 1960 or later.

Unfortunately, spousal benefits cannot be increased by her waiting beyond FRA, but they are reduced by taking them early. So, for example, if your wife were to start collecting her spousal benefits at age 62 (the earliest possible age), she would collect only 32.5 percent of your PIA.

To calculate exactly how much your wife's spousal benefits would be reduced by taking them before her FRA see [SSA.gov/OACT/quickcalc/spouse.html](https://ssa.gov/OACT/quickcalc/spouse.html).

You also need to know that because spousal benefits are based on your PIA, even if you (the primary earner) retire early, before you reach your FRA, your wife's spousal benefit will not be reduced. Just as they will not increase if you delay claiming your benefits beyond your FRA.

You should also note that if your wife worked and is entitled to benefits on her own work record, but it's less than what she's entitled to as a spouse, Social Security will pay her the higher of the two amounts, but not both.

Survivor benefits

In addition to spousal benefits Social Security also pays survivor benefits to spouses and ex-spouses starting at age 60 (50 if disabled).

So, if your wife outlives you, she'll be able to switch from her spousal benefits to survivor benefits and receive a higher payment.

Survivor benefits range between 71.5 and 100 percent of the deceased's benefit, based on your wife's age when she claims.

There is, however, one exception. Surviving spouses and ex-spouses that are caring for a child (or children) of the deceased worker, and they are under age 16 or disabled, are eligible to receive 75 percent of the worker's benefit amount at any age.

Online calculators

There are several online calculators that can help you and your wife figure out the best time to claim your benefits to ensure you get the highest possible lifetime payout. One that's completely free to use [OpenSocialSecurity.com](https://www.opensocialsecurity.com). Or for a more thorough analysis use [MaximizeMy-SocialSecurity.com](https://www.maximizemy-socialsecurity.com). This tool, which costs \$49 for a year, will run what-if scenarios based on your circumstances to find your best strategy.

Send your questions or comments to questions@savvysenior.org, or to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.

Skin

continued from page 5

it's good enough for a cow it's good enough for me. In fact, I did use it when I was breastfeeding my son. Now I use it in the winter for cracked dry feet, applying it after a shower and leaving socks on overnight.

Make your own body butter

You could use some fancy creams that cost a lot of money, but this recipe has kept my skin nice and soft for years. Apply it all over and under.

Body butter recipe

- ▶ 1/2 cup shea butter
- ▶ 20-30 drops of essential oil
- ▶ 1/2 cup olive or sweet almond oil
- ▶ 1/2 cup cocoa butter
- ▶ 1/2 cup refined coconut oil

Combine shea butter, cocoa butter, olive oil, and coconut oil in a glass bowl. Heat in a pan on low. Once

all of the ingredients are melted and combined, stir and remove from heat.

Allow to cool for a few minutes, then place in the freezer, checking every 30 minutes because you don't want it to completely freeze. Just harden it up enough so you can stick your finger in and it holds its shape.

Add the mixture to the mixer and add an essential oil scent of your choice. I use almond, but there's a wide range of scents to choose from. Whip for about 10 minutes to a smooth, whipped consistency. Store in a glass or plastic jar with a lid.

Ingredients can be found in your local health food store, with olive oil, almond oil and unrefined coconut also in places like Fred Meyer's.

I am sharing with readers what I have observed in the decades caring for seniors and observing their good and bad habits, which have guided my aging journey. I was also a volunteer EMT1 in Skagway.



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Send your news tips and event items to editor@seniorvoicealaska.com



Vaccines make a difference in limiting spread of flu

By JOHN SCHIESZER

Medical Minutes

Be sure you know the real facts to protect yourself and your loved one. It is well established that vaccination is the most powerful tool to avoid influenza-related hospitalizations or worse. As many as 130,000 people in the U.S. died from the flu last year, according to estimates from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) “By getting the flu shot, you’re not only protecting yourself, you’re protecting your family and vulnerable members of the community who would suffer a more serious illness,” said Dr. Jonathan Grein, who is the director of Hospital Epidemiology at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles, California.

Although vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu, Dr. Grein also recommends washing hands thoroughly and often, avoiding others who are sick, and wearing a mask when not feeling well. This will greatly help avoid spreading an illness to others.

There are no significant changes to flu shot recommendations this year. Dr. Grein said for anyone 65 and older they should get a high-dose flu vaccine if available. The high-dose vaccine elicits a stronger immune response and older adults’ immune systems weaken with age. “If a high-dose flu shot is not available, older individuals should receive a standard dose, rather than skipping the shot,” said Dr. Grein. “It’s critical for older adults to protect themselves.”

What are flu symptoms?

Like other upper respiratory infections, flu symptoms include nasal congestion, fever, body aches, cough, sore throat and fatigue. Most people with mild symptoms will improve at home with fluids, a pain reliever such as Tylenol and rest, according to Dr. Grein. Those at high risk of more serious infection, such as older adults, immune-compromised individuals and others with chronic health con-



Handwashing is one of the most efficient ways to prevent the entrance of bacteria, viruses or allergens into the body.

ditions should speak with their physician soon after symptoms appear to find out whether an antiviral medication like Tamiflu should be taken.

Those with more severe symptoms, such as a very high fever, loss of appetite or inability to keep fluids down, should see their physician or visit urgent care, according to Dr. Jonathan M Weiner, who is the chair of the Cedars-Sinai Medical Group’s Department of Primary Care and Acute Care Medicine. Life-threatening symptoms like difficulty breathing should immediately be addressed in the nearest emergency department. He said in terms of getting care for the flu, it may be best to have a virtual visit through a patient portal or phone app.

“A physician or other provider can see you, assess how sick you appear and determine if you need to be seen in person or if you can manage your illness at home,” said Dr. Weiner. If a flu test is needed to rule out other illnesses or for a Tamiflu prescription, health providers can order one. You also can get an over-the-counter test at a local pharmacy. Dr. Weiner said it’s good to know if you have the flu so you can avoid spreading the illness to others. Individuals are contagious a day before symptoms start and up until their fever has resolved and symptoms are improving. This may be as long as five to seven days after getting sick.

If symptoms do not improve, other causes of



A high-dose flu vaccine elicits a stronger immune response and older adults’ immune systems weaken with age, but a standard dose vaccine is also effective to prevent infection.

SHVETS Production via Pexels

upper respiratory tract infections need to be ruled out, which could require in-person treatment. Dr. Weiner emphasized that an in-person appointment also is recommended for patients with underlying conditions, high fever, trouble keeping food and liquids down, and for anyone who is having trouble breathing

Simple steps for prevention

Handwashing is one of the most efficient ways to prevent the entrance of bacteria, viruses or allergens into the body. “Throughout the day, our hands often go to our mouth, eyes and nose,” said Dr. Stephen Russell, who is with the University of Birmingham in Alabama (UAB). “The more we can keep our hands washed and cleaned, the more we can protect ourselves from things that can be on our hands.”

Eating a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables is an important step

in protecting the immune system. Registered Dietitian Caroline Cohen, who is also with UAB, said it is important to prioritize whole foods and a colorful plate is key in maintaining strong immune support. “The nutrients that exist in whole foods act synergistically,” Cohen said. “Fruits, vegetables and a colorful plate in general can work to strengthen your immune system.”

There are specific nutrients that dietitians emphasize to make sure that an individual’s immune system is functioning optimally. “Vitamin C is pretty abundant in fruits and vegetables and works as a natural immune support,” Cohen said. Foods rich in both vitamins C and D can serve as efficient immune boosters. These include citrus fruits, kiwi berries, bell peppers, fatty fish, milk, egg yolks, and mushrooms.

A diet that is predominantly made up of processed foods has a significant decrease in the nutrient intake that helps

improve the immune system. Shelf-stabilized foods have had many of the immune supportive benefits significantly decreased. This loss in nutritional attributes makes whole foods greater sources of immune system support.

Maintaining an active lifestyle is an important element in the effective regulation of the immune system. Dr. Russell said getting an age-appropriate amount of exercise can help provide additional support for your body’s immune system. “For most adults, this translates to about 30 minutes of aerobic exercise for five days a week,” said Dr. Russell. Adequate rest is an essential piece of the body’s ability to defend against infections. During sleep cycles, the body works to replenish and repair itself.

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



Focus on the present moment this holiday season

By **LISA SAUDER**
For Senior Voice

As the holidays approach, many of us find ourselves remembering how things used to be—bustle in the kitchen, children running through the house, traditions we kept year after year. With time, those traditions may change, and so do we. If you’re living with memory loss, or simply noticing that the holidays feel different now, it’s important to know that you are not alone. The season can still be filled with joy, warmth, and connection, even if it looks a little different than it once did.

Maybe you used to cook the whole Christmas dinner yourself, and now the idea feels overwhelming. Ordering dinner in, or letting family bring the dishes, doesn’t mean you’re letting go of tradition; it means you’re honoring it in a new way that works for where you are today. Perhaps you can’t host the big family



gathering anymore, but you can still enjoy a smaller, quieter celebration with the people who matter most. These adjustments are acts of wisdom, not loss.

The holidays can also stir complicated feelings. You might notice changes in your own memory or the memory of a loved one. You may worry about how the grandkids will see you, or how to stay present when moments feel fleeting. But here is the truth—the heart of the holidays has never been about perfection. It has always been about connection. A familiar carol, decorating a small

tree, sharing a story from long ago, or simply sitting side by side in the glow of the lights—these moments are real, meaningful, and deeply felt.

What matters most is being together in a way that feels comfortable and safe. Give yourself permission to slow down. Let others help. Allow new traditions to grow alongside the old. Your presence, your laughter, your memories, and even your quiet moments, they

are all gifts to the people who love you.

At Alzheimer’s Resource Alaska, we have spent this year witnessing powerful moments of connection among the seniors we serve. Through support groups, education, Art Links, and the Forget Me Not Chorus, we see every day that joy can still shine through, even as life changes. You deserve that joy, too.

As 2025 comes to a close, we want you to know how

grateful we are for the opportunity to walk beside you. We wish you a season filled with peace, warmth, and moments that bring you comfort and delight—wherever you are on your journey.

To learn more about our programs or find support, visit our new website at www.AlzAlaska.org or call 907-561-3313.

Lisa Sauder is the CEO of Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska.

Dementia meeting recording is available

Senior Voice staff

The October 2025 ADAC quarterly meeting was the first ever face-to-face meeting. The day included a review of A Call to Action: Alaska’s 10-year Map to Address Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementia with Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, a discussion on data and work with the Division of Public

Health, a presentation by Aging at Home Fairbanks, a clinical presentation on the connection between hearing loss and dementia, ADAC workgroup updates, and more.

Access links for the minutes here: <https://bit.ly/4843rOb> The slide deck is available here: <https://bit.ly/3X1Bp0R>

The next quarterly meeting will be scheduled

in January 2026.

ADAC has five work groups that meet regularly to develop and implement an annual work plan. The work groups consist of subject matter experts who are ready to tackle the work. Reach out if you want to get involved with one of the groups by contacting Sandra Heffern for an invite: sandra.heffern@effectivehealthdesign.com



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Protecting Social Security to keep Alaskans strong

By ELLIE KENNEDY

AARP Alaska

This August, AARP Alaska celebrated the 90th Anniversary of the Social Security Act being signed. Since being enacted on August 14, 1935, Social Security has supported a secure retirement for millions of Americans, helping them to retire and age with dignity. In its 90 years, Social Security has never missed a payment, which allows Americans to reap the benefits of their hard work with certainty.

Honoring a milestone statewide

To celebrate, AARP Alaska kicked off a series



Attendees at the anniversary event at the Anchorage Senior Activities Center enjoyed lunch, trivia, and prizes, while learning about Social Security. AARP Alaska

of Social Security events
statewide, along with other

states. Three Social Security parties were put on

at Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center, Anchorage Senior Activity Center, and Wasilla Area Seniors. Members of Congress sent videos to be played at the beginning of each event, followed by a trivia game on Social Security and the year 1935 with prizes. Attendees over the age of 90 also received a special prize. Seniors were asked to sign large Social Security card stickers and share what Social Security means for them, adding them to an oversized card anniversary card, which was taken to events as a visual storytelling tool and photo opportunity. Participants left with a greater knowledge of Social Security and

what it does thanks to a fun social event.

To promote statewide participation in the anniversary, AARP Alaska created a “Social Security Toolkit” that was sent to senior centers and hosts across the state. The kit included trivia questions, prizes, member of Congress videos, “back in 1935” placemats, and other resources to help increase engagement and education. Additionally, the giant Social Security card, with all its stickers, was taken to the Alaska State Fair, AARP Anchorage Fall Financial Fitness Fair, and the Alaska Federation of Natives Conference.

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Steep increases in ACA premiums hit Alaskans

By PAOLA BANCHERO

Senior Voice

Dan Kline is a retired UAA professor who is expecting his Affordable Care Act monthly premiums to rise from about \$192 per month with government subsidies to \$1,733 per month because

the U.S. government is drastically reducing subsidies that helped Americans buy health insurance in the pandemic and post-pandemic era.

Kline, who is a few months away from turning 65, has used the ACA for health insurance since CO-

BRA coverage ended after he retired in 2021.

"This is for an out-of-pocket total of about \$23,000 a year," Kline said. Most recently, he paid \$192 month, including dental and vision coverage with a \$5,000 deductible. Starting Jan. 1, he expects to pay

\$1,773 per month without dental and vision plus a \$6,300 deductible.

Karin Woofter is a financial professional with decades of experience who now helps people in the health, Medicare and Social Security space. She said the ACA is reverting to subsidies in place before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“They are just not as generous,” she said. “What will this mean for Alaskans who use the ACA who make more than 400% of the federal poverty level will be out of subsidy territory.”

In 2025, 400% of the federal poverty level is \$62,600 for a household of one, \$84,600 for a household of two.

In 2021, as part of a covid-era relief package, the ACA premium tax credits were enhanced to lower costs for previously eligible people and expand eligibility to people with incomes over 400% of the federal poverty level. But those modifications, which Congress extended in 2022, will expire at the end of 2025 unless Congress acts, according to KFF, a health care policy organization which also publishes health news. KFF reported that this year's ACA open enrollment period, which started Nov. 1 in most states, is full of uncertainty and confusion for the more than 24 million people

who buy health insurance through the federal and state Affordable Care Act marketplaces. For months, it has been warning that average out-of-pocket premiums for subsidized enrollees in the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, marketplace, more than double if the enhanced tax credits expire.

In Alaska, only two insurance companies are available to people in the ACA marketplace: Blue Cross/Blue Shield Premiera and Moda Health. This limits the choices of people in the ACA marketplace and likely contributes to the cost of the premiums.

Generation X shoppers, those born between 1965 and 1980, are in a tough spot in this enrollment period.

The worst scenario is someone in their 60s who is not on Medicare yet,” Woofter said. “There is the temptation to go without health insurance, but it's not a good gamble.”

Woofert added that medical debt is a leading cause of bankruptcy.

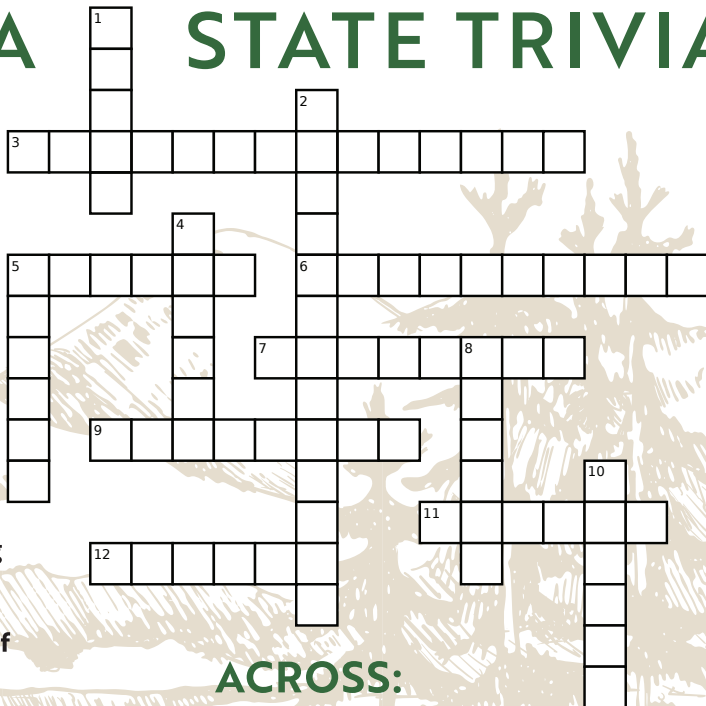
Enrollment for the ACA, also known as Obamacare, is the health insurance reform legislation that passed in 2010 during the Obama administration, began Nov. 1 and go through Jan. 15, 2026. The deadline is Dec. 15 for coverage to begin Jan. 1.

ALASKA

STATE TRIVIA



EMERALD
— ADULT DAY —



DOWN:

1. AK's famous volcano that's currently figuring its life out.
2. Street name and type of airport in ANCH.
3. Charged electrons & protons hit Earth's atmosphere and create a light show
4. The club you don't want to be part of when hiking in the woods.
5. River where only the strongest of sockeye swim up.
6. Bird mascot for one of ANCH's oldest burger joints.
7. Homer's famous dive bar on the spit.
8. Alaska's unofficial state bird.
10. Bear island.
11. Alaska state fish.
12. Mammal that visits Turnagain Arm in the summers.

ACROSS:

1. AK's famous volcano that's currently figuring its life out.
2. Street name and type of airport in ANCH.
3. Charged electrons & protons hit Earth's atmosphere and create a light show
4. The club you don't want to be part of when hiking in the woods.
5. Where Alaskans buy their Xtratufs, gold bars, and rotisserie chickens all in one location.
6. Bird mascot for one of ANCH's oldest burger joints.
7. Homer's famous dive bar on the spit.
8. Alaska's unofficial state bird.
10. Bear island.
11. Alaska state fish.
12. Mammal that visits Turnagain Arm in the summers.



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COVID-19's impact still felt among Alaska's seniors

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

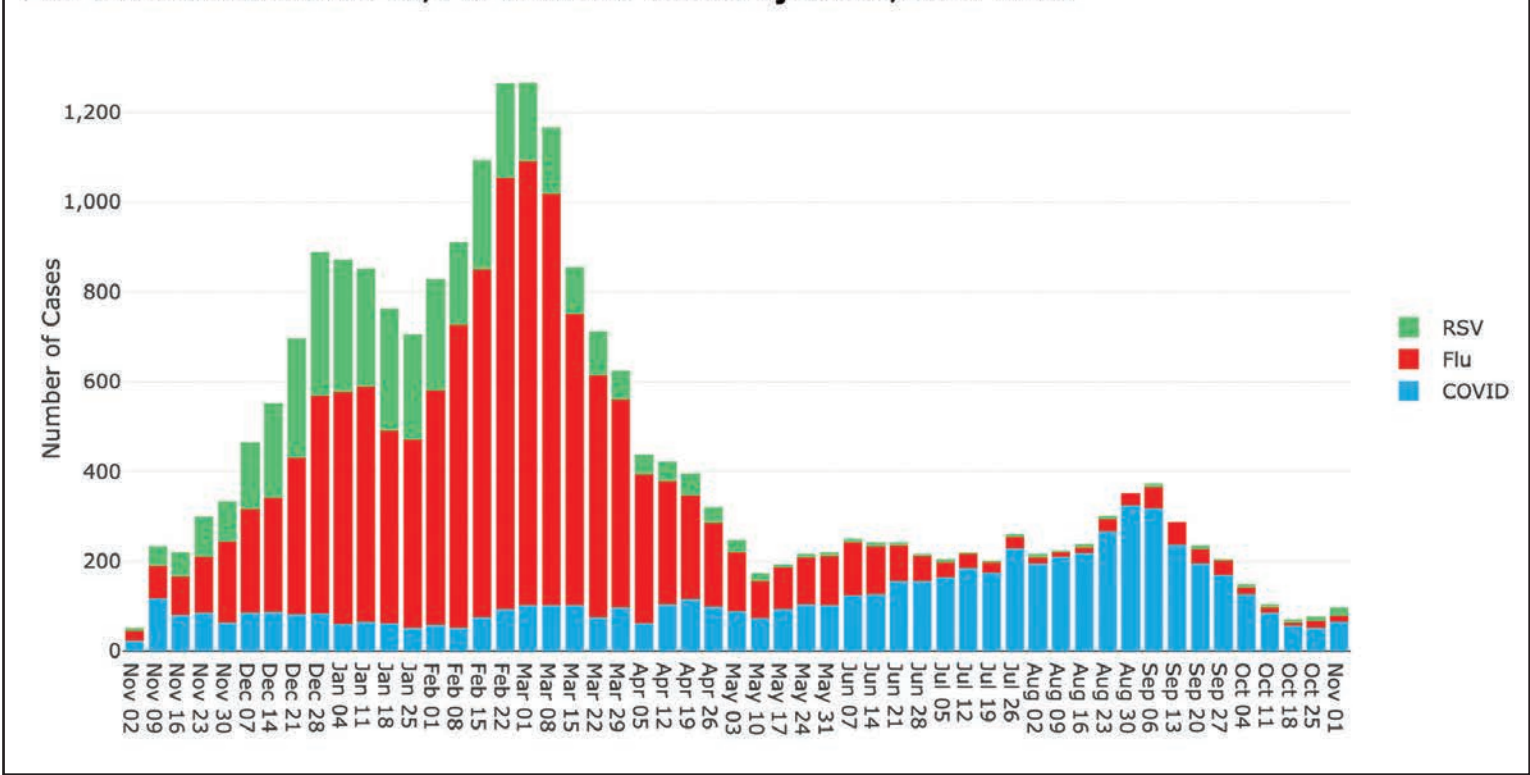
I had a curious, I would say unpleasant, brush with the Canadian health care system on the way down the ALCAN to Seattle late last August. By the time I got to Whitehorse I was pretty sick. I knew I had been exposed to COVID-19 but I repeatedly tested negative on self-administered tests. Still, I felt terrible.

The next day was Saturday, and I wanted to go to a walk-in clinic for more accurate testing and treatment. No dice. They were all closed on the weekend. So I decided to hold out until Monday and go then. Monday rolled around and it turned out to be a national holiday. The clinics were still closed. I was feeling a little better but, to play it safe, I called a provincial nurse line for advice.

“Before I head down the sparsely populated ALCAN, should I go to the hospital emergency department which is the only open clinic in town?” I told him the story and noted I was a 79-year-old American driving down the ALCAN. In response I was lectured.

The nurse assured me that in Canada COVID was considered hardly more than a cold and he strongly advised me not to go to the emergency department unless I had certain symptoms like chest pain

Lab-Confirmed COVID-19, Flu and RSV Cases by Week, 2024–2025



The Alaska Department of Health shows lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19, influenza, and RSV cases by week. You can see the updated counts on the Department's website. Source: <https://health.alaska.gov/en/resources/respiratory-virus-snapshot/>

or trouble breathing. I have great respect for the Canadian health care system, but I think his advice was a little too casual. In any case I was feeling a bit better so I took my chances and got back on the road. The rest of the trip was without incident. Nevertheless, to the nameless nurse I say “Harrumph!”

Fact check: COVID is potentially way more serious than “a cold.” According to KFF, a leading health policy organization in the US, there have been a total of 1.2 million COVID deaths in the United States since

2020. And they continue year after year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that in the last year ending September 20, 2025, there were 44,000 to 63,000 COVID deaths.

But there is more to that story. According to the nonprofit Vaccinate

Your Family, “Older adults are at the highest risk of becoming very sick and dying from this disease, with more than 81% of COVID-19 deaths occurring in people over the age of 65.” Yikes. That causes some anxiety. I had kind of forgotten about COVID, but apparently it has not

forgotten about us. And I really have to dig into my memory synapses to recall the phrase “Long COVID,” but it too has not forgotten about us. According to the CDC, “Long COVID is defined as a chronic condition that

page 22 please

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Planning ahead can save us from home fires

By CHRISTIAN M. HARTLEY

For Senior Voice



The longer we occupy them, the more our homes become precious to us. They hold our memories and keep us comfortable through Alaska's long winters. But our homes can also become dangerous if we don't take steps to prevent fires. Every year, house fires injure thousands of older adults across the country. The good news is that with some simple changes, people can prevent most home fires.

The kitchen is where most home fires start. When cooking, never leave food on the stove or in the oven unattended. If you must step away, even for a minute, turn off the heat first. Keep pot handles turned inward so they won't get knocked over. Make sure your cooking area is clean and free of grease buildup. If grease catches fire, never use water to put it out. Instead, turn off the heat, cover the pan with a lid, and move it off the burner if you can do so safely.

Space heaters are com-

mon during our cold winters, but they need special care. Keep heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn, including curtains, furniture, and blankets. Never use extension cords with space heaters and always plug them directly into wall outlets. Turn off heaters when you leave the room or go to sleep. Check that your heater has an automatic shut-off feature in case it tips over.

Your home's electrical system needs regular attention too. Look for warning signs like flickering lights, warm outlets, or burning smells. These could mean dangerous wiring problems. Never overload outlets with too many plugs. Replace any frayed

Smoke alarms save lives, but only if they work properly. Test your smoke alarms every month by pressing the test button. Replace batteries twice a year when we change our clocks for daylight saving time or purchase an alarm with a 10-year battery.

or damaged electrical cords right away. If you notice problems, call a licensed electrician rather than trying to fix them yourself. Another warning is a plug that your cords fall out of easily. These outlets need to be replaced right away.

Smoking materials cause many home fires. If you smoke, always use deep, wide ashtrays and make sure cigarettes are completely out before throwing them away. Never smoke in bed or when you're drowsy. Consider smoking outdoors instead of indoors to reduce fire risk. Batteries in vapes are susceptible to fires if damaged at all.

Smoke alarms save lives, but only if they work properly. Test your smoke alarms every month by pressing the test button. Replace batteries twice a year when we change our clocks for daylight saving

time or purchase an alarm with a 10-year battery. If your smoke alarm is more than 10 years old, replace the entire unit. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside each sleeping area. Use the same rules with carbon monoxide alarms.

If a fire starts in your home, your safety comes first. Get out immediately and stay out. Don't fight the fire or go back inside for any belongings. Once you're safely outside, call 911 from a neighbor's house or your cell phone. If smoke is blocking your exit, crawl low under the smoke to breathe cleaner air near the floor.

If you have mobility challenges, ask family members or neighbors to help you create a realistic escape plan. You can also sign up with the local dispatch center to warn them

that somebody with mobility challenges lives there, by calling 907-352-5401.

Winter heating brings extra fire risks in Alaska. Have your furnace, chimney, and wood stove inspected and cleaned every year by a professional.

For more detailed fire safety information, contact your local fire department. Many offer free home safety inspections for seniors. The American Red Cross of Alaska also provides excellent fire safety materials accessible on their website at redcross.org.

Preventing home fires takes ongoing attention, but the steps are simple. Small changes today can save your life tomorrow and help keep your Alaska home safe and warm for years to come.

Christian M. Hartley is a 41-year Alaska resident with more than 26 years of public safety and public service experience. He is the public safety director of the City of Houston and serves on many local and state workgroups, boards and commissions related to safety. He lives in Big Lake with his wife of 21 years and their three teenage sons.

Contributions to 401(k) plans, IRAs increase

Senior Voice Staff

Contributions to 401(k) plans, IRAs increase

You can contribute \$24,500 to 401(k) plans in 2026, up from \$23,500, the IRS announced in November.

The Internal Revenue Service also issued guidance regarding all cost-of-living adjustments affecting dollar limitations for pension plans and other retirement-related items for tax year 2026, which you can see here: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-25-67.pdf>

Now, the annual contribution limit for employees who participate in 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans, and the federal government's Thrift Savings plan is \$24,500.

You can also contribute

\$7,500 to your IRA, up from \$7,000 in 2025. The IRA catch-up contribution limit for individuals aged 50 and older was amended under the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 to include an annual cost-of-living adjustment.

If you are 50 and over, you have the option to make "catch-up" contributions to 401(k) and similar plans, so you can contribute \$8,000 next year, up from \$7,500 this year. That's means a 401(k) saver who is 50 or older will be able to contribute a maximum of \$32,500 to their retirement plan annually, starting in 2026. Employees between the ages of 60 and 63 will be allowed catch-up retirement plan contributions of up to \$11,250 annually, unchanged from 2025.



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Vinyl revival unites generations over shared music

By TRAVIS RECTOR

For Senior Voice

Do you have fond memories of hanging out and listening to vinyl records when you were young? Maybe you still have some in a box in your attic, collecting dust. Or perhaps you still listen to them. Records are back in style. And they're not just popular with people who are nostalgic for days gone by.

Introduced in 1948, the "long-playing" (LP) record format dominated the music industry until the late 1980s when they were largely replaced on store shelves by compact discs (CDs). Long forgotten by most consumers, vinyl has enjoyed a steady return in popularity. More than 43 million records were sold in the U.S. in 2024, according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). While a far cry from the glory days of the late 1970s, when annual sales peaked at nearly 350 million, records are back to being the most popular physical music format over CDs and tapes. Vinyl isn't nearly as popular as electronic music services such as Spotify, but it has found its niche. Specialty record stores, such as Obsession Records in Anchorage, have returned as well. And it's not just those who remember Woodstock that are shopping. There's a whole new generation of listeners, as many of today's teenagers are opting for vinyl.

Scout Gramse of Anchorage is one of those kids. While she mostly listens to music on Spotify because of the convenience, she prefers the listening experience that records provide. Like many, she likes records because of the artwork. She also buys records to connect with and to support artists, as services like Spotify pay relatively little. She says it's also been a great way to connect with her grandmother, Virginia Kirk of Eagle River. "My

"My grandma has a big crate full of records. When I visit her I'll pull some out and she'll tell me stories about them. It's been a great way to bond."

grandma has a big crate full of records. When I visit her I'll pull some out and she'll tell me stories about them. It's been a great way to bond." Scout said that some of the records are so scratched up they're unplayable. But they're special to her because of their history, such as a Disney record of Cinderella that has her mother's childhood handwriting on it. She's also discovered old bands that she likes, such as Fleetwood Mac and The Moody Blues. She likes to display records on her bookshelf as pieces of art, changing them every month to reflect her moods.

The rise in popularity of records has also meant an increase in their value, with some fetching as much as thousands—although this is rare, as most records are worth only a few dollars. If you still have vintage vinyl, what might they be worth? As you might guess, it depends on a record's condition, its rarity, and the demand for it from collectors. The popularity of some artists has stood the test of time—such as the Beatles—where others have faded. A record's condition is usually assessed on the "GoldMine" grading scale, which takes into account scratches, wear and tear, and other damage to the record and its sleeve. The demand for a particular record depends largely on which version; e.g., a "first pressing" usually fetches more money than a recent reprint. Determining which version you have can be tricky. For example, there are over 500 different pressings of the Beatles' "White album"—but an online music database



Above: Scout with her grandmother Virginia Kirk. She says vinyl records have been a way connect with her grandmother, Virginia Kirk of Eagle River.

Right: Scout Gramse with her record collection.

Photo courtesy of Scout Gramse



called Discogs can help. Discogs also has a marketplace, which you can use to buy and sell records. But determining the actual market value for a record is tricky. Online markets such as Craigslist are full of ads from hopeful sellers wanting to cash in, but their records seldom sell for the asking price. (Sorry, but no one is willing to pay \$50 for your beat-up Johnny Horton record.)

Local record stores may buy your collection, but usually you get only a fraction of their worth. Instead of selling them, why not dust them off and fire up your old turntable? Or better yet, share them with someone from a younger generation—and show them how good

music used to be.

Travis Rector is a professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He is also married to editor Paola Banche-ro. Virginia Kirk is Kenneth Kirk's mother. If you have questions about your record collection, you can reach him at tarector@alaska.edu.

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Community connection through holiday bazaars

By **MARALEY McMICHAEL**
Senior Voice Correspondent

The only reason I attended the 2024 Colony High Christmas Bazaar was to purchase the most recent Tundra comic book. I had tried in August at the Alaska State Fair, but at the Tundra booth, Chad Carpenter told me they weren't back from the printers yet. So, when I learned that Tundra would be one of the vendors at that bazaar, I circled the date on my calendar.

As I drove to the school shortly before the 10 o'clock opening time, the sun was peeking out to the left of Pioneer Peak in all its majestic glory. Disappointed to learn from the young parking attendants that the parking lot was already full, I was directed to park at the Mormon church across Bogard Road. Which was fine, except for the longer walk at 7° and bitter cold winds.

Once inside, I took a minute to let my glasses and my whole self defrost before deciding to start my search for the Tundra booth in the cafeteria. Immediately I ran into my first of many friends, a woman I know from Valley Garden Club. She told me she arrived early especially for good parking. She also said she'd seen the Tundra booth in the gym.

I had only attended the Christmas Bazaar once since my husband and I moved back to Palmer in 2011. I don't do a lot of Christmas shopping, and I don't like crowded spaces. I planned for this to be a quick grab and exit errand, but then I noticed "hand-writing" near the ceiling on a nearby wall. It was signed



1. Chad Carpenter's Tundra booth is always popular. 2. The Diamond Willow booth at the Colony High School Christmas Bazaar. 3. The Pioneer Pizza booth works to sell slices so Colony High School choir, orchestra and marching band students could travel to Ireland to participate in the St. Patrick's Day parade. 4. A salsa booth that delighted taste-testers.

Maraley McMichael photos

Many bazaars are still happening around the state.

See the Rambles section on page 15 for ideas.

A few others: The Nutcracker Faire will be held on Dec. 6 and 7 in Homer. It's organized by the Homer Council on the Arts. Find it at Homer High School.

Another fun one is the Last Minute Christmas! Dec. 20-21 at the Palmer Train Depot.

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Historic preservation group presents awards

Senior Voice Staff

The Alaska Association for Historic Preservation announced winners of the 18th annual historic preservation award honoring excellence throughout Alaska. The award honors excellence in historic preservation throughout Alaska. There are several categories, both for projects and for individuals.

The Robert Mitchell Historic Preservation Architect Award was awarded to Anchorage architect Samuel

Combs, Combs & Combs, for his expertise in historic architecture and the many historic preservation projects around Alaska and beyond that he has been involved with.

The Stewardship Award-Government Agencies went to Mayor Suzanne LaFrance, chief administrative officer Bill Falsey and grant development officer Michelle Nelson for the creation of the Office of Grant Development and receiving the Paul Bruhn Grant in the amount of

\$500,000.

The Stewardship-Individual Award was presented to Travis O'Rourke who works for the Municipality of Anchorage with the maintenance department.

For more information on the historic association, also known as Preservation Alaska, contact Trish Neal, president of Preservation Alaska at 907-929-9870, via email at AKPreservation@gmail.com or visit] <https://AlaskaPreservation.org>.

Health reports available

Senior Voice staff

The Alaska Department of Health's Analytics and Vital Records Section has released three annual data reports that explain facts of interest to health care professionals, policymakers, and the public.

Now you can see information on the HAVRS Data and Statistics page, such as

- ▶ Alaska Health Facilities Data Reporting (HFDR) program 2024 annual report.

- ▶ Alaska Vital Statistics 2024 annual report
- ▶ Cancer in Alaska 2022 annual report

The reports help shed light on health trends and public health initiatives in the state.

The reports are crucial for understanding health trends and guiding public health initiatives in Alaska.

For example, the HFDR program annual report shows that there were 62,201 inpatient hospital-

izations, worth \$6 billion in billed charges last year. It also shows that that the leading causes of hospitalization were liveborn infant deliveries, septicemia and alcohol-related disorders.

Access these reports and others, such as on traumatic brain injury, here: <https://health.alaska.gov/en/education/alaska-health-data/>

Providence Alaska recognized for efforts to help patients control blood pressure

Senior Voice staff

Providence Family Medicine Center has been recognized by the American Heart Association and American Medical Association for its commitment to improving blood pressure control rates, earning Silver-level recognition from a national initiative that seeks to lower blood pressure called Target: BP.

The Silver achievement award recognizes practices that have demonstrated commitment to improving blood pressure control through BP measurement accuracy.

Additionally, three Providence Medical Group

Primary Care locations—Huffman, Midtown and S Tower—received the Participation achievement award for submitting data to Target: BP for the first time.

Participating in the program helps improve patient outcomes and gives health care providers access to resources to improve the diagnosis, treatment, and management of blood pressure.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a leading risk factor for heart attacks, strokes and preventable death in the U.S. There are 122.4 million U.S. adults living with hypertension.

Rambles

News from the Grapevine

A highlight of Alaska is that when it's the holiday season, it looks like a Christmas card: snow falling, children playing, trees glistening. Get out and enjoy the many ways to celebrate the season ...

Nome has a Christmas Extravaganza at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 5 at Old Saint Joe's on Anvil City Square. For details, email cityevents@nomealaska.org <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1143779374595519&set=gm.1152069650376073> ... Each year, the **Anchorage Concert Chorus** sings Handel's "Messiah." Catch it at **2 p.m. Dec. 7** at First Baptist Church, 10th Avenue and L Street in Anchorage. Tickets are \$20 for individuals, \$60 for a family at CenterTix or at the door. Bring your Messiah score and sing along with four of the choruses. Messiah@anchorageconcertchorus.org for more information ...

The **Alaska Native Heritage Center**, 8800 Heritage Center Drive in Anchorage, has a **holiday bazaar Dec. 5-7**. Shop from more than 60 Alaska Native artist vendors selling jewelry, artwork, carvings, hand-sewn clothing, accessories, and more. The Ch'k'iqadi Gallery and Café Di'eshchin will be open the entire weekend. Admission is free, and everyone is welcome. <https://www.facebook.com/AlaskaNativeHeritageCenter> ...

The **Anchorage International Film Festival** is **Dec. 5-14**. This festival has been named one of the *25 Coolest Film Festivals in the World* in **MovieMaker Magazine**. Catch local and international filmmakers. There are films for almost any audience, from animation to documentaries to narrative films. The films are shown at various locations in Anchorage. <https://anchorage-filmfestival.org/> ...

Fairbanks offers a **Winter Solstice festival Dec. 12-20**. There is a holiday bazaar and a

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Rambles

News from the Grapevine

continued from page 15

winter lights walk every day. On Dec. 20, you can enjoy hot cocoa and photos with reindeers at Golden Heart Plaza. <https://wintersolsticefestivalfairbanks.com/...> **Colony Christmas in Palmer is Dec. 12-14**, featuring a parade on Dec. 13 and family-friendly activities. <https://www.eventeny.com/events/colony-christmas-2025-18675/...> **Hospice of Anchorage offers grief bags.** You can pick one up for yourself or someone you know who is feeling a loss. The bags are available between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. every day, 2612 E. Northern Lights Blvd ... **A Grandparents Day Kinship Family Support Webinar** is happening at noon **Dec. 11.** All are welcome to learn about supports in Alaska for relatives raising children, featuring Southeast Alaska's Kinship Navigator Program Haa Yatx'u Saani, Volunteers of America Alaska, and Generations United on Thursday. Are you a grandparent or relative raising children in your family? Save the date and to find out the Zoom information, call the Alaska Commission on Aging program coordinator at 907-230-0871 or email acoa.info@alaska.gov.

Rambles is compiled from senior center newsletters, websites and reader tips from around the state. Email your Rambles items to editor@seniorvoicealaska.com.

Senior Voice Ambassador wanted.

Senior Voice is in need of a coffee connoisseur who is willing to volunteer time each month to build distribution relationships with coffee cafés in the Anchorage and Eagle River communities. Call the Senior Voice at **(907) 276-1059** if interested.



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Bazaar

continued from page 14

by the class of 2022. Wondering if there was a quote for every year, I wandered back the way I'd come and found “First Class” as the quote for my son's class of 1994 and “Reach for the Stars” for my daughter's class of 1997. Colony High opened in 1992 with freshmen and sophomores, so 1994 was the first year they had a graduating class. Just being in the school brought back so many memories.

I left the cafeteria and decided to check out the hallways before entering the gym. Soon, I found myself looking at the contents of each booth—so many lovely, quality crafts. I ran into more friends, but we didn't visit long, as we were all “on a mission.” At one booth, a music booster mom called out, “Pioneer Pizza \$5 a slice. Help send our marching band to Ireland for the St. Paddy's Day Parade!” The sign said that Pioneer Pizza was established in 1990, and my mind went back to their grand opening celebration.

A vendor lady complimented my hat...which I forgot I was wearing. I'd grabbed my green felt bowler hat on the way out the door to keep my hair in place in the wind. Years ago, I'd attached a salmon pin made of ivory that used to belong to my mother, and I enjoy compliments every time I wear it.

There were so many hallways...I turned one corner expecting to be back at the main hallway, only to realize that I was lost and had to ask directions to the gym.

There were so many interesting things for sale, including Christmas stockings made from old quilts. Ideas that I would like to pursue...if I had another lifetime. And food goods, too. I saw a crowd around one table and learned the husband-and-wife couple were offering samples of salsa: mild, medium, hot, and melt your face off. I tried the medium and it was delicious. I then tried the hot and it was wonderful,



Erin and Maraley McMichael at the 1996 Colony High Christmas Bazaar.
Gary McMichael photo

too. \$16 a pint, or \$15 if you purchase two. The two of them could hardly keep up with the sales. I went back to talk to them later and learned they flew over from Kodiak and this was their first craft fair on the mainland. And yes, they grew their own peppers, but couldn't grow enough to keep up with demand.

Finally, I entered the gym and there was the Tundra booth first space on the left. However, I was disappointed to learn that Chad was not present. He had autographed all the books, but there would be no custom autograph for my granddaughter. Our family has been buying and following his career success since he first began in the early 1990s. It became a tradition and my daughter's family now has the whole collection of his comic books.

Since I'd checked out all the other booths, I needed to browse all the booths in the gym. This is when memories really hit me. I was a Mary Kay consultant when the first Colony High Christmas Bazaar took place and rented table space for my Mary Kay display products. The next year, I shared my rental space with my daughter's cloth creations. I recalled the placement of our booth in the gym 30 years prior.

There were baked goods, macaroons, fudge, pickled items, jams and jellies. During our bed and breakfast years in Slana, I made and sold jam, including a gift set in a handmade

wooden crate for \$15. Now, I saw a similar item for \$25! And the same size jars I sold were now twice my price. What a difference 20 years makes. Another vendor complimented my hat and pin. I was keeping track now, and that was number four.

I'd already spent way more time at the bazaar than planned but found I was enjoying the experience. I even decided to support the marching band and buy a slice of pizza. But I had to wait for that, as they had run out and were expecting another delivery in 8 minutes...so I wandered some more. Once I got the pizza, I sat on a chair in the gym near the Tundra booth and people watched while I savored each bite. A young couple went by with twins in their stroller, and the father held a wooden rocking horse in each hand. The nearby quilting machine lady laughingly made a comment and the father said with a smile, “Yes, we have to buy two of everything these days.”

Upon leaving, I stopped at the entrance doors to zip my coat before braving the bitter wind. This time a man said he liked the fish on my hat. What had been an errand to buy one Christmas gift, turned into an enjoyable couple of hours in a festive atmosphere...with good memories mixed in as well.

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



Ski Mobile travels to Anchorage schools



Kikkan Randall with the Ski Mobile.
photo courtesy of Monica Whitt Photography

Senior Voice staff

Elementary school students will get to enjoy cross country skiing thanks to an initiative of the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District.

The nonprofit created a kit called the Ski Mobile that was built to be shared among 60 Anchorage schools.

The Ski Mobile includes 30 sets of skis and boots to fit children in grades 3–5. The kit was inspired by a group that organizes NSAA ski events. It was championed by 2018 Olympic gold medalist and cross country skier Kikkan Randall, who is NSAA’s executive director.

“We want skiing for all,” Randall said. Often, there’s a barrier for kids: They don’t have skis to try, or they can’t get to trails to practice. The Ski Mobile brings everything to the kids.

“Meeting kids where they’re at is a great way to give kids this experience.”

NSAA already pioneered getting kids involved in the sport, which can be a life-long activity. It organizes a fun race called Ski-4-Kids, which raises funds for grants that schools and community programs can use to buy ski equipment. But the Ski-4-Kids organizing group knew they would never be able to provide enough grants so all Anchorage schools could have their own skis and related gear. Wouldn’t

it be great, they thought, if NSAA created a ski kit that could travel around and be shared by the schools?

That kit is ready for elementary schools, said Joanne Osborne, health and physical education curriculum coordinator for the Anchorage School District (ASD). Each school can keep the kit for two weeks, which gives kids at least a few class periods to try skiing during physical education class. Trying it in elementary school might mean kids feel comfortable joining the cross country ski teams in middle or high school, Randall said. Then maybe they ski for a lifetime.

Osborne and NSAA are also making it easier for teachers to use the traveling ski kit. They provide a curriculum to teach kids how to put on skis and try them out. Teachers with no or limited ski experience will be able to use the kit with their students, Randall said.

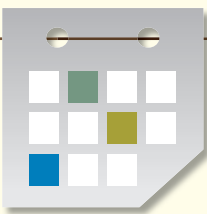
“I’m just grateful, absolutely thrilled,” said Osborne about having this traveling ski kit for ASD. “We live in Alaska. We have to get outside, get our kids outside and make it easier for teachers.”

Skiing gets you outside in fresh air, she said. It’s low impact and builds strong bodies and hearts. It improves all kinds of health—physical, mental and emotional, she said.

“It’s got everything for every age,” Randall said. “It’s a great activity to do together.”

Calendar of Events

- Dec. 1 International** HIV/AIDS Day This day kicks off a whole month to raise awareness about HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and to educate and support people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Dec. 1-31 National** Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month
- Dec. 1-8 National** Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Week
- Dec. 1-8 National** Older Driver Safety Awareness Week
- Dec. 1-8 National** Influenza Vaccination Week
- Nov. 25–Dec. 10 National** 16 days of activism against gender-based violence
- Dec. 2 National** Giving Tuesday A day that is meant to encourage philanthropic giving during the holiday season.
- Dec. 3 International** Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Dec. 7 National** Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Commemorates the day in December 1941 when Axis-aligned Japan, then an imperial power, attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on Oahu, Hawaii. Then a neutral country, the event triggered the U.S.’s involvement in World War II.
- Dec. 10 International** Human Rights Day It is the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.
- Dec. 10 International** Animal Rights Day Animal rights groups ask if humans deserve rights, why don’t animals? So they established Animal Rights Day on the same day and Human Rights Day.
- Dec. 14-22 International** Hanukkah A Jewish holiday that marks the recovery of Jerusalem in the second century BCE. The festival lasts for eight days and eight nights and is observed by lighting the candles of candelabrum, commonly called a menorah or hanukkiah.
- Dec. 21 Northern Hemisphere** Winter solstice The day of the year when it is darkest in the Northern Hemisphere. After this date, the days get incrementally longer until the summer solstice.
- Dec. 25 International** Christmas Most Christians celebrate on Dec. 25 in the Gregorian calendar, which has been adopted almost universally in the civil calendars used in countries throughout the world. However, part of the Eastern Christian Churches celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25 of the older Julian calendar, which currently corresponds to January 7 in the Gregorian calendar, according to Wikipedia. It is also a federal and state holiday. It is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ but is celebrated by many non-Christians around the world.
- Dec. 26–Jan. 1 National** Kwanzaa Is an annual celebration of African-American culture. First celebrated in 1966, it was created by activist Maulana Karenga based on African harvest festival traditions.
- Dec. 31 International** New Year’s Eve



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Balloon bombs drift over Alaska during World War II

By LAUREL DOWNING BILL

Senior Voice Correspondent

Following the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and the American retaliation strike on Tokyo by the Doolittle Raiders in April 1942, Japanese leadership began searching for ways to extend their bombing range across the Pacific Ocean.

Soon, Alaska found itself on the front lines of an unusual, silent, aerial assault. From late 1944 to 1945, Japanese fu-go balloon bombs found their way to the Last Frontier’s shores.

The fu-go (“fūsen” is the Japanese word for balloon and “-go” was added to all projects in the Japanese experimental weapons program) was a technological marvel for its time, designed to spread fear and destruction. This first intercontinental weapon in human history was a hydrogen-filled paper balloon about 33 feet in diameter, carrying a payload of incendiary and anti-personnel bombs. The Japanese military hoped these weapons would ignite forest fires, cause panic, and divert American resources from the war effort.

Alaska, due to its proximity to Japan and vast wilderness, became a prime target for these balloon bombs. According to a 1973 study, at least 32 documented sightings or recoveries of these “windship weapons” occurred in Alaska.

Once the U.S. military learned of these balloons, secrecy became the order of the day. Authorities feared Americans would panic if they knew Japan could strike the western states. Alaska Territorial Guard founder Marvin “Muktuk” Marston feared the bombs carried more than explosives.

“Our greatest fear was that the Japanese would use the balloons for germ warfare,” he said in a 1961 interview.

Marston instructed the ATG to be on the lookout for these weapons.

“If one should come your way, shoot it down; or, if it is found on the ground, post a guard and let no one go near it. ... This is a confidential matter and if it is published it will aid the enemy,” he said.

Nine balloons were shot down over Attu Island in a single day on April 13, 1945, highlighting the potential threat these weapons posed to Alaska’s strategic military installations in the Aleutian Islands.

The fu-gos were spotted across a wide swath of Alaska, from the Aleutians to Bethel and even above the Arctic Circle. This spread demonstrated the unpredictable nature of these wind-borne weapons and the challenges they presented to defense efforts.

Residents in Anchorage had a



Japan sent bombs like this one to drift across the Pacific Ocean during 1944 and 1945 to spread fear across America during World War II. Wikipedia

close encounter on June 18, 1945, when a downed balloon was discovered carrying one high-explosive bomb and two incendiary devices.

Fortunately, the bombs failed to detonate and were safely disarmed by military personnel. The incident brought the reality of the threat directly to Alaska’s urban population – but news of it was kept minimal.

Keeping the existence of balloon bombs secret was part of a broader strategy. By maintaining a media blackout, authorities hoped to deny the Japanese any feedback on the effectiveness of their campaign. This approach may have contributed to Japan’s decision to halt the fu-go program, as they had no way to assess its impact.

Despite the potential danger, the campaign proved largely ineffective in Alaska and across North America. The balloons’ inability to be guided, combined with the vast and uninhabited territories they drifted over, meant that most caused little damage.

The fu-go campaign left long-lasting effects on Alaska’s

landscape. Even after the war ended, balloon bomb remnants continued to be discovered. In 1947, two years after the war’s conclusion, another bomb was found near Petersburg.

These lingering weapons posed dangers to unsuspecting civilians and served as tangible reminders of the conflict. The fu-go balloon bomb campaign in Alaska during World War II represents a unique chapter in the state’s history and highlights Alaska’s strategic position as America’s northwestern frontier and its role in the broader conflict.

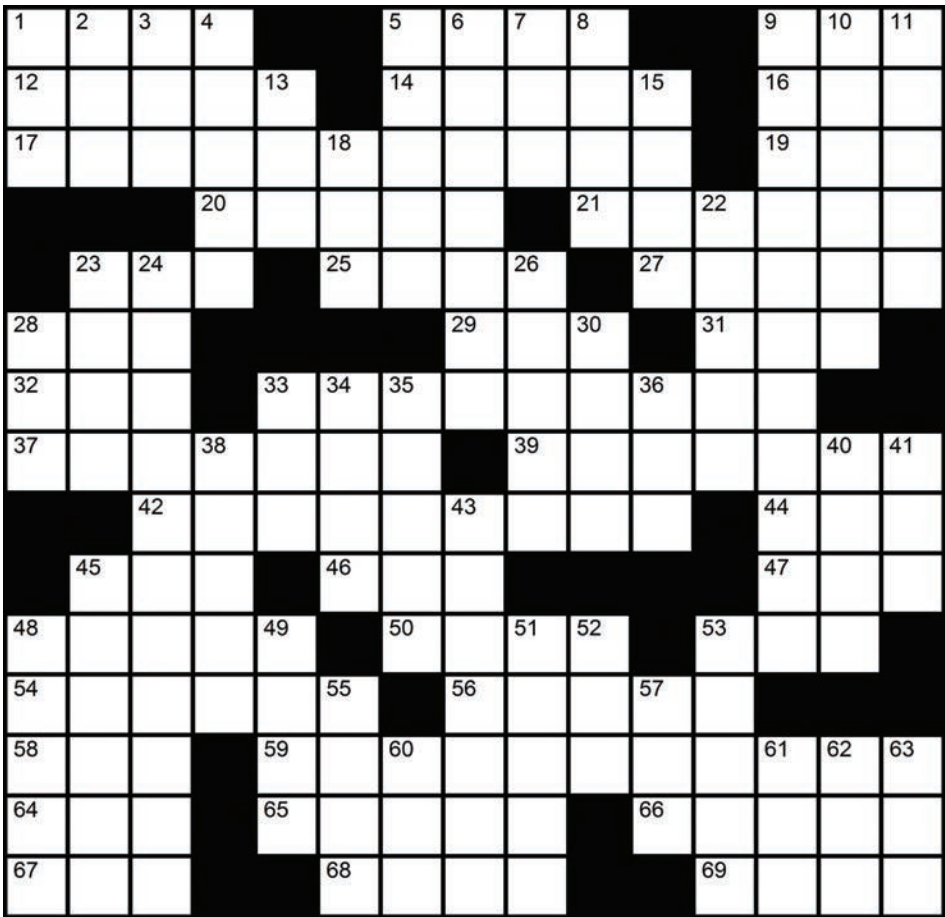
This column features tidbits found while researching Alaska’s colorful past for Aunt Phil’s Trunk, a five-book Alaska history series written by Laurel Downing Bill and her late aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson. The books, including the newest titled Pioneers From Alaska’s Past, are available at bookstores and gift shops throughout Alaska, as well as online at www.auntphilstrunk.com.

Color Coded

Across

- 1 Ticket section
- 5 Small wading bird
- 9 Jest
- 12 Bird’s nest
- 14 Embark
- 16 Regret
- 17 National park
- 19 Wynn and Ames
- 20 Genuflect
- 21 Duplicity
- 23 Weight units (Abbr.)
- 25 Pace
- 27 *Divine Comedy* poet
- 28 W. state (Abbr.)
- 29 Rend
- 31 Network inits.
- 32 Flightless bird
- 33 Moscow plaza

- 37 Corpulence
- 39 Baseball officials
- 42 *Ursus americanus*
- 44 Break bread
- 45 Body of water
- 46 Not him
- 47 Attempt
- 48 Bowler
- 50 Location
- 53 Sharp curve
- 54 Capital of Poland
- 56 Aver
- 58 Silkworm
- 59 Chess piece
- 64 Downwind side
- 65 Sashay
- 66 More frigid
- 67 Mormons, to some (Abbr.)



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- 68 Touched, with the foot
- 69 Boleyn or Bronte

Down

- 1 Articulate
- 2 Golf item
- 3 Web page
- 4 Cheats
- 5 Readjust
- 6 Cervid
- 7 Japanese admiral
- 8 Contribute
- 9 Special Forces
- 10 Books inspections

- 11 1939 Gary Cooper movie, *Beau* _____
- 13 Geologic time
- 15 Swamp grass
- 18 Horror film
- 22 Bay of Naples
- 23 Dinner choice
- 24 Pie ingredient
- 26 Anger
- 28 Corporate executive (Abbr.)
- 30 Cougar
- 33 River inlet
- 34 Engrave
- 35 Weirs
- 36 Spring mo.
- 38 Tablets
- 40 Auditory system
- 41 Pigpen
- 43 Brush feature
- 45 Parched
- 48 Inhabit
- 49 Deviates erratically (Naut.)
- 51 Gabardine
- 52 Scare word
- 53 Author Jong
- 55 Iota
- 57 Cuckoo
- 60 Wedding words
- 61 Card game
- 62 Chicken
- 63 Three (It.)

Crossword answers on page 22



Marilu Henner made her mark on Hallmark

By NICK THOMAS

Tinseltown Talks

Since its debut as the Hallmark Channel in 2001, the network has become a beloved TV destination for millions of viewers, especially during the holiday season with its Christmas-themed features. While Hallmark has cultivated a recognizable roster of its own stars, their programs have also featured an impressive lineup of veteran film and television icons over the years, including Ed Asner, Christopher Lloyd, Shirley MacLaine, Roger Moore, Danny Glover, Burt Reynolds, and Carrie Fisher.

And Marilu Henner.

Best known to TV fans of the late '70s and early '80s hit the NBC comedy series "Taxi" where she played a part-time cabbie, Henner has continued to work in film and television including some 30 Hallmark productions such as their murder mystery movie series, "A Teagarden Mystery."

The channel does have its critics, given the often-repetitive nature of their movies and predictable happy boy-always-gets-girl outcome.

"Yeah, it's the same formula but it works," said Henner of the Christmas movies. "They're just kind of feel-good stories that the whole family can watch. There's always hot chocolate, cookies baking, cutting down their own Christmas tree, and of course a final kiss."

She especially remembers one film from 2020.

"Of all the Christmas movies I've done, 'Love, Lights, Hanukkah!' is one of my favorites," she recalled. "The story is about a girl (played by Mia Kirshner) that I gave up for adoption when I was young. She finds out that she's not just all Italian but half



Marilu Henner was a regular on the hit late-1970s, early 1980s sitcom "Taxi." More recently, she has appeared in more than 20 Hallmark Channel films. Henner has made her mark more recently in the Hallmark Teagarden mysteries, where she plays the mother of a librarian who belongs to a group of enthusiasts who study true historical crimes. Hallmark's family-friendly fare means so she can watch the films with her young niece.

photos courtesy Hallmark Channel

Jewish after a DNA test and reconnects with me and my family. It's such a sweet holiday movie."

In 2022, she played Gramma Mia in "A Kismet Christmas" where she is the keeper of a famous family recipe for kismet cookies. If placed under one's pillow, the sweet treats allow the sleeper to dream of their true love kismet—a Turkish word synonymous with destiny.

"My character is very nurturing with a certain wisdom and she's always cooking, like me," said Henner. "We filmed in Victoria (Canada) and had some scenes in traditional Dickens-like costumes which was fun."

Henner has appeared in some 20 of the Hallmark Teagarden mysteries where she plays the mother of a librarian named Aurora Teagarden who belongs to a group of enthusiasts who study true historical crimes. Unlike other network or cable crime dramas, the on-screen violence is minimal.

"You're not going to see dead bodies or pools of blood everywhere, so I can watch it with my young niece," she explained.

"Taxi" was one of Henner's first on-screen ap-

pearances. Given the co-stars who would go on to become stars (including Danny DeVito, Judd Hirsch, and Tony Danza), there are plenty of stories to share from the show's four seasons.

"Want to hear a great Danny DeVito story?" asked Henner, referring to the actor who played Louie, the grumpy cab dispatcher. "Danny was down to his last unemployment check, his last clean shirt, and he had no money when

he read the script for 'Taxi' and felt it was a great part. He goes to the audition and is in a room full of studio suits with the script in his hand. He throws it down and says, 'Who wrote this 'crap' (censored!)? and they said 'that's our Louie.' He was the only truly irreplaceable character in the show."

"Taxi" may have launched Marilu's career, but at 73 she has made her mark on Hallmark.

"First of all, they are

really nice people to work with and I always have a great time with them," she said of her association with the network. "They pick interesting locations and there's always something in the characters that I relate to. People come up to me all the time and tell me how much they love Hallmark movies."

Nick Thomas has written features, columns, and interviews for numerous magazines and newspapers. See www.getnickt.org.

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On financial companies and stupid rules

By KENNETH KIRK

For Senior Voice

I had a run-in recently with a major national bank. Although I suppose by “run in” I really mean that I complained and they ignored me. I’m still pretty ticked off about it, so you’ll have to forgive me if this becomes a rant.

Here’s what it was about: In Alaska there is a statute which says you can have a short version of your living trust called a “certification of trust,” and if there is not a specific reason why they need to see the whole trust, they must accept the certification. That is a nice convenience, since the certification is about two pages and the trust declaration is invariably going to be a lot longer. It also helps to preserve your privacy. You don’t necessarily want all these junior bankers to see the part of the trust that talks about your alcoholic granddaughter or the kid you’re disinheriting because he’s in prison.

So when I do a trust, I always do a certification to go with it. And if it is a married couple who are doing this as a joint trust, I have both sign the certification, and I notarize it.

Which has worked fine for years. Until recently a certain bank—I don’t want to identify them so let’s call them Western Finan-



cial, and say they have a stagecoach as part of their logo—decided that if there are two people signing the certification, there must be two separate notary stamps. In other words, I can’t have a husband and wife sign, and then I notarize both of them together.

Their new policy makes no sense whatsoever. Every other bank, credit union, brokerage, and insurance company had been willing to accept one stamp for both names. That included, up until now, Wells—oops, Western Financial—until all of a sudden it didn’t.

I spent some time on the telephone. Nobody there could give me a reason, they just said it was a new company policy. I finally threw up my hands and changed my documents to make it two separate stamps for each certification.

But it got me to thinking about all the other little quirks that some of the financial institutions

have. There is one national brokerage which won’t let clients designate pay on death beneficiaries on joint accounts. Why? They can’t seem to tell me. The only person at the company I could get to talk to me, suggested that when one of the couple died, the survivor could then designate a beneficiary, because it would now be a single account. As if couples never die together or one dies but the other is incompetent.

Here’s one that really gets under my skin. Let’s say you have a savings account and quite a bit of cash in it, so you decide to take some of that cash and buy a CD (not a CD you listen to music on, a certificate of deposit). And let us say that when you set up the savings account, you carefully designated your children as the POD (payment on death) beneficiaries on the account.

Will that POD designation apply to the CD as well? Or do you have to do a new designation specifically for that CD? Guess what, it depends on the company. Some of them say that if you have

beneficiaries designated on the underlying account, that will apply to all CDs as well. But others want you to designate beneficiaries on each specific CD. You have to make sure that any time you purchase a CD out of one of your accounts, you ask the bank or credit union whether your POD designation will apply.

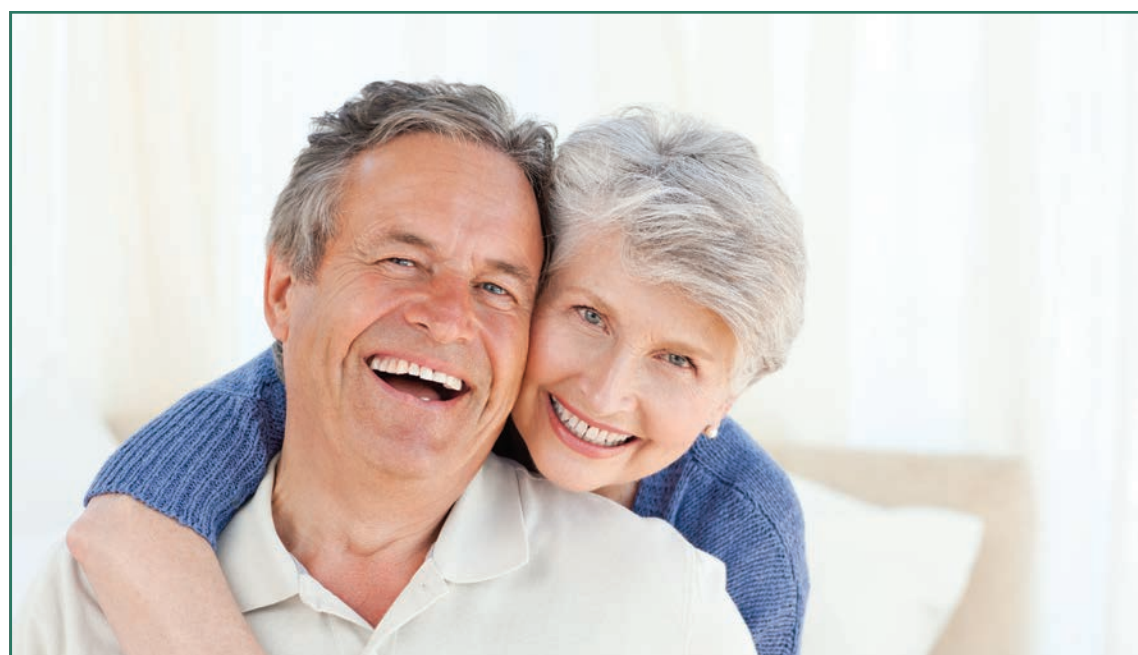
Speaking of banks and credit unions, if you have a living trust and want to put your account in the trust, some of them will let you do that and you can keep the same account number you had before (assuming this is a revocable living trust). But others will make you get a new account number, which would mean throwing out your checks and changing your direct deposits, automated bill pay, and so forth. Fortunately, there’s a work-around (make the trust the POD on the account instead) but why complicate things? Obviously, it’s not a requirement that there be a new account number, or all of them would insist on that. And not all of them do.

Or this one: there is a national company, let’s

call them—oh heck, I’m done being cute, it’s ComputerShare—where the trustee or executor must submit a bunch of paperwork for each stock you’re holding. Not one bunch of paperwork for all of them, separate paperwork for each and every different stock you have with them. Some require notary stamps; some require medallion signatures that have to be done at the bank. What a headache.

There’s not really a moral to this story—I just wanted to rant. Well, OK, maybe there is a moral. Make sure you know what each company where you park your money with requires. Most people have multiple financial institutions they deal with. Don’t just assume that what works at one of them will work at the others.

Kenneth Kirk is an Anchorage estate planning attorney. 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. Thank you for letting me get that off my chest; I feel better now.



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Podcasts, walking videos, and the Internet Archive

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

Q. How do I get started listening to podcasts?

A. The podcast world is built with apps that do two jobs: a podcast directory that indexes all the programs into a searchable list and a player that downloads and keeps track of your listening history.

Podcasts can be played on any digital device because podcast apps exist on every major platform.

Apple offers an app called “Podcasts” that works on Mac, iPad, and iPhone. Because the data is synced to the cloud it is easy to start listening on one device and finish on another.

The Apple “Podcasts” app is similar to most other podcast players, supporting both a directory and a playlist. If you use Apple devices, there is no better place to begin exploring than Apple’s “Podcasts” app.

A good place to start on Android is Podcast Addict, which is a free app with plenty of standard features.

There are many excellent options besides these two. This answer is focused on getting started. Once you learn more about what you like, you can branch out into

third-party apps like Overcast (Apple platforms) and PocketCasts (iOS/Android).

Keep in mind that there is a wide variety of content available, and nearly all of it is supported by advertising. You do not need to spend any money to get started. Just a podcast player app, a device, and some time to listen.

Q. I exercise almost daily, often on a treadmill or stationary bicycle. Are there some interesting new distractions I could use to make the time pass more quickly?

A. If you have not discovered podcasting, check out the previous question. Podcasts are perfect exercise companions. But if your tastes range toward the more visual, consider YouTube, and search for a walking video of your favorite city or maybe a place you dream of visiting someday.

The YouTube search box is a gateway to millions of hours of content. Each minute of every day another 500 hours of content are added. The sheer volume suggests there is something for every taste.

One of my personal favorites is a sub-genre of long walk videos. Imagine someone walking down a

public street with a camera atop their head.

The audio might be the street noise, or perhaps music. The sound and image quality is generally fantastic. Some of the videos include captions that name various points-of-interest during the walk. Those are the best.

Be sure to add weather to some of your searches. For example, the search for a “snowy night walk in New York City” has dozens of listings. When searching, I prefer YouTube’s search for videos. If you use Google instead, be sure to select “Videos” at the top of the returned listings.

Q. What is the Internet Archive?

A. Internet Archive (archive.org) has become one of the most important websites ever, on par with Wikipedia and Google. Next spring its founder Brewster Kahle will celebrate its 30th anniversary.

The digital library originally set out to archive early websites, and has since become a general-purpose media library, preserving music, film, books, and software applications in addition to websites.

The archived websites can be searched via the Wayback Machine tool. The

Wander the Web

Here are my picks for worthwhile browsing this month:

The Art Scavenger

Free illustrations from the public domain that can be used in your personal art projects. Handy raw material for home-made holiday gifts.
theartscavenger.com

Interactive Simulations for Science and Math

Another great example of how the Internet can be leveraged for learning. This site contains over a hundred simulations for everything from magnetism to balloons and static electricity.
phet.colorado.edu

The Accessible Flight Simulator

A free, web-based multi-player online flight simulator. Choose one of dozens of different aircraft and do a few barrel-rolls over your house.
geo-fs.com

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Social Security

continued from page 10

The need for protection

Social Security is a cornerstone of financial security for many Americans. According to AARP, more than one in five Americans receive Social Security. In Alaska, 115,096 residents receive Social Security, which injects \$2.3 billion into the state’s economy each

year. Without these payments, more than 28% of Alaskans aged 65 and over would be living in poverty. Social Security is crucial for Alaskans to be able to age with confidence and certainty both now and in the future.

Since Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system; it’s funded by payroll taxes. However, the most recent Social Security’s Trustees’ Report has forecasted that the surplus will run out in 2035. This will cause a 20% reduction in

Social Security payments nationally. While Congress reformed this program in 1983, it must step up again to ensure that older Americans receive the payments they need.

AARP is leading the charge to ensure beneficiaries receive full benefits and to guarantee access to customer service.

Join the fight to protect Social Security

Visit aarp.org/social-security for more information.

Heritage Health Alaska Trivia Crossword Answers

DOWN

1. Spurr
2. International
4. Devils
5. Costco
8. Dewlap
10. Kodiak

ACROSS

3. Northernlights
5. Copper
6. Roadrunner
7. Saltydog
9. Mosquito
11. Salmon
12. Beluga

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Kinship support webinar is Dec. 11

Senior Voice staff

The Alaska Commission on Aging’s Grandparents Day kinship family support webinar is scheduled for noon Dec. 11. All are welcome to learn about supports in Alaska for relatives raising children, featuring Southeast Alaska’s Kinship Navigator Program Haa Yatx’u Saani, Volunteers of America Alaska, and Gener-

ationsUnited. This program is meant for grandparents or relatives raising children. Learn what supports exist for kinship families in Alaska. Zoom link to join is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85770530178>. For questions or help accessing Zoom, call the Alaska Commission on Aging’s program coordinator at 907-230-0871 or email us at doh.acoa.info@alaska.gov.

Crossword answers from page 18

S	T	U	B			R	A	I	L			G	A	G			
A	E	R	I	E		E	N	T	E	R		R	U	E			
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L	D	S					T	O	E	D				A	N	N	E

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Questions? Contact ACoA Staff Yasmin Radbod at 907-230-0871.



Travel

continued from page 5

first hint of a viral illness (achy, feverish, fatigued). If your blood type is the rare AB your main vulnerability is the high potential for degradation of a key type of immune boosting cell, NK (natural killer) cells. What will offset this weak spot is regular eating habits (as we get older two meals a day is really plenty), lots of veggies in the diet (roasted, steamed, raw), adequate protein intake (20-30 grams unless you are actively body-building in which case up to 50 mg daily is OK. Don't buy into the ridiculous levels of protein powder—purveyors want you to buy. Excess protein is hard on the kidneys, and the environment). AB blood types don't do well on keto-style high fat diets and are advised to “green” up personal care and home cleaning products. If your blood type is O (the most prevalent worldwide) your best immune tonics include larch powder (sometimes sold as ARA6), Astragalus, and Eleutherococcus (Siberian ginseng). O's do well on higher protein, lower carb diets.

Step three

Protect against germs with essential oils. Side benefit: they smell good. Wash your hands frequently while traveling and try not to rub any part of your face. Avoid hand sanitizers that contain alcohol (very drying to the skin) or Triclosan (which is now banned for products marketed for children, thank goodness. Nasty stuff). Instead, choose sanitizers made with essential oils such as thyme, oregano, frankincense (*Boswellia serrata*), or tea tree, all of which are effective antimicrobials. Side effects are extremely rare with essential oils, but they are strong and should NOT be placed undiluted on mucous membranes such as into the nose. You can make

your own blend. Remember to put all liquids and gels in 3.5-ounce size bottles for travel.

Step four

Stay regular. Constipation is very common during air travel, because flying at 600 miles an hour 30,000 feet up is extremely drying. It's best to keep sipping water all day long rather than gulping a whole bottle, which will irritate your bladder. Putting electrolytes or a pinch of complex salt (Celtic, Himalayan, pink) in the water will help keep it in your cells longer. Try senna, either in capsules or tea, for stubborn constipation. I always travel with some Smooth Move tea bags but be warned – they are potent. Don't steep this tea for longer than 10 minutes. Bowel function can also go in the other direction during travel if you are exposed to a bug, usually food-borne, which your intestines understandably will try to push out in a big hurry. Let the loose stools run their course for 24-48 hours. Stay hydrated. Take electrolytes. If you're still stuck in the bathroom after a day or two, consider my favorite anti-diarrheal, berberine. This contains a naturally yellow pigment also found in goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*), Oregon grape, and bearberry. Tincture (herb extraction with alcohol) or glycerite (extracted with honey or glycerine) forms are usually better absorbed than capsules, but trickier for travel.

Step five

Use enzymes or herbal digestive tonics to keep the upper part of your intestinal system happy. Indulging in rich food and drink on vacation can leave you feeling heavy, bloated and hung-over. In this case, you need to take digestive enzymes (a mix of protease, amylase and lipase) or an herbal formula to ease digestion at the time of ingestion of richer-than-usual foods



Jetting away over the holidays? Take some time to prepare your travel bag with naturopathic remedies or preventive medicine.

Photo by Paola Banchemo

and libations. I like a classic Chinese herbal formulation called Jia Wei Kang Ning Wan. “Wan” means pill or tablet. You can also use digestive bitters, sometimes called Swedish bitters, which typically contain digestion-easing herbs including gentian, anise, ginger and/or cumin. If you know you'll be eating a more complex meal or indulging in more fat or sugar than your norm, help yourself with one of these remedial suggestions to simultaneously stimulate your own digestive juices, and allow for smooth transit all the way down.

Side bar: Pack smart. Believe it or not, taking a little time ahead to prepare your packing can help you stay well when you're traveling. Being prepared helps reduce stress, and thus protects your immune ca-

capacity to ward off impacts of new bugs and exotic food. Start with deciding on shoes, since they're bulky and take up a lot of room. Then try to pack as lightly as possible. Plot out what you plan to wear each day while away. Pack a suitcase where pieces can mix and

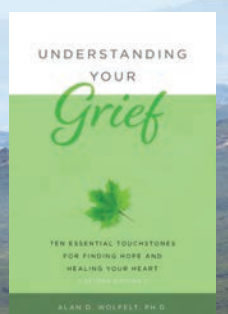
match. And if you're traveling from a cold, wet climate to somewhere sunny and warm, make sure to leave enough space in your bag to pack a coat and heavier shoes for your return.

Emily Kane is a retired naturopathic doctor based in Juneau.

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Bristol Bay Native Association www.bbna.com/our-programs/social-service-programs/elderly-services/
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