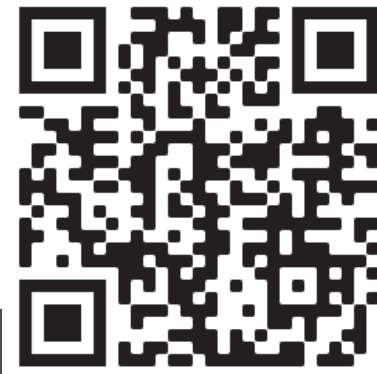


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# Senior Voice

A publication of  
Older Persons  
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Serving Alaskans 50+ Since 1978

Volume 48, Number 6 June 2025

Longtime editor of  
Senior Voice honored. - page 2

Jury duty scams:  
How to stay alert. - page 3

Wildfire preparation  
begins with us. - page 11

Bringing joy, connection back  
to Elders in St. Mary's. - page 14

A couple's adventures in  
fish tendering. - page 19

Anne and Ron Winters bought the Bering as their fishing vessel after their first boat, the Mutual, caught fire. The Bering, shown here in the Cordova harbor, was an 86-foot Power Scow, built in 1945 in Seattle. The Winters spent 20 years tendering fish all over coastal Alaska.

*Photo courtesy Anne Winters*



2024  
National Mature  
Media Awards<sup>SM</sup>  
Winner





# Longtime editor of Senior Voice honored

Senior Voice Staff

David Washburn received the 2025 Ron Hammett Award from the Municipality of Anchorage Senior Citizens Advisory Commission on May 7.

Washburn, the long-serving editor of the Senior Voice who retired in March, was singled out for his service over the course of a three-decade career at the Senior Voice. The award was presented during Older Americans Month in May.

“My community work has been your community work,” Washburn said in receiving the award at the Anchorage Senior Activities Center.

In 2005, the Municipality’s Senior Citizens



David Washburn, who served as editor of the Senior Voice for more than three decades before retiring last March, was honored with the Ron Hammett Award in May. The award recognizes individuals who work to improve the lives of seniors in the community.

Photo by Paola Banchemero

Advisory Commission established the Ron Hammett Award, recognizing individuals whose outstanding

service, dedication and leadership has had a significant impact on the quality of life for seniors in the Municipality of Anchorage.

At the time of his death on October 24, 2004, Hammett was a commissioner for the SCAC and served with “quiet wisdom, well-chosen words, and a clear focus on human needs,” according to a statement from the Municipality.

Hammett was a World War II veteran and served in the occupation of Japan. When he spoke of his time in Japan, he spoke with an empathy for the Japanese people when others were less sympathetic to their plight. This was symbolic of how he lived his entire life and the dedication he demonstrated in serving others. Hammett spent his professional career in Oregon and Alaska, primarily

in the field of vocational rehabilitation and health services. After his arrival in Alaska in 1976, he quickly became involved with Bean’s Café, the Boys and Girls Club, and a variety of boards and commissions that addressed human needs.

Annually, the Ron Hammett Award recognizes the contribution of Hammett and others like him who work tirelessly to improve the lives of seniors in the community. To nominate a person, look for the nominating form next spring on the Municipality’s website. <https://www.muni.org/Departments/health/PHIP/pages/seniorcitizensadvisorycommission.aspx>.

# June is Men’s Health Month: Let’s talk about living with prostate cancer

By C. KELLY JOY  
Certified Peer Support

Statistics published by the American Cancer Society in 2025 suggest that one of every eight men (12.5%) will experience prostate cancer during their lifetime. And the incidence rate has increased by 3% each year since 2014. Men who are 65 and older are experiencing the highest rates of prostate cancer. Yet with intervention, the survival rates for prostate cancer are high at 97.7%.

Since cancer goes into remission and never really goes away, the question

“What future can I expect when living with prostate cancer?” has many answers. The process of recovery is an individual journey and will take you through many challenges. Peer support professionals are well versed in the recovery process because successfully living in recovery is their education. Peer support professionals have learned that recovery from chronic disease involves incorporating lifestyle adjustments that manage the contributing factors to reduce the probability of relapse. Recovery is the process of mastering

new strategies to cope with situations as they arise.

Unfortunately, for many men living with prostate cancer, lifestyle adjustments involve limitations in some of the activities they enjoy, in the dynamics of their family relationships, and in the side effects that can impact on their self-esteem. For example, prostate cancer occurs in the male reproductive system; consequently, this affects a man’s ability to sexually engage in intimate relationships. The cancer affects the urinary tract, and unwanted leakage is not uncommon. Both

conditions are immensely frustrating for an adult man and adapting to these unwanted changes is not easy.

Why talk about this? To encourage awareness. Men can expect their primary care providers to recommend screening for the cancer starting at age 65. For partners, children and friends—be patient, supportive and non-judg-

mental when their husband/father/friend starts to emotionally withdraw from the relationship... it may not be you... living with cancer forces unwanted change and change is not easy.

Care to share? Us TOO is a statewide peer led support group for men with prostate or testicular cancer; [ustooak@gmail.com](mailto:ustooak@gmail.com), (907) 268-9066, (907) 727-8552. <https://ustooak.com/>

### 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](mailto: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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# Strategies for paying off credit card debt

By JIM MILLER

Savvy Senior

**Dear Savvy Senior,**  
My husband and I, who are retired, have accumulated about \$7,000 in credit card debt over the past few years and need some help paying it off. What can you tell us? – *Living Underwater*

**Dear Living,**  
I'm sorry to hear about your financial woes but know that you're not alone. Credit card debt has become a big problem in this country for millions of older Americans. According to a recent AARP report, 52 percent of adults ages 50 to 64 have credit card debt, along with 42 percent of those ages 65 to 74.

Rising costs of basic expenses like food, housing, utilities and health care are the main culprits. But now, new tariffs on products made in China and other foreign countries will make many goods more expensive, which could

make this problem worse. Of older adults carrying a balance, nearly half owe \$5,000 or more, and nearly a third owe upwards of \$10,000.

While paying off credit card debt can feel overwhelming, it's doable with a solid plan and a bit of belt-tightening and persistence. Here are some strategies to help you tackle it:

## Create a budget

Start by taking a close look at your income and expenses to see where you can free up money to put toward your credit card debt. Also look for areas to reduce spending, such as dining out, entertainment or subscriptions. And see if you're eligible for any financial assistance programs (see Benefits-CheckUp.org) that can help boost your budget by paying for things like food, utilities, medicine and health care.

## Call the card company

While the average credit-card interest rate is more than 20 percent, some credit card companies may be willing to lower your interest rate or work out a payment plan, especially if you're struggling. It doesn't hurt to ask.

## Pay more than the minimum

Credit card companies only require the minimum payment, but it's usually mostly interest. Try to pay more than the minimum every month to make a dent in the principal balance.

## Choose a repayment strategy

If you have more than one credit card, pick one and get serious about paying it off. Start with the card that carries the highest interest rate, or the one with the smallest balance.

If you focus on paying off the card with the highest interest rate first, you'll pay

less interest over time, saving yourself a lot of money. Once the highest-interest card is paid off, move to the next highest, and so on.

Or you may want to start with the card with the smallest balance. Paying off smaller debts quickly can give you a sense of accomplishment and motivate you to keep going.

## Consolidate your debt

If you have multiple high-interest cards, look into consolidating your debt with a low-interest personal loan from your bank or credit union. Or consider moving your debts to a balance transfer credit card with 0 percent interest for an introductory period, which is usually 15, 18 or 21 months. This will eliminate the amount of interest you're paying temporarily. But be careful! Once the introductory promotion ends, the card company will charge interest on any remaining balance.

## Consider a debt management plan

If you need more help, use a nonprofit credit counseling agency (see NFCC.org) to create a debt management plan for you. At no cost, a counselor will go over your income and debts and determine what's workable. The counselor will then negotiate with your lenders, to get a payment plan that will lower your interest and monthly payments and maybe forgive some debt.

If you accept their negotiated offer, you'll start making one monthly payment to the counseling service, which will in turn pay the issuers. You'll likely pay the agency a small fee and give up the cards included in the plan, but over time you'll be able to pay off your debt.

Send your questions or comments to [questions@savvysenior.org](mailto:questions@savvysenior.org), or to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070.

# Protect yourself: Jury duty scams are targeting Alaskans

By THERESA HOLT

For Senior Voice

Jury duty scams are on the rise in Alaska, and it's crucial to know how they work so you can avoid them. One common scam involves an email that claims you missed jury service and includes a calendar to select a week when you'll be available. The email may threaten fines or imprisonment if you don't respond. This email is not from the Alaska Court System or the U.S. District Court...It's from a scammer! Do not click any links in this email.

In another version of this scam, a caller claims to be from a law enforcement agency, like police or state troopers, stating that they have a warrant for your arrest because you missed jury duty or a court appearance. According to the caller, the only way to avoid arrest is to pay a fine. In some cases, they offer to clear up the "misunderstanding" if you will share personal information. This is a scammer trying to get you to give them personal information like your Social



*The Boney Courthouse in Anchorage. Jury duty scams, in which criminals try to get your personal information by saying you missed jury duty or a court appearance, are on the rise.*

James Brooks photo

Security number or date of birth so they can steal your identity. If you receive a call or email like this, do not click on any links, provide any personal information or make any payments. You can always hang up and contact the real agency at the phone number on their official website.

Scammers often use official-looking letterhead from the Alaska Court System or "spoof" a phone number to make it look like it is coming from the court system. They may also refer to a case number, or pose as a local police officer, trooper, or judge to make

the scam more believable.

The Alaska Court System sends jury summons by email, directing you to their jury dashboard. If you don't respond to the email, they will send a summons by mail. The court system will never call, threaten to arrest, or ask for money over the phone. People who fail to show up for jury duty will likely receive a letter reminding them to reschedule. The court system does not collect money for failing to serve as a juror, and police will not be sent to anyone's home to collect unpaid fines or make arrests.

## Red flags of a jury duty scam:

- ▶ The Alaska Court System will never send an email threatening fines or imprisonment. Those emails are scams.
- ▶ It's extremely unlikely that anyone from the court system would call a potential juror directly; communication is almost always by email or letter. If you receive a call like this, hang up and do not provide personal information.
- ▶ No one gets arrested or is asked to pay when they don't show up for jury duty. These threats are meant to scare you into complying.
- ▶ Courts never ask for payment over the phone. No government agency will do that.
- ▶ Only scammers insist on payment with gift cards, payment apps (Venmo, Paypal), cryptocurrency (bitcoin), or using wire transfers. The court system will never request payment through these platforms.
- ▶ Courts never ask for sensitive information like your Social Security number or birthdate over the phone.

## What should you do?

If you receive a suspicious call or email, contact your local police department to confirm it's a scam. If you can identify the caller's phone number or email, provide this information to the police. Remember, no police department will ever call asking for money to drop a warrant. For scams involving federal jury duty, call the U.S. Marshals Service, District of Alaska, at 907-271-5154.

If you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam or fraud, you are not alone. Fraud specialists at the AARP Fraud Watch Network Help-line (877-908-3360) are available from 4 a.m. to 4 p.m. Alaska time and can provide free support and guidance on what to do next. To learn more about fraud, scams, and prevention, visit the AARP Fraud Watch Network at [www.aarp.org/fraud](http://www.aarp.org/fraud).

Remember: if you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam.

Teresa Holt is the AARP Alaska state director.





# Reflections on life and finding hope

By KAREN CASANOVAS

For Senior Voice

**Q:** I recently watched the documentary “The 90s Club,” where individuals in their 90s share their perspectives on life, love, loss, and the search for meaning. This deeply resonated with me and sparked reflections about my own future. Some days, it is challenging to remain optimistic, especially when I find myself surrounded by constant reminders of farewells and funerals. I’m seeking ways to shift my perspective and find hope amid grief. How can I develop a more positive outlook?

**A:** One way to approach this is by considering an alternative perspective: What lies ahead? Instead of focusing solely on loss, think about the excitement of the unknown and the possibilities that await. Adopting a positive mindset can profoundly influence how we perceive our circumstances. The saying goes, “You become what you think.” In other words, what you focus on shapes your reality—what you think, you become; what you feel, you attract; and what you imagine, you create.

Your thoughts have a direct impact on your behaviors and decisions. For instance, constantly dwelling on failure may lead you to take fewer risks, ultimately hindering your



growth. Conversely, nurturing positive thoughts encourages optimistic actions. Research from neuroscientist Dr. Richard J. Davidson at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has shown that positive emotions activate reward pathways in the brain, particularly in a region called the ventral striatum. According to Davidson, those who can savor positive emotions exhibit prolonged activation in this area, which is linked to increased well-being and even healthier levels of stress hormones.

In contrast, negative emotions engage the amygdala, a region associated with fear and anxiety. Davidson notes significant variations in how quickly individuals recover from threatening situations, with slower recovery potentially increasing the risk of various health issues. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as resilient individuals are better equipped to maintain positive emotions.

**According to Davidson, those who can savor positive emotions exhibit prolonged activation in this area, which is linked to increased well-being and even healthier levels of stress hormones.**

## Defining resilience

“Resilience is an inference based on evidence that some individuals have a better outcome than others who have experienced a comparable level of adversity.” —Michael Rutter (2012)

## Key aspects of resilience

1. Adaptability: The ability to adjust to changing circumstances and find ways to thrive in challenging situations.
2. Emotional regulation: Managing emotions under stress without feeling overwhelmed by negativity.
3. Problem-solving: Actively seeking solutions to overcome difficulties.
4. Positive outlook: Focusing on lessons learned rather than becoming stuck in setbacks.
5. Social support: Building connections and a sense of community, which serve as buffers against stress.
6. Process: Recognizing

that resilience is not a fixed trait, but a dynamic journey of learning, adapting, and evolving.

## Patterns of thinking

Your thoughts significantly influence your habits. Repeated thoughts can lead to the formation of neural pathways in the brain, making certain behaviors more likely. It’s essential to understand that positive thinking doesn’t mean ignoring challenges; rather, it involves confronting difficulties with a hopeful and effective approach, anticipating positive outcomes instead of fearing the worst.

Positive thinking often starts with self-talk—the ongoing dialogue within our minds, which can either uplift or discourage us. Some self-talk is driven by rational thought, while other aspects may arise from previous beliefs or misconceptions about what

could occur in a situation.

A negative self-talk pattern can foster a pessimistic outlook on life. In contrast, a generally positive mindset promotes optimism, forming the foundation for effective positive thinking throughout life.

## Summary

Resilience—the ability to bounce back from adversity—offers invaluable benefits, such as improved mental and physical health, enhanced coping skills, and greater success in both personal and professional realms. It serves as a protective factor against mental health issues like depression and anxiety, aids in stress management, and can even accelerate healing from illness. Embracing positive thinking not only strengthens relationships but also fosters resilience. Strive to move forward and focus on nurturing positive thoughts as you navigate life’s challenges.

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



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# Plan summer outdoor activities with safety in mind

By LISA SAUDER

For Senior Voice

Alaska’s summer solstice season offers long hours of light, warmer days, and a strong pull for Alaskans to enjoy the natural beauty that surrounds us. For individuals living with Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD), June is a great time to embrace the outdoors.

Summer’s sunshine brings plenty of chances for fun and connection, but it also comes with a few extra things for caregivers to keep in mind.

Whether it’s a gentle walk on a local trail or time spent gardening on a porch, outdoor activities can support emotional well-being, physical health, and cognitive engagement. However, not all activities are created equal, and caregivers must balance stimulation and safety.



## A season of light and memory

In 2025, the summer solstice in Alaska falls on Friday, June 20, at 6:42 p.m. Alaska Daylight Time. It marks the longest day of the year, with areas like Fairbanks seeing over 22 hours of daylight. The abundance of natural light can uplift moods and provide more opportunities for outdoor engagement.

At the same time, extended daylight can sometimes disrupt sleep or increase late-day confusion for those with de-

# Virtual and in-person expo

*Assistive Technology of Alaska*

Assistive Technology of Alaska is celebrating World Assistive Technology Day on June 4. There is a virtual expo on emerging assistive technology from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, followed by an in-person open house at ATLA from 1 to 4 p.m.

**Schedule**

- 9–10 a.m.** Emerging Tech: Assistive technology for employment
- 10–11 a.m.** Emerging Tech: Assistive technology for community living
- 11 a.m.–12 noon** Emerging Tech: Assistive technology for education
- 1–4 p.m.** In-person open house at ATLA, 1500 W 33rd Ave Ste 120, Anchorage 99503.

Discover what is new in assistive technology. Explore emerging tools and trends to support independence, inclusion, and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. The expo will feature three focused sessions on how AT is shaping key areas of everyday life:

- **Employment:** Innovations enhancing workplace accessibility, supporting career development, and enabling diverse talent to thrive
- **Community Living:** Technology promoting autonomy, safety, engagement in daily life, and community participation
- **Education:** Tools and strategies impacting learning environments and supporting inclusive education from early childhood through higher ed

The virtual expo on emerging technology is free and open to the public. Registration is required. [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/7517458618336/WN\\_uKIuKVYqR3iPtF-Wj3exRBg#/registration](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/7517458618336/WN_uKIuKVYqR3iPtF-Wj3exRBg#/registration)

Attendees who require accommodations to access the virtual expo should specify their needs during registration. Real-time captioning, interpreting, and electronic copies of materials can be provided in advance. If any other accommodations are needed, let us know in the comment section when registering for the event.

The in-person open house features hands-on assistive technology. An interpreter will be available.

mentia—a phenomenon known as sundowning. With the right awareness and routine, however, solstice season can become a time of calm, sensory-rich connection.

## Why the outdoors matters for dementia care

Spending time outside does more than offer a change of scenery. Natural settings can reduce agitation, improve mood,

and help restore regular sleep cycles by exposing the brain to daylight at key times of day, especially helpful in Alaska’s extreme seasonal light patterns.

page 6 please

# What to know about Medicare’s coverage of vaccines

By SEAN McPHILAMY

Alaska Medicare Information Office

Preventive health care is care you receive to prevent illness, detect medical conditions, and keep you healthy. Medicare covers many preventive health care services, including routine vaccines. Today I will discuss how the different parts of Medicare cover vaccines, along with some important notes about a few common vaccines.

## Point 1: Understand that most vaccines are covered by Medicare Part D

If your provider recommends that you get a vaccine, in most cases this service will be covered by your Part D prescription drug plan. Part D plans must include most commercially available vaccines on their list of covered drugs (the formulary), including the vaccine for shingles. The



amount you pay for your vaccine may vary depending on where you get vaccinated. Be sure to check your plan’s coverage rules and see where you can get your vaccine at the lowest cost. Typically, you will pay the least for your vaccinations at an in-network pharmacy or at a doctor’s office that can bill your Part D plan for the entire cost of the vaccination process. When you get a vaccine at your doctor’s office, ask the provider to call your Part D plan first to find out if the provider can bill your Part D plan directly. If this is

not possible, your provider may bill you for the entire cost of the vaccine, and you will have to request reimbursement from your Part D plan.

## Point 2: Learn which vaccines are covered by Medicare Part B

While Part D covers most vaccines, there are certain vaccinations that are always covered by Part B, such as for influenza (the flu shot), pneumonia, hepatitis B (for people at risk), and for COVID-19. Part B also covers certain reasonable and necessary vaccines to treat an injury or exposure to a disease. For example, Part B covers a tetanus shot if you step on a rusty nail, or a rabies shot if a dog bites you. If you qualify for one of these vaccinations, original Medicare covers the full cost of the vaccine when you receive the service from a participating provider. This means you

pay nothing. Please bring your red, white, and blue Medicare card with you to your vaccination appointment. Let’s review who is eligible for these vaccines and when:

First, the flu shot—Medicare covers one flu shot every flu season. The season usually runs from November through April.

Second, the pneumonia shot—Medicare covers two separate pneumonia vaccines. Part B covers the first shot if you have never received Part B coverage for a pneumonia shot previously. You are also covered for a different, second vaccination one year after receiving the first shot.

Third, the hepatitis B shot—Medicare covers the hepatitis B vaccine if you are at medium or high risk for hepatitis B, a virus that attacks the liver and can cause chronic liver disease. If you are at low risk for hepatitis B, the shot will be covered under Part D.

Finally, Medicare Part B covers COVID-19 vaccines, including a subsequent dose or booster. Speak with your doctor to learn more about the vaccine and whether a booster or additional dose is recommended for your individual circumstances.

To discuss any concern relating to vaccine-coverage by Medicare, or to ask any questions regarding your specific situation, please contact the State of Alaska Medicare Information Office at (800) 478-6065 or (907) 269-3680; our office is also known as the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), and the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) program. If you are part of an agency or organization that assists seniors with medical resources, consider networking with the Medicare Information Office. Call us to inquire about our new Ambassador program.





## ADVERTISEMENT

## Simple at-home tips to make your hearing aids last longer

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

Here are preventive measures that the hearing aid wearer or the caretaker, in some instances, should complete regularly to ensure that the hearing aid is well maintained and functioning at its full capacity.

**Earwax.** The most common culprit for hearing aid repair is earwax.

To prevent wax from clogging critical components of the hearing device, such as the microphones or receivers, it is important to wipe off the hearing aid each morning with a cloth or brush with a clean dry toothbrush. Cleaning tools should be cleaned regularly to avoid re-depositing wax or other debris onto the

aid. Wipe the aids down in the morning when the wax has had the opportunity to dry and will flake off. It's critical not to wipe debris onto the microphone ports from another part of the aid.

**Physical damage.** Hearing aids should be stored in a consistent, safe manner nightly. They should be placed out of the reach of small children and pets, as animals tend to be drawn to the devices due to the human scent. When damage occurs, gather all components of the hearing device and call your hearing health care professional as soon as possible. The devices should not be worn if there is damage to the casing as sharp edges can hurt the wearer.

Use these tips to get the most out of your hearing aids and to keep them in optimal working condition.

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.

## Activities

*continued from page 5*

Activities that engage the senses—like hearing bird-song, smelling flowers, or feeling sunshine—can help trigger comforting memories and emotions.

### Activities to try this summer

Here are some simple and rewarding outdoor activities to enjoy with your loved one:

► **Nature walks:** Choose smooth, familiar paths. Go at a relaxed pace with plenty of breaks. Avoid busy trails with bicyclists or runners.

► **Container gardening:** Raised beds or patio pots allow participation without

the strain of bending.

► **Backyard birdwatching:** Place a feeder near a window or porch. For tech-savvy caregivers, the Bird Buddy smart feeder offers live video and automatic bird ID via a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

► **Photo walks:** Take a phone or camera and document flowers, trees, or birds—then use the pictures later to spark conversation.

► **Music or picnic in the park:** Pack snacks or a picnic and attend low-key, outdoor concerts or play favorite songs at a picnic in your own yard.

**Keep things person-centered:** what feels familiar, safe, and enjoyable to your loved one? The goal isn't to do more, but to do what brings peace and connection.

### Reducing risk while enhancing joy

Because dementia can affect judgment, orientation, and communication, it's important to plan with care. Watch for signs of overheating, dehydration, or fatigue. Wandering, overstimulation, and sun exposure can all pose risks in summer.

With thoughtful routines and backup plans, caregivers can help ensure outings are both safe and meaningful.

### Summer safety tips for caregivers

► **Stay hydrated:** Offer wa-

ter regularly. Older adults may not notice thirst until they are already dehydrated.

► **Use identification tools:** Make sure your loved one wears a medical alert bracelet or carries ID. GPS devices are useful if wandering is a concern.

► **Sun protection:** Don't forget sunscreen, sunglasses, and wide-brimmed hats. Even on cooler days, sun exposure can be intense.

► **Dress in layers:** Even in June, Alaska weather can shift fast. Pack a jacket, scarf, or lap blanket just in case.

► **Emergency essentials:** Bring snacks, medications and calming objects.

### Final thoughts

Summer in Alaska is a season of light—literally and emotionally. The solstice reminds us of the power of warmth, renewal, and connection. For families impacted by Alzheimer's or related dementias, these months offer a chance to share simple joys, whether it's sunshine on the face or birdsong through a speaker. With a little planning and a lot of heart, we can create summer days that feel safe, connected, and full of meaning.

For more ideas, tools, or caregiving support, contact Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska at 1-800-478-1080 or visit [www.alzaska.org](http://www.alzaska.org).

*Lisa Sauder is the CEO of Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska.*

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**By LEE CORAY-LUDDEN***For Senior Voice*

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# Get moving to reduce joint and back pain

By Dr. EMILY KANE  
For Senior Voice



Even though muscle is heavier than fat, and exercise greatly stimulates appetite, no health improvement or weight loss program will ultimately succeed without focused toning. This is because muscle is highly metabolically active tissue and uses up close to 80% of our glucose requirements. In general, I favor low carb (and no refined carb) diets, especially for blood type O and B. A blood types would ideally choose a pesco-ovo vegetarian diet (avoiding red meat and heavy dairy products). But we all like to have a treat now and then—right? So, save your organic, dark chocolate, gluten-free brownie or macaroon or bagel with jam for a little carb load 60–90 minutes before your main workouts during the week. Sugar that doesn't get burned quickly (within 2 hours of consumption) gets stored as that special type of "sugar-fat" called triglycerides. This lipid is actually three glycerol molecules hooked together

and gets stored in our favorite fat-holding area: the midsection. When a patient walks into my office with muffin top or a beer belly I know they have high triglycerides. You can calculate a modifiable risk factor for diabetes or premature cardiovascular failure with a lab value calculation. If you take your total triglyceride level (from a blood test) and divide it by your so-called "good" cholesterol HDL (all cholesterol is good but that's another topic) and if that number is 4 or more—you have this risk factor called "metabolic syndrome." Do an internet search on that because I'm going to talk about exercise now.

The basic weekly exercise prescription I give

**Meaningful exercise tends to not happen spontaneously in our gadget-filled realities. If you are lucky and get to work outside or work in a physical profession, you will probably still need to round out with aerobic and flexibility training.**

most patients is a combination of strength, flexibility, balance and cardio:

Aerobic: 3 hours (six 30-minute sessions such as brisk walks, or 4 x 45 minutes or 3 x one hour sessions)

Strength: 1 hour (2 x 30 minutes or 3 x 20 minutes)

Flexibility: 10 minutes every other day. Basic yoga stretches: 8 sun salutes, for example.

Balance: 30 minutes weekly; ideally 5 minutes 6 days a week such as standing on one leg while brushing teeth or washing dishes.

If you are committed to optimal health you must schedule exercise into your week and keep the appointment. Meaningful exercise tends to not happen spontaneously in our gadget-filled realities. If you are lucky and get to work outside or work in a physical profession, you will probably still need to round out with aerobic and

flexibility training.

Let's drill down a bit on the strength component. That generally involves weightlifting. If you want to build muscles, you have to stress them. I urge you to work with a trainer for the first few weeks to get a weightlifting program going. If you have access to a gym—great. But you can create a simple home gym using only your own bodyweight (think: planks, push-ups, squats). There are many options out there. In general, we have stronger legs than upper bodies so during a 20-minute weight routine (that you would commit to three times weekly) you will probably have just enough time for five different exercises with three sets, and from eight to 12 reps per set. Four of the five exercises should be for arms, and one for lower body, particularly if you already walk a fair amount or live on stairs. Keep track of your weights and reps and try to increase either the weight or the number of reps periodically. An example of a leg exercise would be deep squats with a bar (which generally weighs 45 pounds) bal-

anced right on your collar bone and the upper arm flesh. An example of an arm exercise would be a bench press lying down or an overhead press, standing, with free weights in each hand. Try to keep the rest between sets below 60 seconds. If you can easily perform 12 reps in the first set of a given exercise, increase the weight slightly for the second and third sets. If you can barely perform eight reps, stay at the same weight and work towards 12 reps before increasing the weight.

One inexpensive, quickly effective tool I recommend to help stimulate muscle development, and also curb carb cravings, is branched chain amino acids (BCAA). Very high doses tend to be cited in research studies (15 grams or more) but I think somewhere between 2 and 4 grams a few times a week, say in a morning smoothie on weight-training days, are quite adequate. There are three amino acids in the BCAA group: L-Isoleucine (50%), L-Leucine (25%) and L-Valine (25%). This amino acid combo has a somewhat bitter taste and doesn't dissolve readily in water, but mixes well into a shake that has a thicker texture. You can also find the powder encapsulated, but caps are always more expensive than powder.

page 9 please



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# Technology use can prevent cognitive decline

By JOHN SCHIESZER

Medical Minutes

Technology use among older adults appears to benefit cognitive health rather than harm it, according to a large-scale meta-analysis published in *Nature Human Behaviour*, a monthly multidisciplinary online-only peer-reviewed scientific journal. The study, which examined data from more than 411,000 adults ages 50 and older, found that engaging with digital devices may actually help protect against cognitive decline and dementia.

“The generation that brought us the digital revolution is now reaching the age where dementia risks emerge,” said study co-author Jared Bengé, who is a neuropsychologist at UT Health Austin’s Comprehensive Memory Center in Texas. “Far from causing ‘digital dementia,’ as some feared, we found technology engagement is consistently linked to better brain health, even after accounting for education, income and physical health.”

The analysis of 57 studies showed technology users had lower odds of cognitive impairment and reduced rates of decline over time. These protective relationships were observed across computer, smartphone and inter-



net use. Brain protection remained strong in both snapshot and multiyear studies.

The protective effect was comparable to or stronger than established factors such as physical activity and education. Effects persisted even when controlling for socioeconomic factors, education and health conditions. Positive effects were found in both the 50-65 age group and those older than 65.

The study introduces “technological reserve” as a new protective factor against cognitive decline. Just as education and lifelong learning help the brain resist damage, using technology may strengthen the brain’s ability to withstand age-related changes possibly through multiple pathways. These include challenging the mind with new learning, maintaining social connections, and creating digital systems that help compensate for normal age-related memory changes.

**The findings were consistent across different genetic and demographic backgrounds. The authors report that understanding the interplay between different activities can now empower adults 50+ to make positive health changes in terms of physical activities.**

“Our data suggests encouraging older adults to engage with technology, particularly in a manner that helps challenge, connect and compensate for cognitive problems, could be a powerful approach to promoting cognitive health,” Bengé said.

## Staying active is key

A brisk walk, a splash of water aerobics, if your heart rate goes up then so too will your brain health, according to a new study from the University of South Australia. The study was conducted in partnership with the US-based AdventHealth Research Institute and it found that staying active through moderate-to-vigorous physical activity is associated with significantly better processing speed, working memory, and executive function in older adults.

Interestingly, the biggest cognitive gains were seen among people who went from doing no moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, to even doing just five minutes, clearly illustrating the power of exercise for the human brain. The team assessed data from 585 older adults (aged 65-80 years) in the USA. The study examined associations between cognitive performance and time spent in sleep, sedentary behavior, light

physical activity, and moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.

Researchers identified a two-way relationship between “huff-and-puff” physical activity and brain health. In other words, do more exercise and your brain health improves, but do less and it declines.

Dr. Maddison Mellow, who is with the University of South Australia, said the study highlights how small changes in daily activities can have big impacts on brain health. “There are three mutually exclusive lifestyle behaviors in the 24-hour day: sleep, sedentary behavior and physical activity—and how these interact to influence our health outcomes,” Mellow said.

The authors of this study suggest that there is an interconnectedness that is now being more fully understood. “For example, we know that being more active can improve our sleep or having a better night’s sleep could boost our energy levels to perform physical activity the next day. But what we don’t know is the optimal balance of time spent in each of these behaviors to maximize cognitive performance,” Mellow said.

Not surprising, the study showed activity performed at higher intensities that increases your heart rate and breathing was related

to better cognitive performance. The authors report that “huff-and-puff” physical activity, such as aerobic exercise improves processing speed, which is how fast your brain thinks. This type of physical activity was associated with improved executive function (how well you plan, focus, and multi-task) and improved working memory (ability to store information for short periods of time). Lower levels of higher intensity physical activity were related to poorer performance on cognitive tests.

The findings were consistent across different genetic and demographic backgrounds. The authors report that understanding the interplay between different activities can now empower adults 50+ to make positive health changes in terms of physical activities.

“There are only 24 hours in a day, so every day, we make decisions about how we spend our time. For example, if we sleep for eight hours, then there’s 16 hours remaining for waking behaviors like physical activity or sedentary behaviour; that’s the basic reality,” said co-researcher, Dr. Audrey Collins, who is also with the University of South Australia. “Our results show that how we choose to spend our time across the 24-hour day may be differentially related to our brain health.”

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](mailto:medicalminutes@gmail.com).

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- **SNAP** - Alaska’s Food Stamp Program
- **LIHEAP** - Heating assistance
- **Senior Benefit** - receive cash from the State of Alaska
- Additional programs may be available.





Pain

continued from page 7

Vitamin C and B6 are synergistic nutrients for the absorption of BCAAs and daily intake would optimally be 1 to 3 grams of Vitamin C (ideally not just plain ascorbic acid, but complexed with bioflavonoids for the anti-inflammatory and vasculature-healing properties of those amazing yellow and orange pigments) and 50-150 mg of pyridoxine (B6). The way the BCAAs work is by minimizing or even preventing the body's need to catabolize (break down) endogenous BCAAs from muscles during exercise by providing an alternate source of BCAAs for the body to convert into fuel. Many professional athletes use BCAAs, and I also give them to patients who are recovering from an injury or illness that required prolonged disuse of a body part. For example, when someone breaks their leg and is in a cast for 6 weeks, the healing leg tends to atrophy, which means they



Emily Kane recommends a basic weekly exercise routine that mixes strength, flexibility, balance and cardio. For strength, she suggests one hour per week broken up over two or three days.

Kampus Productions/Pexels

lose a lot of muscle mass. Taking BCAAs during the recovery, including the physical therapy rehab, allows for much quicker muscle building. If you are making a pre- or post work-out smoothie, experiment by adding some

super-green food, some frozen berries, maybe a splash of flax oil (vegan anti-inflammatory) or bee pollen (immunity booster) or aloe vera juice (heals heartburn). For blood types O or B a banana adds thick, creamy deliciousness. A

blood types should avoid bananas so pineapple or

nicely ripened pear would be good fruit choices. Extra protein powder will help turn the smoothie into a mini-meal and also round out the amino acid profile. Whey protein, one of the better performance products, is about 24% BCAAs. Whey protein is generally not a problem for lactose intolerants, but if you have a true dairy allergy and can't handle casein either, pea protein might be better. If you choose soy-based protein powder, be absolutely sure it is organic soy, because if not, it is guaranteed to be genetically modified soy.] If you don't exercise according to my minimal prescription, be good to yourself and prioritize fitting regular work outs into your week. Emily Kane is a naturopathic doctor based in Juneau. Contact her online at <http://www.dremilykane.com>.

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# Plan, protect, prevent: Honoring World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in Alaska

Alaska Commission on Aging

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), observed annually on June 15, is a critical opportunity for Alaskans to reflect on the safety and dignity of our rapidly growing senior population. With more than 160,000 Alaskans now aged

60 and older—representing nearly 22% of the state's population—the risk of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation is rising in step with demographic changes. Older adults in Alaska face unique vulnerabilities, especially in rural communities. People may be isolated, have disabling conditions, or experience other health

challenges, making them more susceptible to harm.

In 2024 alone, Adult Protective Services (APS) received more than 8,100 reports of harm against Alaskans aged 60 and older. Of these, nearly 2,000 were screened in for investigation—evidence of both high need and growing awareness. Meanwhile, the

Alaska Long-Term Care Ombudsman investigated nearly 500 complaints in assisted living settings, with 80% resolved to the satisfaction of the resident or their representative.

Elder abuse is not only a moral issue but a public health and safety concern that threatens the independence and wellbeing of Alaskans who built this state. As nearly one in three residents in Southeast Alaska are already seniors—and as the 85+ population is projected to quadruple by 2050—addressing elder abuse is relevant to us all. This World Elder Abuse Awareness Day we reaffirm that every Alaskan elder deserves to live free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation—protected, valued, and heard.

It's also important to recognize the powerful role that estate planning tools can play in protecting older adults from exploitation and ensuring their wishes are respected. Financial abuse is one of the most common and underreported

forms of elder abuse, often committed by someone the victim knows and trusts. By clearly documenting their wishes, appointing trusted representatives, and setting legal safeguards in place, seniors can reduce the risk of manipulation or unauthorized decision-making in times of vulnerability.

Join us on June 12 from 12 noon to 1:30 p.m. for a free webinar. Chelsea Riekkola of Foley & Pearson, P.C. will provide an overview of estate planning topics with a focus on the planning for Older Americans. She will discuss powers of attorney, health care directives, wills, probate, and other helpful topics related to estate planning. Because this is a live webinar, participants will be able to ask questions during and at the end of the presentation. The Zoom link to join the meeting can be found on our Facebook page: Alaska Commission on Aging, or on the Senior Voice Calendar online. Please contact us with us questions: 907-465-3250, [doh.acoa.info@alaska.gov](mailto:doh.acoa.info@alaska.gov).

## Senior priorities get bump in next budget year

Senior Voice staff

The Alaska Legislature has passed the fiscal year 2026 operating budget with a \$2.5 million increase for senior community grants, half a million less than the \$3 million increase the House originally proposed. This funding is meant to strengthen critical senior services such as Meals on Wheels, transportation, and caregiver support.

Funding for an addi-

tional Assistant Long-Term Care Ombudsman position was included in the budget to address the growing needs of Alaska's aging population. The state has experienced a significant increase in residents aged 60 and over, creating greater demand for oversight services. This additional staff member will help ensure that residents in all 20 Skilled Nursing Facilities and more than assisted living homes across

Alaska receive regular visits and advocacy services from the LTC Ombudsman program. The added position allows the office to visit more facilities and provide greater oversight for seniors in long-term care facilities.

You can access the full text and details of the budget on the Alaska State Legislature's website: HB 53 – Operating Budget Bill Page. The final version of the budget reflects flat funding across most programs, the result of significant fiscal constraints.

## Medical debt is increasing in Alaska

Senior Voice Staff

Alaskans are more likely to lack health insurance, according to Census Bureau data. They are also racking up more medical debt.


Alaska showed a 32% increase in medical debt from 2020–23, with the percentage of residents in medical debt growing from 4.90% to 6.48%. Where one lives can determine what kind of medical coverage you can get and also influence the cost of health care. Iowa had the greatest number of residents falling into medical debt, while Delaware was able to reverse medical debt the most of all states.

An analysis of government data estimates that

people in the United States owe at least \$220 billion in medical debt. Approximately 14 million people (6% of adults) in the U.S. owe more than \$1,000 in medical debt and about 3 million people (1% of adults) owe medical debt of more than \$10,000, according to the Peterson-Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracker.



Despite about 90% of the U.S. population having health insurance, costs such as high deductibles or co-payments, high prescription costs and other expenses can add up. For people with limited means, even a relatively small unexpected medical expense can be unaffordable.

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# Wildfire prevention and older adults

By PAOLA BANCHERO

Senior Voice

Wildland fire danger is growing across Alaska. A warm and dry winter has put fire officials on high alert and prompted residents in zones where wildland meets urban development to take precautions.

“The wilderness surrounding us presents a significant fire risk,” said Anchorage Mayor Suzanne LaFrance at a recent town hall about fire prevention efforts across the Municipality. “Our beautiful green spaces, while cherished, also mean that the risk of fire is ever present, even in our urban core. We are facing heightened fire danger this summer.” Recent wildfires, such as in Lahaina and Los Angeles and even in New Jersey, have also prompted Alaskans to wonder what they can do to prepare. For Alaska’s seniors and caregivers, the risks associated with natural disasters are multiple. Older adults and caregivers must plan possible evacuation scenarios and think through how a natural disaster could disrupt their regular health care and community ties.

“There are many lessons learned from these disasters and more come out all the time, said Amanda Loach, director of the Municipality’s Office of Emergency Management.

At a recent community town hall in Anchorage, about 200 people gathered to hear about these efforts and to learn how a community council is taking actions to address the danger. Many of those in the audience are older adults themselves eager to hear what they should do to prepare.

## Where humans and wildland intersect

As it turns out, a lot of us live in what fire experts and geologists call the Wildland-Urban Interface, or WUI. Those are areas where humans and their homes, businesses and infrastructure abut fire-prone wildland or vegetation, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>



Anchorage Fire Department crews do controlled burns at the Hilltop Ski Area on May 21. The Municipality has rebuilt its wildland fire division after years of inactivity.

Photo courtesy Travis Rector

**What is clear is that wildfire prevention and planning starts with us. The AFD and other communities offer an inspection of your property to see if it is firewise, meaning firewood, trees and grass are cut back and managed. But we have to follow through and see to it that our neighbors do the same.**

One 2022 study found that this wildland-urban interface covered less than half a percent of the total area of the state but almost three out of four housing units were in this zone. In Anchorage, about 82% of housing is in this area.

Norman McDonald, deputy director of the Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Prevention, said fire prevention and fire-fighting is complex and getting more challenging. Multiple agencies interact for wildfire protection, such as the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service and the military.

“You look across the world and there are fires in Australia and Europe and conditions like we’ve never seen before,” McDonald said at the town hall. “It’s a complex problem. It’s very real. It’s changing. And it’s not getting better.” That’s why it’s important to build resilient and prepared communities, in addition

to developing safe and effective fire response.

The division is tasked with protecting 154 million acres in Alaska and cooperates with the Anchorage Fire Department. AFD supports state efforts in fighting any wildfire that breaks out within the Municipality.

## Catching up after years of inaction

The Anchorage Fire Department used to have a wildland fire division, but funding for it ended in 2009. With it, the Municipality also had a community wildfire protection plan; it was last updated in 2008. City leaders realized planning and prevention efforts had become stale.

“The threat of a major wildfire in the Municipality is very real, and we’ve had some close calls in recent years,” said AFD Chief Doug Schrage. “The intensity and the growth of a fire depends on three factors — fuel, weather and

topography—and we have all three problems here in the Municipality.”

With that in mind, the fire department went to congressional leaders. U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski responded by securing \$4 million in federal funding to restart the wildland fire division. The department is also applying for other grant money to fund projects to reduce fire risk.

As part of the rebuilding effort, the Municipality of Anchorage, more than 1,900 square miles that stretches from Eklutna to Girdwood, hired Jon Glover as wildland fire division chief. Glover grew up in Anchorage and has worked on hotshot crews and fire management for more than 20 years. He’s spent time trying to catch Anchorage up on wildland prevention efforts.

Part of the wildland division’s efforts will include writing a new community wildfire protection plan. The division has been busy reaching out to community members through media appearances, talks at civic clubs and groups, and the recent town hall. The division is also gathering community input with a survey. [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe-0E3Q5YKljMwD-IXorPtk-](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe-0E3Q5YKljMwD-IXorPtk-1m6IQljFGhEOjYoFJs_7H-v8Syig/viewform)

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## The risks to elderly residents

The Lahaina fire in 2023 showed the vulnerability of elderly populations. More than two-thirds of Maui’s fire victims were over the age of 60, according to reporting by Honolulu Civil Beat, a nonprofit newsroom. The elderly population of the state is about 22%. Seven residents of an assisted living facility on Maui were killed when the fire swept the complex.

A similar pattern occurred in Los Angeles when fires broke out in January. Many of the dead were elderly and in some cases also disabled. One neurologist recently described searching for her patients—many of them with Parkinson’s disease or dementia—in the aftermath of the fire. And in many cases, the elderly lose the homes they’ve lived in for decades, the resources they depend on, and the communities that are familiar to them. The Altadena Senior Center in Los Angeles burned in the Eaton fire there in January. It had 27,000 visits last year alone, KCAL-TV in Los Angeles reported.

page 27 please





# Staying safe from seasonal allergies in Alaska

By CHRISTIAN M. HARTLEY

For Senior Voice

As our beautiful Alaska spring turns to summer, many people sneeze and sniffle more than their normal. Pesky seasonal allergies can make enjoying our gorgeous outdoors difficult. Let's go over helpful information about recognizing allergic reactions, treating them, and minimizing seasonal allergies.

First, let's talk about how to know if you're having an allergic reaction. Mild to moderate symptoms include sneezing, runny or stuffy nose, watery or itchy eyes, and itchy throat. You might also notice skin issues like hives or a rash. These symptoms are uncomfortable, but usually not dangerous.

In Alaska, our main allergy triggers are different from the Lower 48. Birch, alder, and cottonwood trees release lots of pollen from May through July. Grass pollens peak in June and July. When plants do bloom, they often release pollen all at once, making symptoms worse for allergy sufferers.



To reduce your exposure to allergens, try to stay indoors on high pollen days, especially during mornings when pollen counts are highest. When you go outside, wearing sunglasses can help keep pollen out of your eyes. Coming back inside, changing clothes and washing your hands and face can remove the pollen you've picked up.

For treating allergies, over-the-counter medications can be very helpful. Antihistamines like Claritin, Zyrtec, or Allegra can relieve many symptoms. Nasal sprays like Flonase or Nasacort work well for nasal congestion. Remember to talk with your doctor before starting any new medicine, as some may interact with medications you already



It's hard to believe this tiny bit of green that emerges in late April can flourish into the vegetation that cause us seasonal allergies.  
Photo by Paola Banchemo

**Call 911 immediately if you or someone else experiences difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, face or mouth swelling, throat tightening, dizziness, or fainting, rapid or weak pulse, severe skin rash, or hives.**

take or affect conditions like high blood pressure.

Natural remedies help some people. Using a nasal rinse can wash away allergens. Keeping your home clean by dusting and vacuuming regularly, and washing bedding in hot water, can reduce indoor allergens.

For more personalized help, consider seeing an allergist. This is really important if over-the-counter treatments aren't working. Many local health

clinics throughout our state can provide guidance, but if you have a doctor, talk to them.

It's important to recognize when an allergic reaction becomes an emergency. Call 911 immediately if you or someone else experiences difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, face or mouth swelling, throat tightening, dizziness, or fainting, rapid or weak pulse, severe skin rash, or hives.

Don't wait to see if these

symptoms improve on their own. These may be signs of a life-threatening allergic reaction that requires immediate medical attention.

Remember, there's no need to suffer through allergy season. With proper precautions, treatments, and knowledge of when to seek emergency help, we can all enjoy Alaska's beautiful summers, even those of us with allergies.

Christian M. Hartley is a 40-year Alaska resident with over 25 years of public safety and public service experience. He is the City of Houston Fire Chief and serves on many local and state workgroups, boards and commissions related to safety. He lives in Big Lake with his wife of 20 years and their three teenage sons.

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12 | Senior Voice, June 2025





# Where have all the finches gone?

*Citizen science investigates Anchorage's absent winter birds*

By J.K. ULRICH

For Senior Voice

Anchorage bird feeders came down this April heavy with uneaten seed and unresolved questions. Throughout the winter, local birdwatchers remarked on the absence of small passerines—an order of perching birds that includes more than half the world's avian species. Where were the redpolls, the pine grosbeaks, and white-winged crossbills? Last year these birds mobbed feeders and fir trees across the city. How could the flocks vanish like so many melting snowflakes?

Science offers important clues. All three species belong to the finch family, which is known for irruptions. Not like Mount Spurr—volcanoes erupt with an 'e'—but a sudden, non-cyclical migration in response to environmental conditions. For finches, these conditions usually involve food availability. "Their ecology is they go to where the food resources



Anchorage saw a significant decline in the number of redpolls visiting the area, according to citizen science bird counts. Redpolls, a member of the finch family, likely experienced an irruption—a sudden, non-cyclical migration in response to environmental conditions. For finches, these conditions usually involve food availability.

are abundant," said River Gates, the Pacific Shorebird Conservation Initiative Coordinator for Audubon Alaska. "If you look outside right now, you'll notice that we don't have a lot of spruce cones on our trees... what we're seeing is that this year, we don't have

the food resources for these irruptive species."

Most of the finch species that winter in North America's boreal forests rely on seed. Some even specialize in a particular type to reduce competition. White-winged crossbills, as their name suggests, have a beak



Crossbills are members of the finch family. They and their bird brethren likely declined in number across the Anchorage bowl this winter because the unusually warm winter didn't produce the conifer cones they eat. The migration patterns of finches can be affected by food availability.

Photos by J.K. Ulrich

ideally shaped for prying open conifer cones. Others take a generalist approach. Trees have their own tricks to survive. "Most years" yield a bumper crop to ensure some seeds will grow despite predation. In other years the trees produce very little, forcing hungry birds to switch food sources or move elsewhere.

Gates hypothesizes that abundant conifer seeds and extreme cold in the winter of 2023 drew the birds to Anchorage. This year, with fewer cones and milder temperatures, they likely stayed in the boreal forest. For evidence, Gates consults data from the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. This annual event has tallied backyard birds for 125 years, making it the longest-running citizen science project in the United States. "Audubon has used that information to inform science and conservation planning across the hemisphere," Gates said. Those same data can offer insight into local population trends.

In December 2023, Anchorage's citizen scientists tallied an astonishing 4,180 redpolls, 546 pine grosbeaks, and 3,456 white-winged crossbills. The following year brought only 66 redpolls, 19 pine grosbeaks, and 0 white-winged crossbills. Comparing 20 years of surveys from 2004

to 2024 revealed a pattern of such peaks and valleys. While a winter without these species might seem strange to birdwatchers, the data indicate such variation is normal. "We're not seeing big declines in individuals, just a pattern of them shifting their behavior based on seasonally abundant food resources and probably the weather conditions, because it has been a remarkably warm, weird, dry, snowless winter here in Anchorage," Gates said.

Citizen science reassures us that a year without finches is part of a natural phenomenon, but it has also revealed more worrisome trends among bird species nationwide. A study published in May analyzed 36 million observations from the bird survey platform eBird to track population changes in nearly 500 bird species across North and Central America and the Caribbean. Results showed that 75% of species had declined in the last 14 years, often in areas where they were most abundant. This counterintuitive finding suggests that formerly ideal habitats were no longer suitable for the birds. Species that breed in the Arctic and northern latitudes showed the steepest declines, which researchers attributed to the warming climate. Anchorage's redpolls, grosbeaks, and crossbills might be at risk along with their biome.

Broad ecological studies like these would not be possible without contributions from birdwatchers across the continent. Knowing where population changes occurred can also support conservation. Gates agrees that citizen science can play an important role in preserving the wildlife that bring color and joy to our neighborhoods. "In addition to the technical and scientific information that comes out of the Christmas Bird Count, I really think that the community of citizen scientists that it's created has created a really strong network of people willing to advocate for bird conservation in the United States as well." Avian allies can also connect with BirdTLC in Anchorage to support local efforts, ensuring Alaskan bird feeders stay busy for many seasons to come. <https://www.birdtlc.org/>

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# Bringing joy, connection back to Elders in St. Mary's

By ENI MAVAEGA  
RurAL CAP

Laura Long is one of just a handful of dedicated senior companion volunteers across Alaska. She gives her time, energy, and heart to support older adults in her community. Since October 2024, Long has served as part of RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps Senior Companion Program, where her passion for culture, connection, and care is helping reawaken a sense of togetherness among Elders in St. Mary's.

"My community needs more activities for Elders, and I want to make that happen as a Senior Companion volunteer," Long said.

Born and raised in the rural village of St. Mary's, Long grew up surrounded by the values and rhythms of the Yup'ik way of life. Her parents were active in the community, fishing and helping teach the Yup'ik language at the local mission. Those early years left a lasting impression.

She recalls her mother always picking berries and gathering, while her father spent his days hunting and fishing to feed their large family. With 15 siblings, life was lively and full of responsibility.

"Everyone helped," Long said with a smile. "My brothers learned to hunt and fish, and we girls helped our mom gather and care for things at home. It was just what we did. There was always something to do."

Now, decades later, Long continues many of those same traditions. She still goes out on her Honda during the berry season, collecting the fruits of the land just as her mother did. Her deep respect for the land and traditional lifestyle inspires much of the work she's doing now as a senior companion.

"Subsistence and traditions were important to my family, and I know many in my community still cherish our traditional way of life," she said. "I want to help the Elders feel connected to those traditions again."

One of Long's greatest blessings is having her mother still living in St. Mary's. She regularly visits her, bringing fresh bread



Laura Long is a dedicated senior companion volunteer. She gives her time, energy, and heart to support older adults in her community of St. Mary's. Since October 2024, Long has served as part of RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps Senior Companion Program, where her passion for culture, connection, and care is shaping her volunteer work.

Eni Mavaega, RurAL CAP

and soaking in the stories and wisdom that only a mother can offer.

"Being able to ask my mom about stories from my past is something I won't take for granted anymore," Long reflected. "My young self didn't always appreciate her knowledge. Now I want to learn everything I can."

Long celebrated her 70th birthday in April. Though officially a senior herself, she's still going strong, energized by her community, her family, and her desire to create change. She lives at home with her dog and says she finds peace in the quiet beauty of village life.

Her daughter and grandchildren live in Anchorage, and they are a big part of her motivation.

"They always tell me to do things that bring me joy," Long shared. "And I've learned that giving back to my community, to the people and the land—that's the best way to find it."

Long said when Elders have meaningful activities and spaces to gather, their mental, emotional, and physical well-being improves. That's why she's partnering with the Algaaciq Tribe to launch regular Elder gatherings in St. Mary's. Her plan is simple: invite anyone 55 and older to come together to a warm and welcoming space to reconnect, share

stories, and enjoy each other's company.

She's already brainstorming ideas for what these gatherings could look like: storytelling nights, singing and music, card games, dancing, talking circles—and yes, maybe even a little bingo.

"Everyone likes bingo," she laughed, "but there must be more to do here than just bingo. Elders like to share. We can always keep learning. People just need a reason to come together."

Long's leadership is a reminder that it's never too

late to make a difference. Through her work as a senior companion volunteer, she is weaving tradition, community, and joy into something new, something rooted in the old ways yet filled with fresh energy.

"I can't slow down yet," Long smiled. "I have to keep up with my grandsons."

And with that spirit, she's helping Elders across St. Mary's stay active, stay connected, and stay proud of where they come from.

## Become a senior companion in your community

The Senior Companion Program is accepting applications. Benefits for qualifying seniors 55+ include PTO, a tax-free stipend, paid holidays, free meals and travel assistance. Please call for more information and apply: 907-865-7276. Check out the online interest form and learn more at [eldermentor.org](http://eldermentor.org). You can also reach the team via e-mail at [eldermentors@ruralcap.org](mailto:eldermentors@ruralcap.org). Search "RurAL CAP Senior Companion Program" on Facebook to find us there.

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Image: Ameteke Kukubor, Buddies, 2022. © Ameteke Kukubor





# The Black Currant Patch

By **MARALEY McMICHAEL**  
Senior Voice Correspondent

Three years ago this month, I finally planted my black currant berry patch—a total of 14 plants—along the sloping edge of my year-old lawn. It was such a wonderful feeling of accomplishment to complete a project that was 10 years in the making.

Normally, to develop a successful berry patch, a person would identify a location and prepare the ground before or at least at the same time as acquiring the berry plants, but not me. Those kinds of considerations rarely seem to come together for my projects, and this particular endeavor was more long term than usual, even for me. I almost gave up more than once.

I was introduced to red currants in 1986 when my husband Gary and I bought a house off the Parks Highway. Mature red currant bushes came with



*Life got in the way between 2013 and 2022 when writer Maraley McMichael was finally able to plan 14 black currant plants at the edge of a new lawn. Each year, her harvest grows.*

Photo courtesy Maraley McMichael

the landscape. The house we downsized to in 1993 had undisturbed natural landscape, but over the years, we put in a lawn, flower beds, and a row of raspberries, but no currant bushes. After we moved

page 16 please

## Rambles

News from the Grapevine

June is packed with events as Alaskans get the most amount of sunshine of the year this month. The **summer solstice is June 20 at 6:41 p.m.** Alaska time, according to the Time and Date website. <https://www.timeanddate.com/sun/usa/anchorage?month=6> You can get out and enjoy the summer through a variety of activities. ... An event to bring metaphorical sunshine into your life takes place June 6. The **Forget-me-not Chorus**, a program of **Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska**, is performing its spring concert at the **Anchorage Senior Activity Center Ballroom**. Complimentary refreshments will be served following the performance, which starts at 1 p.m. There will be American Sign Language interpretation. If you have questions, contact Ann Farris, program manager at [afarris@alzalaska.org](mailto:afarris@alzalaska.org). ... This month is a highlight for road races in the state. The **Alaska Run for Women** is June 7 in **Anchorage**. It's one of the largest women's runs in the country and raises money for breast cancer research. The **Alaska Men's Run** is June 14 in **Anchorage** and raises money for prostate and testicular cancers. <https://alaskamensrun.com/> The **Midnight Sun Run** is a 10-kilometer (6.2 miles) race in **Fairbanks** is a tradition dating back to the early 1980s. It raises money for FRA, a nonprofit that champions people with disabilities. This year's race begins at 10 p.m. June 21. <https://midnightsunrun.net/> That same day is the **Anchorage Mayor's Marathon** and Half Marathon in Anchorage. <https://www.anchagemayorsmarathon.com/> ... The **Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc.** is having a **Miles for Meals** Fundraiser, page 14 please



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# Rambles

News from the Grapevine

continued from page 13

a community-driven event where every step taken supports the independence, health, and dignity of seniors across the Mat-Su. The goal this year is to raise \$100,000; this equals 8,333 meals. The WASI **Miles for Meals Fun Run** is June 21. Register at 9 a.m. and the run begins at 10 a.m. at 1301 S. Century Circle in Wasilla. Registration is \$30 but includes a barbecue after the run. The barbecue only is \$10 for non-runners, \$5 for children. Go the distance for seniors. Sign up, donate, or learn more at [www.wasillaseniors.com](http://www.wasillaseniors.com). The **Homer Spit run** is June 28. It's Homer's oldest running race. <https://kachemak-bayrunningclub.org/events/> ... It's Cancer Survivors Month, and several organizations will have events to mark it. For example, the **Alaska Black Caucus** is organizing the **Corene Davis Graham Cancer Telethon** on from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. June 8 in the **Wilda Marston Theater**, Loussac Library, 3600 Denali Street, Anchorage. <https://www.thealaskablackcaucus.com/events2/corene-davis-graham-cancer-telethon/> You can learn about related events at this site: <https://alaskacancerpartnership.org/cancer-survivors-day/> ... June is also known as **Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month**. June is also **National Aphasia Awareness Month**. Aphasia affects approximately 2 million people in the United States, though most Americans say they haven't heard of it. Aphasia affects a person's ability to communicate as they lose the ability to find the words they want to use. It often affects people who have had a stroke or a brain injury. Actor Bruce Willis' family announced he was quitting acting because of an aphasia diagnosis. He was later diagnosed with frontal temporal dementia.

*Rambles is compiled from senior center newsletters, websites and reader tips from around the state. Email your Rambles items to [editor@seniorvoicealaska.com](mailto:editor@seniorvoicealaska.com).*

# Currants

continued from page 15

to Slana in 1999, I could pick all the wild red and black currants I needed by walking into the woods behind our house—enough for ourselves and for my jam—and jelly—making side business for our bed and breakfast guests.

For health reasons, we moved back to Palmer in fall 2011. That last summer living in our Slana house, I noticed a plant sprout up next to the big rock at the base of the rain gutter downspout in the flower bed at the side of the front entry steps. I had not planted anything there and was curious about its identity. The blossoms eventually showed it to be a currant bush. Perhaps a bird dropped a seed. Who knows? But it was a very happy accident. By the time we made the big move in mid-August, I could see the berries were turning black! Even better! But the berries were not ripe enough to pick before our move.

Shortly after we got settled into our new house in Palmer, I got a call from a Slana neighbor. She said she was walking around



Photo courtesy Maralee McMichael

our place (knowing we'd moved) checking on things for us and saw all the huge black currants hanging from the bush... She asked if she could pick them so they wouldn't go to waste. She said she wanted to make jam with them and would give us a jar. I agreed. We did plan one more trip up there, but by then the berries would have frozen and thawed multiple times and most likely fallen off the bush.

The next spring when we made a trip to Slana to get another load of belongings, I checked on the currant bush. It appeared to be doing fine, with the leaf buds just opening. And there were several baby currant bush seedlings of various sizes at the base. Before we left, I dug out the babies, put them in a plastic grocery bag, and took them back to Palmer. I was excited to think we might be able to have some black currant bushes in our new Palmer landscape.

In spring 2013, we again returned to Slana for another load. (Our potential buyers had backed out and now there didn't seem to be much interest.) When I checked the black currant bush, it hadn't grown any bigger but it was healthy. A solid mass of greenery at the base turned out to be over 50 seedlings, each about 1-inch tall. Since my neighbor had not called about picking the berries the previous fall, perhaps they all fell to the ground and with the help of the water from the downspout, had clumped into a group and sprouted. This time the babies were so small I had to use a spoon to gather them from the soil and put them in a food container so they wouldn't get lost or crushed during our five-hour drive

home. I had come prepared to dig up the mother plant and did so.

A lot happened between 2013 and 2022. There was a blue ribbon at the Alaska State Fair for the berries from the mother plant, numerous Valley Garden Club plant sales, a ton of rain in August 2016 that nearly killed the baby plants with powdery mildew, and Gary had broken his hip and could no longer help on yard projects with his tractor, requiring me to seek professional landscaping help. Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Spring 2022 brought Gary's move to the Palmer Veterans and Pioneer Home and a huge garage sale.

Finally in June 2022 I could plant my long-awaited black currant patch, but if spaced according to recommendations, only 14 plants would fit in the area at the edge of the new lawn. I gave some away and sold the remaining plants for \$13 each at the 2023 Valley Garden plant sale. Amazingly, that one mother plant (which began in 2011) produced approximately \$250 worth of plants in two plant sales eight years apart, as well as what I kept for my own use.

Nowadays, I'm so thankful to have my own little black currant berry patch. The harvest quantity increases each summer, now producing enough to freeze for my own use. No more jams and jellies (with added sugar) for me since 2018 — just straight berries or berry juice. And I seem to treasure eating them more, just remembering how much trouble and effort went into them. I'm glad I persevered.

*Maralee McMichael is a lifelong Alaskan now residing in Palmer. Email her at [maraleymcmichael@gmail.com](mailto:maraleymcmichael@gmail.com).*



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# Plan now to submit idea or attend Statewide Elders and Youth Conference

Senior Voice Staff

The 42nd annual First Alaskans Institute Statewide Elders and Youth Conference will take place at the Dena'ina Center in Anchorage, Oct. 12-15. Elders and Youth is open to all who want to learn and immerse themselves in a gathering that centers Elders and youth in Native ways of knowing and being. The Elders and Youth Conference is not open to the public the way the annual Alaska Federation of Natives Conference is. EY Council representatives each register and agree to the rules that help keep the conference safe for Elders and youth. First Alaskans

Institute, the organizing entity of the conference, is committed to the protection of Elders and youth conference participants and requires all attendees to register as a matter of safety and security. First Alaskans invites Native language teachers, artists, writers, cooks, culture bearers, providers, community organizations and leaders to share the gift of time, energy and wisdom with our Elders and youth during the conference. To submit a proposal for this year's conference, go to [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/25EY\\_Propsals](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/25EY_Propsals). Proposals are due July 18. To register for the conference, go to <https://tinyurl.com/2025EYC>.

# Legal intern to join Fairbanks office this summer

Senior Voice Staff

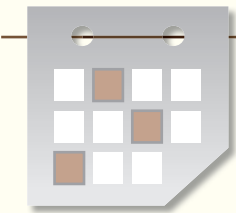
The Alaska Legal Services Corp. is welcoming a summer intern at its Fairbanks office. The intern is part of the Rural Summer Legal Corps (RSLC), a partnership between LSC and Equal Justice Works. Each summer, law student fellows join LSC-funded legal aid organizations to support clients in underserved rural areas. RSLC training started in late May with interns from across the country. From helping survivors of domestic violence to advocating for veterans and seniors, these fellows will provide legal assistance this summer. Many rural communities in the United States are "legal

deserts"—areas with a critical shortage of lawyers and legal resources. More than 70 rural communities in the United States have been helped by Rural Summer Legal Corps fellows. Between 2017 and 2021, 190 fellows served nearly 7,000 rural community members, including 1,183 agricultural workers, 735 survivors of domestic violence, 1,600 seniors, 230 veterans, and more. Each fellow spent, on average, 90 hours over the summer providing direct legal services to the community. This can include outreach and education activities, work on client cases, client intake, and assisting with legal clinics. Learn more: [www.lsc.gov/initiatives/rural-summer-legal-corps](http://www.lsc.gov/initiatives/rural-summer-legal-corps).

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# Calendar of Events

- June 1 Nationwide** National Cancer Survivors Day.
- June 1 Palmer** Stallions of the North. A parade of stallions that live in Alaska. This free event begins at 12 noon. <https://www.alaskastatefair.org/site/stallions-of-the-north/>
- June 3 Statewide** The University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service is having a webinar titled "Warming things up with plastic, glass and plastic mulch" 5:30-6:30 p.m. These gardening classes started in April, but there are still some left in June. Join the classes each Tuesday via Zoom. Visit <https://bit.ly/AlaskaGardening> to register. Can't make a class? Preregister and a link to the video will be emailed to you after the class.
- June 6 JBER** Annual picnic for 5,000 service members and their families.
- June 1-30 Nationwide** Gun Violence Awareness Month.
- June 14 Nationwide** Flag Day.
- June 15 Nationwide** Father's Day.
- June 19 Nationwide** Juneteenth. Commemorates the day in 1865 that enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned of their freedom. It is celebrated as a day of freedom, resilience, and a reminder of the struggle for equality and justice. It is now a federal holiday.
- June 20 Northern Hemisphere** Summer solstice. The astronomical start of summer. Those in the Southern Hemisphere are entering winter.
- June 24 Nikiski** A presentation from 1 to 2 p.m. on communicating effectively with your senior from Cindy Harris from the Alzheimer's Association.
- June 25 Anchorage** Title Wave Books, 1360 W. Northern Lights Blvd., is having a book talk from 5:30 to 7 p.m. featuring Holly Miowak Guise's book "Alaska Native Resilience: Voices from World War II." Hear about the writing process from the author. This book talk is open to the public. Guise is an Iñupiaq historian from Anchorage and family from Unalakleet.
- June 27 Nationwide** Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Day.
- June 28 Nationwide** Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising in New York, which led to the LGBTQ+ rights movement and Pride events throughout the month of June. The Anchorage Pride parade begins at 11:30 a.m. on the Delaney Park Strip, West Ninth Avenue. Other events take place this month in Fairbanks, Homer, Seward, Valdez and other communities.
- June 30 Alaska** The early-bird deadline for registration in the Alaska International Senior Games is at midnight. <https://www.alaskaisg.org/games/registration/>



## Send us your calendar items

Send to: Senior Voice  
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[calendar@seniorvoicealaska.com](mailto:calendar@seniorvoicealaska.com) or [editor@seniorvoicealaska.com](mailto:editor@seniorvoicealaska.com)  
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# A bar bet births a beloved baseball tradition in Fairbanks

By LAUREL DOWNING BILL  
Senior Voice Correspondent

One of the most cherished traditions in the world of baseball began as a bar bet between two saloon owners at the turn of the last century when Fairbanks was a small gold rush town. The stakes? Bragging rights for the entire winter.

According to local lore, the first “High Noon at Midnight Classic” was played on June 21, 1906, between the Eagle’s Club and the California Bar. Led by Eddie Stoecker, who became known as “Father of the Midnight Sun Game,” the score ended with the Eagles falling to California 7-4.

“Tell this to your friends when you go outside,” The Fairbanks Daily Times wrote the next morning. “Say to them that on June 21, while you were in Fairbanks you attended a game of baseball that started at 11 o’clock at night and ended at 12:30 the morning after.”

This extraordinary event has continued to captivate fans and players alike for more than a century. Although, after that first game, “outsiders” were brought in to take on the Fairbanks team, according to the Alaska Goldpanners’ website.

The Goldpanners, a collegiate summer league team, became host of the games in 1960, which brought this unique event to the attention of baseball fans worldwide and marked the beginning of a new era for the midnight game. The team elevated its profile and attracted talent from across the nation. The book “Baseball America” has called it one of the “12 must-see events for the baseball fan.”

The game’s timing is made possible by Fairbanks’ geographical location, just 160 miles south of the Arctic Circle. On the summer solstice, the sun barely sets, providing enough natural light for the entire game to be played without artificial lighting. The first pitch is typically thrown at 10:30 p.m., and as the game progresses, the sun dips slightly below the horizon before rising again, creating a surreal and magical atmosphere.

Over the years, the Midnight Sun Game has attracted teams from around the world. In 1967, a team from Japan participated, and in 1984, a Taiwanese team took part in this nocturnal spectacle. These international matchups have added to the game’s mystique and global appeal.

The game also has seen its share of future baseball stars. Since taking over the hosting duties, the Alaska Goldpanners have sent more than 200 players to the major leagues. Notable alumni include Hall of Famers Tom Seaver and Dave Winfield, as well as Barry

Bonds and Terry Francona. This impressive roster of talent has further cemented the game’s significance in baseball lore.

One of the most cherished traditions of the Midnight Sun Game occurs during the half-inning closest to midnight. The game pauses, and spectators join in singing the “Alaska Flag Song,” a moment that encapsulates the spirit of the event.

The popularity of the Midnight Sun Game has grown steadily over the years. While regular Goldpanners’ games might draw a few hundred fans, the Midnight Sun Game routinely attracts crowds of 3,500 to 5,000 spectators. This surge in attendance transforms Growden Memorial Park into a hub of excitement and celebration.

In recent years, the Midnight Sun Game has faced challenges, including the cancellation of the 2020 game due to the COVID-19

**Dishin' It Up**

**Across**

1 Dermal development  
5 Mine entrance  
9 Elton John, e.g.  
12 Wrinkle remover  
13 Speeds  
15 Relocate  
16 In order  
17 Side dish  
19 Tank filler  
20 Stage signal  
21 Whopper toppers  
22 Mezzo Berganza  
25 Tie the knot  
26 Hideous  
27 Blockhead  
29 Half a sawbuck  
32 Son of Seth  
33 Respond  
35 Treat like a dog?  
36 Carnival city  
37 Club alternative  
38 \_\_\_ Cruces, N.M.  
39 Links letters  
40 Common contraction  
41 Preoccupy  
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44 Maiden name  
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46 Genesis locale  
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48 Raptors  
51 Part of 37 Across  
54 Bubble source  
55 High card  
58 Sweet and sour dessert  
61 Channel marker  
62 Lubricates  
63 Brings in

**Down**

1 Annex  
2 \_\_\_ 51  
3 Fowl entree  
4 Cable channel  
5 Bicker  
6 Challenges  
7 Hotel amenity  
8 Casual attire  
9 Without help  
10 Nobelist Pavlov  
11 Roulette bets  
14 Chinese veggies, usually  
15 Domestic  
18 Bad looks  
20 Bawl  
23 1997 U.S. Open champ  
24 Pop-ups, e.g.  
26 Bind  
28 Night fliers  
29 Side dish  
30 Israeli statesman, once  
31 State (Fr.)  
32 One of the Waltons  
33 Tuna sandwich type  
34 Airline investigators (Abbr.)  
37 Colombian city  
42 Compass pt.  
43 “Fables in Slang” author  
46 Nightmarish street  
47 Applies lightly  
49 Winery process  
50 Estimate  
51 Walked over  
52 Mississippi feeder  
53 Stubborn beast  
56 Robin Cook thriller  
57 Ogled  
59 Cave dweller  
60 Country club figure  
61 Slot machine symbol



Summer solstice baseball games played in Fairbanks during the early 1900s may not have drawn the huge crowds they do today, but they were just as intense.  
Alaska State Library

pandemic. However, the resilience of the Fairbanks community was evident as a local adult league staged an All-Star Game to keep the tradition alive, albeit in a modified form.

From its humble beginnings as a bar bet to its status as an internationally recognized event, the Midnight Sun Game has become a symbol of Alaska’s spirit and a reminder that even in the land of the midnight sun, the crack of the bat and the roar of the crowd can still bring a community together.

This column features tidbits found while researching Alaska’s colorful past for Aunt Phil’s Trunk, a six-book Alaska history series written by Laurel Downing Bill and her late aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson. The books are available at bookstores and gift shops throughout Alaska, as well as online at [www.auntphilstrunk.com](http://www.auntphilstrunk.com).

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Crossword answers on page 26





# 20 years of fish tendering from Ketchikan to Nome

By ANNE WINTERS

I get so excited when someone from my past contacts me about visiting Alaska for the first time. I revert to my travel agent days and have to restrain myself from boring them with minutia about all of the beautiful and diverse towns I've seen along the coast of Alaska.

For 20 years my husband and I lived aboard and operated two beautiful old wooden salmon tenders. It was always Ron's dream to get into tendering for the commercial fishing industry. Tenders don't catch fish; we haul fish. After I met Ron in Homer in the mid-1980s, he persuaded me that this was going to be a fun adventure. We could make a living, work from May to October, have the winters off, tie up wherever it felt right and see all of coastal Alaska. We decided to pursue the dream, sold our land-locked assets packed up the dogs and moved on board the M/V Mutual (built in 1920). Our first season was marred by the Exxon Valdez oil spill and instead of packing fish, we ended up being a "hotel" boat for the clean-up effort on the outside of the Kenai Peninsula. After that we were able to secure contracts from various fish processors around the state and the real ocean-going adventure began.



*For 20 years, Anne and Ron Winters lived aboard and operated two old wooden salmon tenders. Their first season was marred by the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Instead of packing fish, the couple offered their vessel as a kind of hotel for the clean-up effort. After that they were able to secure contracts with fish processors and the real adventure began.*

*Photos courtesy Anne Winters*

We packed fish out of Cordova. We hauled fish into Kodiak. We spent time in the Homer harbor and Cook Inlet. We filled the holds with halibut on a trip from Hoonah to Seattle. We dipped our toes into the dive fisheries in southeast Alaska and spent a few weeks one October being a floating live-tank for abalone destined for the Japanese market from Ketchikan.

We lost the Mutual to a fire in July 1992, but that devastating and scary part of the adventure didn't dull our desire to maintain our ocean-bound lifestyle. We immediately bought a 90-foot power scow, the Bering (built 1945) and

subsequently broadened our horizons. The boat was much more versatile and efficient in the fisheries than the Mutual had been, and we were able to secure contracts farther north and west. Our first season on the Bering was spent packing herring in Prince William Sound, and then moving onto Kodiak, down Shelikof Strait, through False Pass and up to Togiak. After the herring season, we ventured around the corner, into the ice, and on to Norton Sound. A whole new world. Although I'd spent several winters working with the Iditarod Trail Committee and visiting checkpoints along the race route back in the late '70s, I'd never experienced that country when it wasn't covered in ice and snow. We got to work with fishermen out of Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Saint Mary's, White Mountain and even took the boat to Nome and beyond. I have happy memories of stops in Brevig Mission and a windy night

spent waiting for deliveries in Port Clarence.

The Bering was well suited to the shallower, sand-bar riddled waters of Bristol Bay and we did our time during several summers packing fish into Dillingham and Naknek. We usually had a minimal crew aboard – Ron, myself and one deckhand. Some contracts, especially in Bristol Bay, required us to have a fourth hand. It was hard work and sometimes dangerous work. Rough seas, high winds, long, long hours were typical and exhausting. I had to add an entire new list of abilities to my resume – first mate, cook, painter, deck hand. I always ended the summer 20 pounds lighter than I started. It was a good life.

Winter time was our respite from the summer chaos. If we had heavy boat work to do, exten-

sive repairs or repowering needs, for example, we had no choice but to head for Seattle. But, if possible, we liked to stay in Alaska and tried to see different ports during our off time. We spent winters in Cordova, in Homer, in Wrangell, Petersburg, Ketchikan, Sitka and Craig. My address book is still full of wonderful friends we made along the way—fellow live-aboards or locals who welcomed us to their communities.

I lost Ron in 2022, but the memories of our 20 years on the boats get me through some lonely times. It was a young person's lifestyle for sure and my bones still feel the effects all these years later. Now I'm confined to a part-time office job, but I wouldn't change the past for anything. And I can tell my friends lots about coastal Alaska.

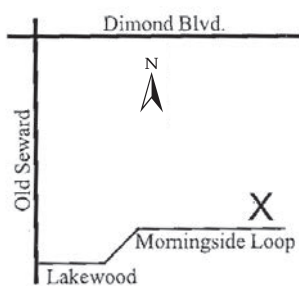


*The Mutual was built in 1920 and was originally used as a trap tender in southeast Alaska. When the ship was lost to a fire, the couple purchased the newer Bering, which had been used as a military transport vessel.*

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# Go by the book when planning what your heirs should know

By KENNETH KIRK

For Senior Voice

“Can you write up some instructions for my heirs, telling them everything they need to do when I’m gone?”

I get asked this question periodically and the answer is always no. There are so many things a person has to do when their loved one has passed that I would have to write up more than just a few pages. In fact, given that circumstances may have changed by the time the client is deceased, in order to cover all the possibilities, I would basically have to write a book.

I suppose I could write a book, and title it something like “What To Do When Your Loved One Dies In Alaska,” but then I would have to constantly update the book, and I wouldn’t have time to do other things like, say, practice law.

This reticence is not because I’m so anal that I must cover everything in great detail. It’s because there are so many variations on the question. For instance, did this person have a will? Did they have a living trust? Was there a surviving spouse? Are any of the beneficiaries underage? Did they own any real estate? Did they die in an accident? I could go on and on, but you get the point.

There is one task, though, that is universal for all survivors. Someone is going to have to check their accounts.

Back in the day, most people just had one account, typically at a bank. Today almost everyone has multiple accounts. One person might have a bank account for their personal checking, a credit union where they have some money in certificates of deposit, a brokerage account for their 401k, some investments with a different brokerage, and an account at another credit union they used to finance their



car loan. And when that person dies, somebody is going to have to check every one of those accounts, regardless of what estate planning arrangements they have made.

The good news is, it isn’t that difficult. One of the heirs has to get some original death certificates, which are usually ordered for them by the funeral home, and go around to the various branches to find out what they have. Of course, this is assuming they know what institutions the deceased had accounts with; in today’s world of paperless statements, that isn’t always easy. You should have a list somewhere that shows all of your accounts.

The difficult part is that what that financial institution tells you, when you show them the death certificate, can be confusing. There are a lot of different ways any given account can be passed along to heirs. So as a free preview of the book I’ll probably never write, here are the possibilities:

**Joint with right of survivorship.** If it is a joint account, assuming the other owner is still alive, that person is entitled to the account. It doesn’t matter if there is a will, trust, or other arrangements. Since this overrides everything else, if you put somebody on an account with you, be careful how you do that.

**In a living trust.** When people create a trust, they sometimes put their accounts directly into the trust. In that case, the terms of the trust will control what happens with

**First, you need to check your TOD’s regularly. Your monthly or quarterly statements are not going to show who is on there, and people often misremember who they designated. Second, if the account is tax-deferred, such as an IRA, 401k, or TSP, the heirs will have to pay income tax on that, so they need to be careful how they handle those funds.**

that account. The trust documents should say who the substitute or “successor trustee” will be, and that is who collects the funds from the account. The successor trustee then distributes or holds the funds according to the rules set out in the trust.

**Beneficiary designation.** When people open an account, they have the opportunity to designate a beneficiary on the account, also known as a TOD (transfer on death) or POD (payable on death). This could be one person, or it could be several people, or it could even be the living trust. If there are designated beneficiaries on the account, the institution will contact those folks directly to give them their inheritance.

Before I move on, there are two very important

points about TOD’s. First, you need to check your TOD’s regularly. Your monthly or quarterly statements are not going to show who is on there, and people often misremember who they designated. Second, if the account is tax-deferred, such as an IRA, 401k, or TSP, the heirs will have to pay income tax on that, so they need to be careful how they handle those funds. A mistake in how it is withdrawn can cost those heirs a lot more income tax than they should have had to pay.

**Affidavit for collection.** Sometimes none of the above applies; the account is just in one individual person’s name, not in a living trust, and there are no designated beneficiaries. In that case the financial institution will typically tell

you to get a court order. But before you start printing out the paperwork to open a probate case, try to find out whether the accounts add up to less than \$50,000. If they do, there is a small estate procedure called an “Affidavit for Collection of Personal Property” you may be able to use. It is done with a form from the Alaska Court System website and is pretty easy.

**Probate court.** This is the last resort. If none of these other options applies, you have to obtain orders from the probate court. That can be expensive and time-consuming, but it’s the final option when all else fails.

This is the short and simple (or if you prefer, “quick and dirty”) version. But it’s the starting point for almost everyone.

*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. “Kirk’s book is brilliant and witty” — Rex Beauregard, Wasilla Review of Books.*

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# Laser vs. inkjet printers, home thermostats, internet locksets

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

**Q. Which is best for home use, an inkjet or laser printer?**

A. The answer depends a great deal on what you want to print. There are tradeoffs that will narrow down your options quickly.

If you want to print in color, inkjet is a clear winner. But color printing can be expensive. This reality will reveal itself slowly, around the time you discover the price for replacement ink cartridges. If you regularly print high-quality photo images, you'll find ink costs probably surpass the cost of a photo lab. It is a balance between cost and convenience.

Inkjet printers have one more limitation; they are most efficient when they are used often. At least once a day is ideal. Leaving the printer inactive for long periods will cause dry ink to build up, shortening the life of the hardware.

My point here is that the drawbacks of inkjet printers are not obvious until you own one. However, if you need convenient color photo printing, inkjets are the best option available.

Even better, if a local copy shop has an inkjet printer, you can pay-as-you-go and hop off the cartridge treadmill.

If you can avoid color, laser printers are the per-

fect tool. They are fast, inexpensive, and reliable. My Brother sub-\$200 wireless printer is almost 10 years old, uses plain copier paper, and only needs toner once every couple of years.

**Q. Is it possible to control my home thermostat from my smartphone?**

A. Yes. Home automation technology is still a mixed bag, but there are a few simple tasks that it has taken over in our household. One of them is the furnace.

The main challenge is the initial setup. It requires some solid troubleshooting skills and a lot of patience. You need to navigate several apps to get the configuration correct.

We installed an ecobee Smart Premium thermostat (ecobee.com) last winter, and it has been a solid upgrade over my ancient thermostat.

I chose the ecobee in part because my power company offered it for sale at a deep discount. That closed the deal, but I already had an ecobee on my shopping list because I liked its simplicity compared to other devices like the Nest Thermostat.

Now I can ask Siri to set the thermostat to a specific temperature or use the ecobee app on my phone. We also depend on a second sensor upstairs, so we can keep the master bedroom at a specific temperature

overnight rather than rely on a single sensor where the thermostat is mounted.

Based on our experience, the smart thermostat was a long overdue upgrade for us. It did take some patience during the initial setup, but the results have been worth the effort.

**Q. How well do voice-activated smart locks work on a home entry door?**

A. We are not yet in Star Trek territory where the door opens as you approach it, but it's close.

This first bit of advice is the most important: choose a smart lockset that also operates with a key. Voice control and other electronic methods require electricity. Use the smarts in smart locks as an accessory, not as a replacement for a simple key.

If you have installed a door lockset before, installing a smart lock will probably be easier than a smart thermostat.

When researching the best lock for your needs, go online first. In my town, the local home stores generally stock older models. Find the best one for you online and then see if it's available for purchase locally.

## Wander the Web

Here are my picks for worthwhile browsing this month:

### Eat This, NOT That!

Eat This has over 12,000 articles dedicated to helping you make better food choices. It covers grocery shopping, eating out, home cooking, and more.  
[eatthis.com/](http://eatthis.com/)

### Treehugger

Founded over 20 years ago, Treehugger is a vast source for information on sustainability, gardening, and environmental sensitivity.  
[treehugger.com/](http://treehugger.com/)

### Remember VHS Tapes?


This page is a VHS kitsch parade, everything from ancient titles to long lost brands  
[vaultofvhs.tumblr.com/](http://vaultofvhs.tumblr.com/)

Some of the early lock designs had issues, but newer models from Level (level.co) and Schlage (schlage.com) are excellent designs that will provide years of reliable service.

Before you consider a specific device, take stock of what you already have in your home. Does the front door have good Wi-Fi

coverage? Do you use Siri or Alexa? Can you replace just a deadbolt, or do you also need a new lockset? Do you already own a smartphone? The answers to each of these questions will put you on the road to success.

Bob has been writing about technology for over three decades. He can be contacted at [techtalk@bobdel.com](mailto:techtalk@bobdel.com).



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# Cranes and all manner of creature grace summer days

By **DIMITRA LAVRAKAS**

Senior Voice Travel  
Correspondent

Only a four-mile drive to Homer enters you into a world of birds.

At the Inspiration Ridge Preserve, walk through forests, bogs, meadows, ponds, and creeks, all part of the 693 acres of critical wildlife habitat best known for its visiting summer population of sandhill cranes.

The legacy stewardship of the property of Nina Faust and the late Ed Bailey is continued by the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, which offers guided tours.

The 1.5-hour tour covers about two miles at a leisurely pace and the 3-hour tour is close to three miles. The hikes are designed to accommodate various fitness levels.

1.5-hour tour: Adult (age 12+): \$20, Child: \$10, Senior (65+) \$15, Family (3-6) \$50. 3-Hour Tours: Adult \$35, Child \$15, Senior \$25, Family \$85.

The 1.5-hour tour runs from June to Labor Day 2025; four days a week at 11 a.m.

The 3-hour tour also runs from June to Labor Day for two days a week at 2:30 p.m.

In early September, the entire flock of cranes take to the air simultaneously, something I missed by four days.

Visit <https://akcoastalstudies.org/inspirationridge> for more information or call 907-235-6667.

## Near Homer

Off Homer is the bird-packed Gull Island. Owned by the Seldovia Native Corp., it is off-limits to landing with your boat—either use binoculars from your boat offshore or take a tour.

Like a scene out of Hitchcock's film "The Birds," more than 20,000 birds nest on the cliff faces as kittiwake, common guillemot, Brünnich's guillemot, pigeon guillemot, marbled murrelet, Kittlitz's murrelet, tufted puffin and horned puffin dive offshore for fish to feed the young ones.

There's also frolicking sea otters as well as visiting

pods of orcas and an occasional humpback whale.

Most tours are two or three hours and include other locations in Kachemak Bay.

For more information contact

Mako's Water Taxi, (907) 235-9055, [makoswa-tertaxis@gmail.com](mailto:makoswa-tertaxis@gmail.com)

Inlet Charters, (907) 435-1600, [inletcharters@gmail.com](mailto:inletcharters@gmail.com)

Bay Excursions, (907) 299-9999, <https://www.bayx.net>

Rainbow Tours, (907) 235-7272, <https://www.rainbowtours.net/kachemak-bay-tour>

Alaska Bearfest in Wrangell, July 30 to Aug. 3, includes bear biologists and researchers. Travel to Anan Creek for bear viewing, up the Stikine River, or to the LeConte Glacier. Wrangell offers opportunities for viewing other wildlife—bird, whales and marine mammals—as well as bears. Free guided nature and bird watching walks will be offered.

For more information and to contact Bearfest at 907-874-2998 or visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/>.

Catch your breath after the summer to gear up for the Alaska Bald Eagle Festival in Haines from Nov. 7 to 9.

Eagle viewing is in the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, along the Chilkat River from many stops on the Haines Highway (10-mile to 26-mile, with biggest concentration between 19- to 23-mile).

They dot the trees like so many lobbed tennis balls and stare down at you curiously from the trees as you drive through.

Some years there are more than 3,000 eagles along that stretch of the Chilkat River waiting on the late run of salmon.

It is the largest gathering of eagles in the world.

For more information go to the American Bald Eagle Foundation at <https://www.visithaines.com/events/annual-events/alaska-bald-eagle-festival/> or call 907-766-3094.

## Now travel north

The Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival, Aug. 18 to 24, with the main festival



A huge flock of sandhill cranes fly over from Portage Glacier, about 50 minutes from Anchorage.

Photos by Dimitra Lavrakas

weekend dates being Aug. 23 and 24, and takes place in Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks.

The festival is organized by the Friends of Creamer's Field in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Alaska Songbird Institute and the Arctic Audubon Society.

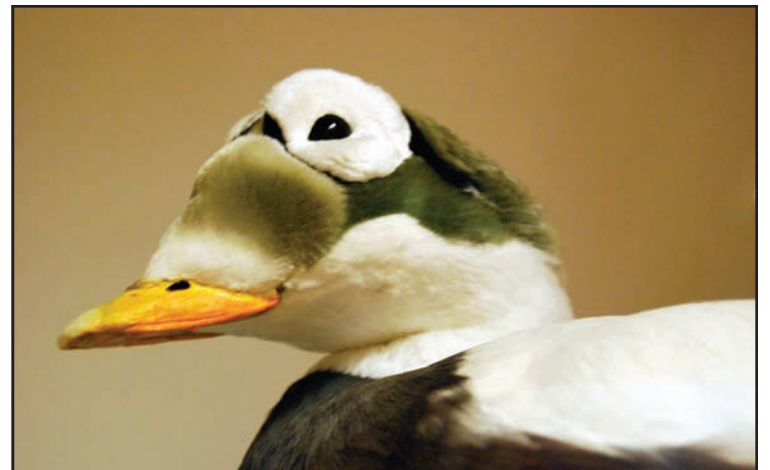
Each August, thousands of sandhill cranes begin their southward passage from Alaska and Siberia. And Creamer's is the heart of daily crane tallies topping 1,000. Fall staging is late August and early September. Again, watch them fly out in unison!

There's nature walks, bird and wildlife viewing, photography, workshops, kids' activities, silent auction, food, and a chance to win Alaska Airlines tickets.

For information visit the Friends of Creamer's Field website or call (907) 978-8457.

Travel above the Arctic Circle to Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow) for the Utqiagvik Migratory Bird Festival June 13-15, a part of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Directorate Fellows Program initiative, is a collaboration between Audubon Alaska, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for an educational migratory and shorebird-centered experience.

Activities include educational games and other activities for kids of all ages, bird tours for birders



Maybe you'll get to see the spectacled eider at the Utqiagvik Migratory Bird Festival.

of all levels, an artist workshop, and speakers from all over the world sharing their knowledge on shorebird and avian science and

cultural importance

For more information go to <https://www.facebook.com/utqbirdfest>.

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# Tour a nuclear missile site that overlooks Anchorage

By LAWRENCE D. WEISS

For Senior Voice

Mount Gordon Lyon is in the Chugach Mountains about 14 miles northeast of Anchorage. You can see it with the naked eye. Look closer. See the steeply ascending slash across the entire mountain, from the bottom left to the top right? That is the road to the top. Very narrow, a largely useless guardrail when there is one at all, not for the squeamish. It leads to where they stationed the nuclear weapons.

Perched on the very top of the mountain, also visible to the naked eye, are two white domes, one taller than the other. These are former radar towers left over from the days when there were 14 nuclear-tipped Nike Hercules missiles up there. More about that in a moment.

But if you still can't identify the mountain, surely you have seen the lighted star on the side of Mount Gordon Lyon in the winter. Originally built by a few bored soldiers stationed at Nike Site Summit in the late 1950s, it has be-



A docent explains how the Nike Hercules missile sites in Alaska worked during the Cold War.

Photo by Lawrence Weiss

come a tradition ever since. You can see it from all over Anchorage because it is as big as a football field and lit by 300 LED bulbs.

Mount Gordon Lyon used to be taller until the 1950s when the military blasted off the top 60 feet, removing 25,000 cubic yards of rock to make it

flatter. They did that to build a Nike missile base on the nice new flat-topped mountain. And why do that? The Cold War, of course.

The military envisioned hordes of Soviet bombers armed with nuclear weapons swarming toward the United States, flying right

over Alaska on their way to the Lower 48. As a result, Alaska was home to three batteries of Nike Hercules missiles designed to blast commie bombers out of the sky. Each missile was 41 feet long and weighed about 10,000 pounds. It traveled 3,000 miles per hour, could climb to more than 100,000 feet, and had a range of about 75 miles. It typically carried a 20 or 40 kiloton warhead—up to three times more powerful than the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Site Summit (B Battery) was located on top of Mount Gordon Lyon in the Chugach Mountains. It was home to 14 nuclear-tipped missiles and all the necessary infrastructure.

And here's the best part—you can go up there

for a tour. You'll see guard posts, the dog kennels where guard dogs lived, bunkers where nuclear weapons were stored, other bunkers where Nike Hercules missiles were at the ready to be launched in minutes when needed, and buildings that housed the electronics that controlled radar systems.

Of course, the star of the show is a genuine Nike Hercules missile in its "cradle" on the floor of the bunker right in front of you. Go ahead, touch it. Finally, if you are not surrounded by an impenetrable, ominous fogbank, you'll see fantastic views of Anchorage and environs.

The entire site is a restricted military area. Park

page 26 please



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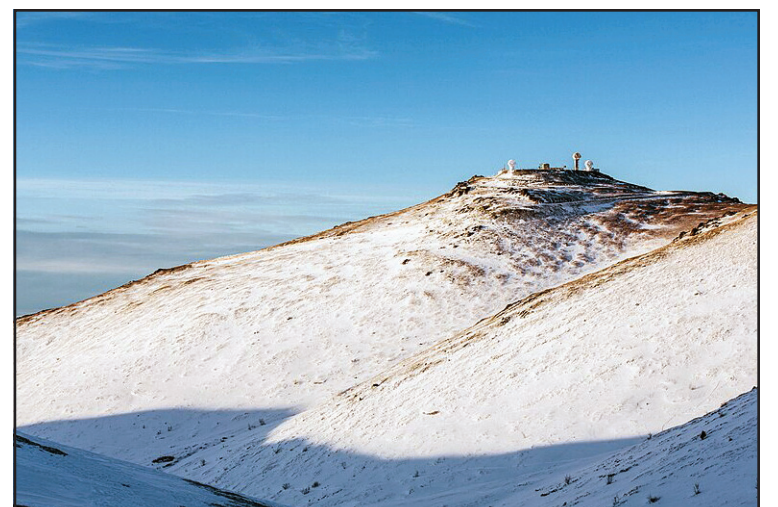
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The Nike Summit site in Arctic Valley as seen from Rendezvous Pass. In addition to the bus tour in Arctic Valley there is one in Kincaid Park in Anchorage, where other Nike Hercules missiles were placed defend major military installations in Alaska during the Cold War.

Photo Wikipedia, by Will Koeppen





# Quilters gain expertise while crafting for community

By **CHERYL HOMME**

For Senior Voice

The Valley Quilters Guild (VQG) is a nonprofit organization committed to enhancing the educational and charitable aspects of quilting. The mission of Valley Quilters Guild is to promote quilt-making and foster an appreciation for quilts while enhancing members' knowledge of quilting techniques and history. One of the significant enterprises this year benefits Quilts of Valor® (QOV) which operates in the Mat-Su Borough through two dedicated groups: The Forget-Me-Not Quilters of Alaska and Valley Quilts of Valor. The primary aim of QOV is to create and present unique, handmade quilts to veterans and active-duty service



Pexels photo

members, offering them comfort and healing. Notably, local QOV groups do not receive funding from the national foundation; instead, they rely solely on generous donations from the local community.

These organizations, along with the Bright Lights Book Project (BLBP) are collaborating for a

fundraising event during Colony Days to support their missions. On Saturday, June 14, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., a small quilt auction will take place at the Eagle Hotel in Palmer, 918 S Colony Way. The auction will feature both in-person silent bidding and an online bidding option, with all proceeds benefiting the two local QOV groups. This event is particularly significant as it honors and recognizes the contributions of local veterans, many of whom are senior citizens.

A highlight of the auction is a special commemorative quilt created by VQG members in 2001 to cele-

brate the 50th anniversary of Palmer's incorporation. Featuring iconic buildings from Palmer's past, this custom-made quilt will be auctioned (along with many other quilts, books, and more). The Palmer Historic Buildings Quilt has been on display in various historic locations around Palmer in the weeks leading up to the event, allowing the community to appreciate its artistic and historical value.

This patriotic event on June 14 coincides not only with Flag Day but also commemorates significant anniversaries, including the 90th of the Palmer Colony, the 40th of Valley Quilters Guild, the 22nd of Quilts of Valor, and the fifth of the Bright Lights Book Project.

The national Quilts of Valor Foundation, founded by Catherine Roberts, was inspired by her personal experience with her deployed son. Her journey began with a dream where a soldier found peace in a quilt, leading to a movement dedicated to comforting service members across the nation. Since then, QOV has grown to

include more than 10,000 members and has awarded 408,000 quilts nationwide, including nearly 5,000 in Alaska alone.

In addition to providing comfort, these quilts offer numerous benefits to senior citizens. Engaging in quilting as a hobby can enhance cognitive function, reduce feelings of isolation, and boost mood through creative expression. Participating in community quilting activities fosters social connections, allowing seniors to bond with others and share their stories and experiences.

Anyone interested in these activities to attend Valley Quilters Guild meetings at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of every month at the Palmer Train Depot.

For more information or to get involved in VQG, QOV, and/or BLBP, please reach out to Cheryl Homme at 907-355-2134, Patty Livingston at 907-354-0919, Jana Berna at 907-795-5386, or Susan Franznick at 907-315-3519. Join us in supporting our veterans and promoting literacy while enjoying the enriching community experience that quilting fosters.

## What's it like being a raven or a crow?

The Conversation

Many of us as children may have wondered what's going on inside the mind of an animal—what are they thinking and feeling? Most animal researchers study science because of their fascination with animals, but for a long time scientific norms made it impossible to even raise the question of animal consciousness without losing scientific credibility.

Fortunately, those days have ended, thanks in large part to pioneering work by scientists such as Donald Griffin, who argued from the 1980s to his death in 2003 that animal minds should be a topic for scientific study.

We are philosophers who study consciousness, and in our recent research we worked with other scientists to explore what the world might be like from the point of view of corvids, the family of birds that includes ravens, crows, jays and magpies.

"Birdbrain" used to be a common insult but corvids have such surprising intelligence that they are sometimes described by scientists and journalists as "feathered apes". But we wanted

to go beyond intelligence. To do this we examined five dimensions of their experience by combing through studies on their behavior, cognition, brains, emotions and consciousness.

Corvids' eyes have incredibly sharp resolution that allows them to navigate while flying at high speeds and to find potential sources of food. Their hearing is excellent allowing them to even distinguish reliable from unreliable group members by assessing and remembering their alert calls.

They also have a good sense of smell, which they use to help them find nuts and other food they have hidden.

Corvids show cognitive biases, similar to humans. They have negative moods and show signs of pessimism after observing similar states in others. But they also show positive moods after successfully using tools—just like humans.

Read the full article on The Conversation [https://the-conversation.com/whats-it-like-being-a-raven-or-a-crow-257171?utm\\_source=firefox-newtab-en-us](https://the-conversation.com/whats-it-like-being-a-raven-or-a-crow-257171?utm_source=firefox-newtab-en-us). Republished under a Creative Commons license.

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# Volunteer and Medicare hospice differences

By AMY TRIBBETT

For Senior Voice

Hospice is not a place. And hospice care is not just about those who are dying. Hospice is a comprehensive, compassionate kind of care that focuses on living—hospice is about living as fully as possible, surrounded by family and friends, up until the end of life. Palliative care brings this special philosophy of care to people earlier in the course of a serious illness. Did you know that Hospice of Anchorage is a volunteer hospice? Did you know there are three Medicare hospice providers serving Anchorage and the surrounding areas as well?

### What is a volunteer hospice and what does that mean for you?

Because Hospice of Anchorage is not a Medicare-certified hospice provider, access to our services differs from Providence Hospice, Ancora Hospice and Enhabit Hospice (the three Medicare hospice providers in the Anchorage area).



*Hospice is a comprehensive, compassionate kind of care that focuses on living—hospice is about living as fully as possible, surrounded by family and friends, up until the end of life. Here, a younger sister hugs her older sister.*  
Photo by Paola Banchemo

### Making a referral to hospice care

If you are earlier in the course of a terminal life-limiting illness and/or are still undergoing treatment but need some guidance and support, please call Hospice of Anchorage. We can help you and your loved ones navigate your diagnosis, connect you with community resources, and provide social services as well as nurse education.

If you or a loved one are no longer pursuing curative

treatment, do not want to return to the hospital, and have been given a diagnosis with a life expectancy of six months or less, you should call a Medicare-certified hospice. Most importantly, do not wait. What we hear most often from those on our service is, “I wish I would have called sooner.”

### What services are offered?

Hospice of Anchorage offers care provided by a team of professionals and

trained volunteers, and includes emotional spiritual support, information, education, in-home practical assistance and companionship, assessment, and coordination of community resources. We make referrals to Medicare hospice or other home care providers and provide volunteers when care needs increase. Hospice of Anchorage coordinates with other providers for needed medications and equipment and provides limited in-home respite and chore services for those who qualify for our State of Alaska funded Senior-In-Home grant program.

Supervision of medical care remains with the individual’s provider.

Grief support is available to anyone in the community through phone calls and mailings. Individualized support is available for families of Hospice of Anchorage clients.

Providence Hospice, Ancora Hospice and Enhabit Hospice provide care in the person’s place of residence by a team of professionals (RN case managers, chaplain, licensed clinical social worker or licensed master social worker, medical director, and certified nursing assistants) and trained volunteers. They also provide:

- After-hours coverage with as-needed access to RN and physician
- Medications related to pain and symptom management (per formulary) and Durable Medical Equipment, per basic equipment list (all other requests considered on a case-by-case basis)
- Four levels of care: Routine in-home care; continuous care; general in-patient care; in-patient respite care
- Supervision of medical care can remain with the individual’s provider or can transfer to the Hospice’s medical director
- One year of bereavement support after the death

### Who is eligible?

Hospice of Anchorage serves individuals of all ages (from before birth to 101+) with a limited life expectancy and their support networks; provides support to families and caregivers even when an individual declines care; will serve

those who are continuing to receive palliative or curative treatments or go to their provider or hospital for care.

Providence Hospice, Ancora Hospice and Enhabit Hospice generally do not admit individuals receiving ongoing medical treatments/hospitalization for their illness. Medicare does have specific medical indicators/criteria that must be present to qualify for the Medicare Hospice Benefit. A physician must sign a “certification of terminal illness” (CTI).

### Who can make a referral?

For Hospice of Anchorage, anyone can make a referral. A referral/admission order from a health care provider is not needed. However, our team will request a verification of diagnosis (VOD) from your physician.

For Providence Hospice, Ancora Hospice, Enhabit Hospice, a referral/admission order is needed from a health care provider.

### How do I pay for hospice care?

At Hospice of Anchorage, there is no fee for care. Services are funded primarily by community donations and gifts of volunteer time.

At Providence Hospice, Ancora Hospice, Enhabit Hospice, hospice care is 100% covered by Medicare, as well as by most Medicaid and commercial insurances.

If this information about hospice surprises you, or raises more questions, take the time to find out more. The best time to learn about hospice care is before someone in your family is facing a health care crisis.

**Hospice of Anchorage,** 907-561-5322

**Providence Anchorage Hospice,** 907-212-4400

**Ancora Hospice Anchorage,** 907-561-0700

**Ancora Hospice Wasilla,** 907-561-9240

**Enhabit Hospice,** 907-272-1275

Amy Tribbett is a prior executive director of Hospice of Anchorage. Susie Smith is the current executive director of Hospice of Anchorage. Note: This article first ran July 1, 2021 and has been updated with current information.

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**Anchorage Senior Activity Center**  
1300 E. 19th Avenue, Anchorage  
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**Wasilla Senior Center**  
1301 South Century Circle, Wasilla  
June 17, July 8, Aug 4 | 9:30–11:30 a.m.

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# Nuclear

continued from page 23

at the Arctic Valley Ski Area parking lot where you board a bus for the final leg up the mountain to the Nike complex. The buildings are spread around the top of the mountain, so the bus carts you around to the different points of interest. Every facility you visit has one or more docents, often guys who were stationed there when the site was active. They give you the real scoop about what life was like on the mountain year-round.

The docents tell you stories that maybe you would be just as happy to have not heard. For example, each missile was stored in a horizontal cradle ready for raising to an almost perpendicular attitude prior to launch. Every day a man would run his hands all over each nuclear warhead, kind of like an enthusiastic greeting of the family dog. But his purpose was different, a bit more sinister.



An oscilloscope used at the Nike Hercules site on Mount Gordon Lyon used to graphically display electrical signals.

Photos by Lawrence Weiss

He was looking for warm spots which he fervently hoped he would not find. They would indicate the beginning of unwanted nuclear reaction.

Like to see the old Nike site for yourself? Here's how to do it. Visit: nikesite-summit.net where you will find detailed information about the site and about how to sign up for a tour. Alternatively, you can call 907-717-0117, or visit Facebook: Friends of Nike



There are bus tours and hiking tours of the site, but the hiking tours book up early. They go through most of August.

Site Summit. Participants should wear sturdy shoes with good ankle support and bring appropriate

clothing for ever-changing weather at Arctic Valley. By the way, they tell us the site is fully decom-

missioned but, ummm, if I were you I wouldn't press any buttons or pull any levers. Just saying.

## U.S. House Republicans pass bill slashing Medicaid

By JENNIFER SHUTT and ASHLEY MURRAY  
Alaska Beacon

WASHINGTON—The U.S. House approved the “big, beautiful bill” on May 22 that Republican leaders spent months negotiating with centrists and far-right members of the party—two distinct factions that hold vastly different policy goals—over intense oppo-

sition from Democrats. The 215-214 vote ships the package to the Senate, where GOP lawmakers are expected to rewrite much of it, before sending it back across the Capitol for final approval, a process likely to stretch through the summer. President Donald Trump, who said he backed the House version, would then need to sign the legislation, which under the complicat-

ed process being used by Republicans can pass with just a majority vote in the GOP-controlled Senate. Speaker Mike Johnson said minutes before the vote that he expects lawmakers to give the measure final approval before the Fourth of July. “Now, look, we’re accomplishing a big thing here today, but we know this isn’t the end of the road just yet,” Johnson, R-La., said. “We’ve been working closely with Leader (John) Thune and our Senate colleagues, the Senate Republicans, to get this done and delivered to the president’s desk by our Independence Day. That’s July 4. Today proves that we can do that, and we will do that.” House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., argued against the legislation, saying it “undermines reproductive freedom, undermines the progress that we have made in combating the climate crisis, undermines the rule of law and the independence of the federal judiciary. It even undermines the ability of hard-working

and law-abiding immigrant families to provide remittances to their loved ones, who may just happen to live abroad.” Jeffries raised concerns with how the proposals in the bill would impact the economy and the federal government’s financial stability. “Costs aren’t going down. They’re going up. Inflation is out of control. Insurance rates remain stubbornly high,” Jeffries said. “Our Moody’s rating, our credit rating, has been downgraded, and you’ve got people losing confidence in this economy. Republicans are crashing this economy in real time and driving us toward a recession.” Alaska’s sole representative, Nick Begich, voted in favor of the bill. Ohio’s Warren Davidson and Kentucky’s Thomas Massie were the only Republicans to vote against passing the bill, which members debated throughout the night prior to the vote just after daylight in the nation’s capital. All Democrats, who dubbed it “one big ugly bill,” were

opposed. Maryland GOP Rep. Andy Harris, chairman of the Freedom Caucus, voted “present.” Massie spoke against the bill, calling it “a debt bomb ticking.” The legislation would: 

- Extend the 2017 tax law, including tax cuts for businesses and individuals;
- Bolster spending on border security and defense by hundreds of billions of dollars;
- Rework energy permitting;
- Restructure higher education aid such as student loans and Pell Grants;
- Shift some of the cost of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program food aid program for low-income Americans to state governments; and
- Overhaul Medicaid, the nation’s program for health care for low-income people and some people with disabilities.

 This story was first reported by the Alaska Beacon <https://alaskabeacon.com>. Alaska Beacon stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

### Crossword answers from page 18

W	A	R	T			A	D	I	T				S	I	R		
I	R	O	N			R	A	C	E	S			M	O	V	E	
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# Wildfire

continued from page 11

As a potentially vulnerable group to natural disasters, licensed facilities such as assisted living centers are required to submit emergency plans to the state and do quarterly disaster drills with older residents and the employees taking care of them, according to Alaska law.

However, the law is less clear for seniors living in independent housing.

What is clear is that wildfire prevention and planning starts with us. The AFD and other communities offer an inspection of your property to see if it is firewise, meaning firewood, trees and grass are cut back and managed. But we have to follow through and see to it that our neighbors do the same.

“The Anchorage emergency management community is always working together with partners to strengthen community disaster resilience,” Loach, the director of emergency management, said. “As part of recent preparations for both wildfire and the potential for an ashfall incident we worked with the public and multiple local, state, private industry, and federal agencies to update and share important preparedness messaging, plans, operational procedures, and methods of warning.”

A couple examples these partnerships: The Anchorage Health Department works with each senior activity center in the Municipality to maintain emergency plans. Salva-

tion Army of Alaska and other Alaska voluntary organizations have disaster experts the city works with in planning and response to share communitywide connections and resources every day and in the event of emergencies.

## Neighbor watching out for neighbor

In some communities, only one road goes in and out of the neighborhood. The houses surround Far North Bicentennial Park, full of spruce and birch trees. The Basher Community Council has a subcommittee specifically focused on resilience. It has created a community-specific emergency plan, a phone tree providing residents the contact information for nearby neighbors, a newsletter about emergency preparedness, and is helping other community councils develop resilience subcommittees.

## Time to build on momentum

As Alaska experienced one of its driest winters, fire officials across the state were holding their breath that this fire season could be worse than the record-breaking 2004 summer. Then, April showers brought down the risk of fire danger in the Municipality, said Aviva Braun, National Weather Service Warning Coordinator Meteorologist in Anchorage. While many signs indicate warming trends are ongoing, she is predicting a more normal fire season in Alaska in 2025.

Those better conditions could be fleeting. Preparing for wildfires takes resour-



Anchorage Mayor Suzanne LaFrance opens a community town hall about wildland fire prevention efforts on May 19.

Photo courtesy Travis Rector

## Be firewise

Sign up for text alerts by texting “Anchorage” to 67283. In Fairbanks, you can text FPDALERTS to 67283.

The Municipality recommends bookmarking trusted sources’ information outlets via website or social media. These organizations are committed to providing timely, accurate information to the public:

- ▶ Anchorage Police Department: <https://www.anchoragepolice.com/>
- ▶ Anchorage Fire Department: <https://www.muni.org/Departments/Fire/Pages/Default.aspx>
- ▶ Municipality of Anchorage: <https://www.muni.org>
- ▶ Office of Emergency Management: <https://www.muni.org/departments/oem/emergencymessages/pages/default.aspx>
- ▶ Anchorage Health Department:

<https://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Pages/default.aspx>

▶ State of Alaska: <https://ready.alaska.gov/>

▶ Follow the guidelines in the Ready, Set, Go guide. <https://www.muni.org/Departments/Fire/Wildfire/Pages/ReadySetGo.aspx>

Create a defensible space around your home, meaning firewood and vegetative fuels (trees and other growth) are cut back or removed if dead. See the Firewise Alaska guide for details.

Connect with the Anchorage Fire Department, which offers free property assessments. Check with your community to see if this is available. <https://www.muni.org/Departments/Fire/Wildfire/pages/firewisehomeassessments.aspx>

Work with your neighbors to enforce guidelines

es, and Anchorage is just beginning to rebuild its efforts. The federal funds secured by Sen. Murkowski for the AFD run out in 2027, and prospects for additional federal funding are unclear.

Anchorage Assembly

member Zac Johnson urged residents to stay engaged.

“Continue to advocate. We have so much momentum right now and we are doing so much more than we’ve done in the last 15 or 20 years,” he said at the

town hall. “But we need to make sure that we don’t lose sight of that. We might get lucky with the weather for a couple of years. We might start to get complacent. We just can’t let that happen.”

## Resources

- ▶ Firewise Alaska <https://forestry.alaska.gov/Assets/pdfs/home/firewise09.pdf>
- ▶ Alaska Interagency Coordination Center <https://fire.ak.blm.gov/>
- ▶ Municipality of Anchorage Comprehensive Emergency Operations Plan (available in several languages) <https://www.muni.org/Departments/OEM/Plans/pages/default.aspx>
- ▶ Anchorage Fire Department Wildfire Division <https://www.muni.org/Departments/Fire/Wildfire/Pages/Wildfire%20Home.aspx>
- ▶ Alaska Wildland Fire Information A comprehensive website with regular updates on fire activity. <https://akfireinfo.com/>
- ▶ Wildland-Urban Interface Community Action Team <https://sites.google.com/view/wuicat/home?authuser=0>

- ▶ Organizations like Access Alaska offer specialized emergency preparedness information and toolkits tailored for individuals with disabilities and seniors. <https://www.accessalaska.org/emergency-preparedness?rq=emergency%20preparedness>
- ▶ The "Get Ready! Toolkit" includes checklists and planning tools to assist in developing personalized emergency plans, ensuring that seniors and people with disabilities have the necessary support and information. <https://ready.alaska.gov/Documents/Preparedness/Outreach/Get-Ready!%20Alaska's%20emergency%20preparedness%20toolkit%20for%20people%20with%20disabilities.pdf>
- ▶ The Municipality of Anchorage provides comprehensive wildfire preparedness information, including guidelines on creating emergency kits, evacuation plans, and

property mitigation strategies located at this website: Preparedness Wildfire Preparedness. These resources are designed to be accessible and actionable.

- ▶ The Federal Emergency Management Agency has an older adult readiness guide: <https://www.ready.gov/older-adults>
- ▶ <https://ready.alaska.gov/Preparedness/CERT>
- ▶ <https://ready.alaska.gov/Operations/EAS>
- ▶ National Institutes of Health Protecting older adults from the effects of natural disasters and extreme weather <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/protecting-older-adults-effects-natural-disasters-and-extreme-weather>
- ▶ National Library of Medicine Wildfires and Older Adults: A Scoping Review of Impacts, Risks, and Interventions <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10341407/>





## Connecting Seniors, People with Disabilities and Caregivers with Long-Term Care Information & Services

- **Identify** your long-term support needs
- **Explore** your options for meeting those needs

- **Connect** you with the resources you choose for yourself or your loved one
- **Follow Up** to ensure your needs are met

### Anchorage

Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Health Department  
825 L St., Ste 200, Anchorage, AK 99501  
907-343-7770 [www.muni.org/adrc](http://www.muni.org/adrc)

### Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, Valdez-Cordova

Independent Living Center  
47255 Princeton Ave., Ste 8, Soldotna, AK 99669  
907-262-6333 | 800-770-7911 [www.peninsulailc.org/adrc](http://www.peninsulailc.org/adrc)

### Southeast Alaska

Southeast Alaska Independent Living Center (SAIL)  
8711 Teal St., Ste 300, Juneau, AK 99801  
1-800-478-SAIL (7245) [www.sailinc.org](http://www.sailinc.org)

### Mat-Su Borough

LINKS Resource Center  
777 N. Crusey St., Ste 101, Wasilla, AK 99654  
907-373-3632 [www.linksprc.org/adrc](http://www.linksprc.org/adrc)

### Fairbanks North Star, Southeast Fairbanks, Yukon-Koyukuk, Denali, North Slope

ADRC North - Fairbanks Senior Center  
1424 Moore St., Fairbanks, AK 99701  
907-452-2551 [www.adrcnorth.org](http://www.adrcnorth.org)

### Western Alaska-Aleutian Islands, Lake and Peninsula, Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Bethel, Kusilvak, Nome, Northwest Arctic

Bristol Bay Native Association [www.bbna.com/our-programs/social-service-programs/elderly-services/](http://www.bbna.com/our-programs/social-service-programs/elderly-services/)  
1500 Kanakanak Rd., Dillingham, AK 99576  
907-842-4139 | 800-478-4139



# 1-877-625-2372

The State of Alaska, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, administers the ADRC grant in partnership with the regional sites. Contact SDS at 1-800-478-9996 to learn about the grant program.



**AARP is hearing from thousands of older Americans who are concerned about their Social Security.**

We're urging Congress to protect and strengthen Social Security.

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