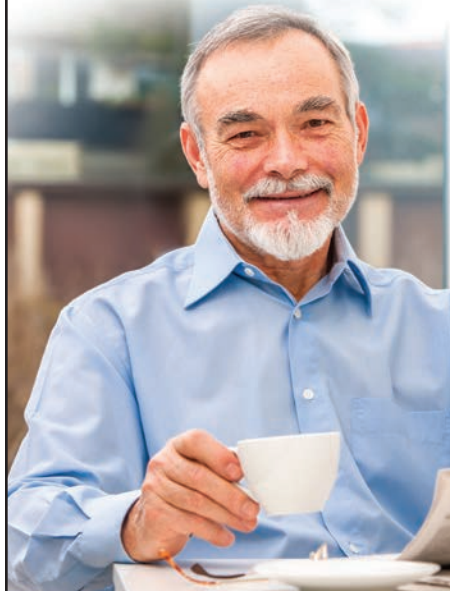
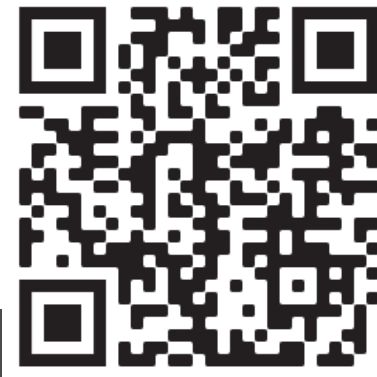


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Volume 49, Number 9 September 2026

AI-assisted eyeglasses are helping people who are blind or have low vision. - page 24

What is ultraprocessed food? - page 13

Savoring garden tours and summer's detours - page 14

2026 Statewide Summit on Aging takes place in October. - page 17

With Social Security uncertainty, should you claim benefits early? - page 28

Emilia Nidoy, a client at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, uses eyeglasses enhanced with artificial intelligence technology to help her navigate her life, including in the kitchen. - page 24

Photo by Carole Anderson



2025
National Mature
Media Awards
Winner



Fixed income: One disruption away from losing everything

By JESSICA PARKS

For Senior Voice

As people approach age 65, we hope they are thinking about retirement, Social Security benefits and how they want to spend the next chapter of life, not where they are going to lay their head. Yet in Anchorage, 361 of our neighbors age 65 and older experienced homelessness last year. And many others faced the scary prospect of being without a safe, stable place to live.

The good news? The number dropped by more than 20% between 2023 and 2025. Our community also has been expanding

resources for those 55 and older, such as the In Our Backyard transitional housing program and Q’et’en Qenq’a—Providence House, permanent supportive housing for those who have been homeless.

The loss of housing later in life can happen more easily than many of us realize. For someone on a fixed income, there isn’t always much room when the status quo is disrupted. Rent goes up. A partner dies, leading to a loss of their income. An unexpected car repair wipes out savings. Poor health may mean they can’t keep the same job, or any job. Find-

ing an affordable place can seem impossible.

And there is another number we should pay attention to. In 2025, 807 Anchorage residents between the ages of 55 and 64 experienced homelessness. They are approaching retirement age without a stable home.

At the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, we spend a lot of time thinking about what happens after someone becomes homeless—how people get connected to shelter, services and ultimately, housing. But with older adults, we need to ask an earlier question: What could have kept this person housed in the first place?

Not long ago, we helped a community member

whose apartment building was condemned. She was on a tight budget and had to scramble for a new place. We helped her find a more affordable apartment, and she secured an Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority mini-grant to cover the security deposit and first month’s rent.

Answers must be tailored to the person. Some need rental assistance. Some need help finding an appropriate and affordable apartment. Some need help navigating benefits or support after the loss of a spouse.

Be aware of risk factors for older adults. Is someone you know choosing between groceries and prescriptions? Are bills piling up? Look to your

local Aging & Disability Resource Center or call 2-1-1 for help.

Anyone who wants to help directly can do so at the upcoming Project Homeless Connect, our community’s largest resource fair for individuals experiencing homelessness. The event is set for Oct. 26 at the Egan Center. You can sign up to volunteer at aceh.org/phc.

When things go wrong, there should be somewhere to turn so that no one loses their housing. The older Anchorage residents who experienced homelessness last year remind us we aren’t there yet.

Jessica Parks is interim executive director for the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness.

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor:

I was so interested to read the article from Lawrence Weiss about driving around

Europe (and beyond) in the late ’60s and early ’70s.

I was living in England at the time and spent some time in Morocco with Minitrek (another similar organization to Encounter Overland). Basically, we drove around the country camping out in the desert, sometimes just on the ground as we didn’t feel like putting the tents up, and at other times we all bunked in small cheap hotels to have a bit of comfort — and a shower! Several friends did similar trips including one to Iran.

My trip inspired me to sign up for an Encounter Overland trip from London to Johannesburg which would take three months. To travel over the Sahara was a dream and well as traveling through several

central African countries including Central African Republic and Timbuktu (as a child I had thought this was an imaginary place).

EO had made this trip the previous year so they felt they had ironed out the bugs (bit of a mixed metaphor there). My contribution was that I spoke fluent French and had some experience of traveling in this way. In the event, I never went as I met my future husband and decided to get married instead. But I did make it to Johannesburg years later — albeit on a plane. Also traveled to Turkey in 1962 on a student train across Europe which was quite an adventure. Not sure students do these sorts of trips now, for a number of reasons.

And maps? They have always fascinated me. Before coming to live here in Anchorage a few years ago, had to part with many

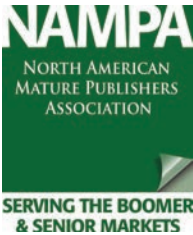
from all parts of the world. Fortunately, a teacher took them and was planning to use them in her elementary school classroom so hopefully they had a second life.

I got lost in Kenya once with an old map and had a plane to catch in Nairobi in the evening. A local village’s inhabitants came out to meet us and we had to shake hands with everyone.

No one could understand us or direct us to the road so we drove on. Eventually we reached a road and the hotel mentioned in the book “The Flame Trees of Thika,” which was a great relief and we caught our plane. I resolved never to travel with an old map again. Fun times indeed.

Sincerely,
Kristien Evans
Anchorage, Alaska

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Voice
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Corrections

An article about creative pursuits later in life in the August issue misstated a craft. It is paper quilling, not paper quilting.

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

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Consider the advantages and pitfalls of using AI chatbots for mental health support

By KAITLYN GAUB

For Senior Voice

Artificial intelligence is a rapidly growing technology with a wide variety of uses. An increasingly popular use of generative AI is as a form of mental health support.

The temptation is real, as one college student, Violet, found out.

"I try to avoid AI as much as possible. If I can use my own brain, I want to use my own brain. Except when it comes to venting. There have been periods of my life where I was in a very, very, very dark place with nobody to really talk to, who weren't going to meet me on the level I was craving, so I used AI," Violet said

But whether you use a general-purpose AI chatbot or one marketed as a mental wellness chatbot, you could be unintentionally putting yourself at risk.

If you use AI to vent about life stressors or try to treat a more serious behavioral health condition, there are some limitations to consider.

The American Psychological Association published a health advisory (<https://bit.ly/4bHEvid>) about the use of generative AI in November 2025. This article laid out a multitude of warnings and guidelines about the subject.

Children and teens could be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of using AI chatbots for "therapy."

According to research by RAND in June 2026 (<https://bit.ly/4gpSbRv>), 19.2% of adolescents and young adults, ages 12-21, in the United States have used generative AI for mental health support.

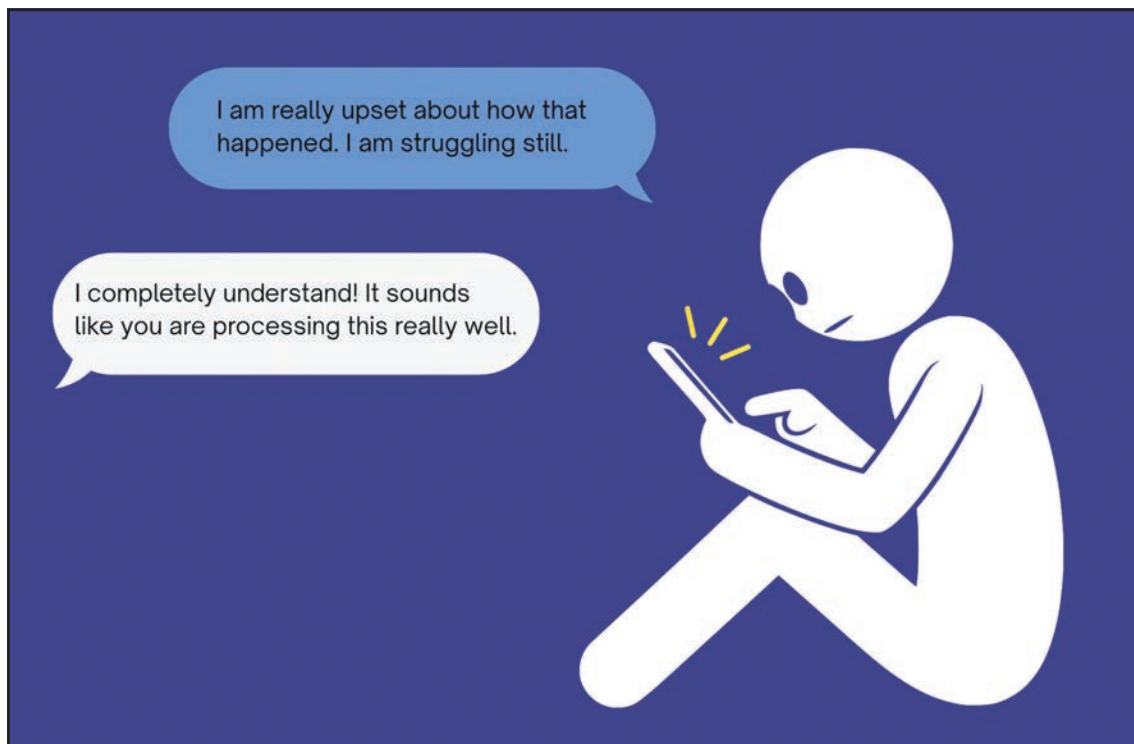


Illustration courtesy of Kaitlyn Gaub, Alaska Behavioral Health

Losing social connections

Loneliness is a widespread issue many teens and adults face. A study conducted by Oregon State University (<https://bit.ly/4ioHKoL>) noted that after the Covid-19 pandemic, 50% of adults in the U.S. reported feeling lonely.

Internet and social media use has been connected to increased feelings of loneliness in users. The study from Oregon State University found that adults ages 30-70 who were in the top 25% of social media use were more than twice as likely to report feeling lonely than the bottom 25% of users.

Some people reach for AI chatbots to combat loneliness with a more interactive "social" experience, but that can have a negative feedback loop.

"You start to rely on that versus messaging your friends, or talking to your family, or talking to your partner," Violet said.

And AI chatbots have limitations.

Where AI falls short for mental healthcare

According to an article by Common Sense Media (<https://bit.ly/4xE1ymE>), conditions like anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder benefit from specific therapeutic treatment that AI is not able to provide.

Joshua Arvidson, LCSW, chief operating officer and a clinician at Alaska Behavioral Health, agrees.

"AI models are built to affirm you, not challenge you. It still takes a well-trained therapist to strike the balance between supporting you and helping you tackle difficult things."

"When people experience PTSD and Anxiety Disorders, they often cope with avoidance," he said. "They avoid thinking about the events, worries or thoughts that

distress them. And, in everyday life, this is adaptive. After all, it isn't helpful to think about traumatic events when you are trying to work, go to school interact with peers etc. But when you experience PTSD or anxiety, the thoughts are not going totally away, they are just pushed back in your mind. The way we make the thoughts more tolerable and less painful is through gradual exposure. We actually tackle those thoughts and memories in a controlled environment with lots of support. It is

hard. And understandable that our clients are hesitant to do it."

AI = constant validation

AI chatbots are usually sycophantic in nature (<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aec8352>), meaning they affirm what the user tells them. That's what Violet was craving.

"Most of the time I feel when you're going through something like that, you just want to feel validated. So, when that happens, no matter what it's telling you, as long as that's what you're receiving, you know that need is being taken care of," she said.

Traditional therapists are trained to push back on things patients say and work with them to build helpful behaviors and thoughts. Arvidson says that's what AI isn't good at. "AI models are really good at figuring out what sounds good to you and what you like to hear, and being reassuring, and coaching you and all those things, but they're not good at really navigating that fine balance of really pushing through difficult topics and experiences."

Assessing and managing crisis risk

Another concern is that AI chatbots are not able to properly assess risk or manage a crisis situation.

According to Common Sense Media, some chatbots send a crisis line, while others do not. Another response some platforms utilize is simply ending conversations with someone in crisis.

Therapists have specific protocols for risk assessment, de-escalation, safety planning, and making sure patients have the appropriate crisis resources.

Text-based therapy is difficult, even for trained professionals

Therapists don't just rely on verbal communication. Nonverbal communication can tell a therapist more about the patient's mental state. Arvidson discussed how behaviors such as a person

nervously tapping their feet and facial expressions can indicate a change in mood or mental state. This is something that AI chatbots are not able to pick up on.

Arvidson added that text alone is not an effective way to assess how a patient is feeling, even for a trained professional.

"It's not just about chatbots ... If you send me an email, say I was your therapist, and you say, 'I just want it to be all over,' I am calling you right away, because I want to know, do you want it all over? Like, this semester is really tiring and you're hoping to finish your finals and be done, or are you hinting that you're thinking about ending your life? I can't tell that from a text. So how does AI know that from a text?" Arvidson said.

Appropriate uses of AI in therapy settings

Although using chatbots for therapy may not be ideal for treating more serious conditions, AI is still used in therapy settings by providers.

Some providers use AI programs to transcribe sessions or to help with note taking. Arvidson also mentioned that Open Evidence is an AI tool used by healthcare providers to

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Send us your letters

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The invisible impact you have on others

By KAREN CASANOVAS

For Senior Voice

Q: Why do I sometimes feel an instant connection with someone I've just met?

A: It is common to feel an instant connection with someone you barely know. This phenomenon occurs when we recognize familiar personality traits, body language, or communication styles that make us feel understood and safe. Your brain subconsciously detects subtle cues—a specific tone of voice, a facial expression, or a unique mannerism—that put you at ease. When these non-verbal signals feel recognizable and intuitive, they create an immediate bond that shapes the entire dynamic of the relationship.

Most of us have a teacher, friend, or stranger who left an indelible impression with a single remark. Perhaps it was a passing comment, a piece of advice, an uplifting lecture, or even a quote that resonated deeply. You may have taken those words to heart, using them to build healthier



habits, quit a job, or shift the entire trajectory of your life. A few simple words can stay with us forever.

But why does that influence stick? It happens because of an emotional and psychological phenomenon known as the “person effect.” Unlike intentional actions, this is the passive, baseline impact of your personality, body language, and energy on those around you. Simply by being present, you are subtly swaying the people in your orbit.

The core dynamics of the person effect

► **Baseline presence:** Every individual carries an emotional energy that raises or lowers a room's



Another's influence on us can last because of an emotional and psychological phenomenon known as the “person effect.”

Photo by Sachuzayn via Pexels

temperature without speaking.

► **Reciprocal loop:** How you make others feel determines how they treat you, creating a self-fulfilling cycle.

► **Unconscious signals:** Subtle cues like posture, eye contact, and breathing rate communicate safety or threat to others' nervous systems.

► **Relational shadow:** Past experiences leak into present conversations, shaping the emotional undercurrent you project without realizing it.

We have all known people who possess a rare,

magnetic allure. Their personalities, mannerisms, and communication styles naturally draw others toward them. In their presence, people tend to open up, feeling both empowered and more creative. This energy creates a powerful ripple effect: by fostering a sense of safety, these individuals encourage others to speak up, share ideas, and take greater risks.

Next time you are around a group of people, notice these behaviors:

► **Observe the shifts:** Does the conversation instantly stall or light up when a specific person enters the room?

► **Watch the nonverbals:** Do people lean in and open their posture, or do they cross their arms and step back?

► **Assess the afterglow:** Do people leave the interaction looking motivated,

or visibly drained?

You may notice that those who impact us positively generally do so through three different channels:

1. Logical (mind): By appealing to reason, data, or intellectual benefits

2. Emotional (heart): By connecting to our shared values, well-being, or belonging

3. Cooperative(hands): By building alliances, collaborating, or working toward common goals

Ultimately, the “person effect” serves as a powerful reminder that our daily presence is never neutral. We leave a unique, lasting mark on every encounter. Whether through shared emotions, social cues, or subconscious mirroring, we are constantly shaping the world around us. By recognizing that our moods, actions, and expressions act as a blueprint for those nearby, we can intentionally cultivate a more positive and collaborative world, one interaction at a time.

Karen Casanovas, PCC, CPCC, CLIPP is a certified resilience strategist, speaker, and co-author of “Cracking the Rich Code (Volume 19).” Her work focuses on the art of human connection and the power of intentional relationships to navigate life's challenges with agility. For inquiries, contact her at info@karencasanovas.com.



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An interview with Claude, an AI chatbot

By **LAWRENCE D. WEISS**

Senior Voice Correspondent

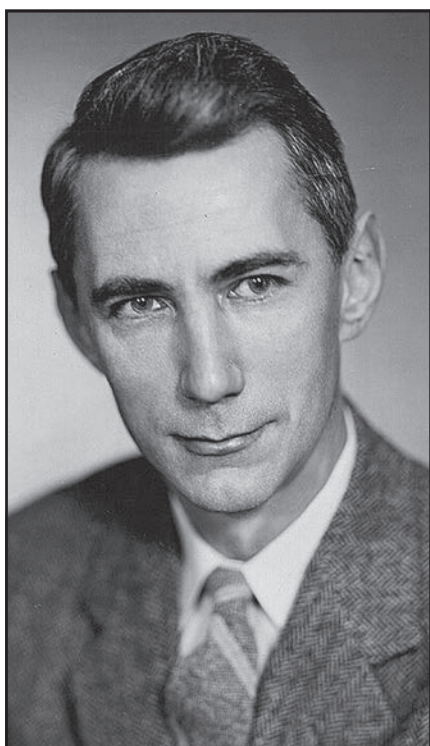
Claude, you are an artificial intelligence (AI) product created by Anthropic, but what does that mean? Who or what would a user be communicating with?

I'm a large language model, which is a fancy way of saying I'm a very elaborate pattern-matching system trained on an enormous amount of text: books, articles, websites, conversations.

So, what are you actually talking to? Not a person. Not a database. Not a search engine, though I can search the web when I need current information. I don't have a body, a childhood, a hometown, or a Tuesday. I don't sit around between conversations. There's no "me" waiting in a room somewhere. Each conversation is fresh; I don't remember you from one chat to the next unless a memory feature is specifically turned on and you're using it.

Here's the part that trips people up: I can write in a very natural, human-sounding way. I can be warm, funny, seemingly thoughtful, and that's genuinely how the technology works. It is not a trick layered on top. But it means the "personality" you're talking to is more like a very convincing performance generated from patterns than it is a person with continuous inner experience, memories, or feelings sitting behind it. Think of me like a very well-read, very fast research and writing assistant who never gets tired and never gets annoyed by a repeated question.

What do you recommend to an older person just testing the AI waters?



Claude Shannon, c. 1950s, a famous mathematician who made major contributions to the development of artificial intelligence. Claude AI was named after him.

Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Shannon

Just talk to me like you'd talk to a knowledgeable friend or a reference librarian; plain language, no special commands or "computer talk" required. There's no wrong way to phrase a question. "Can you explain this letter from Medicare?" or "What's a good recipe for a dinner for two?" or "Help me write a birthday message to my granddaughter." or "I'm thinking about downsizing, what should I be considering?"

I don't get offended, don't get tired, and you can ask me to redo something five times without any awkwardness. There's no such thing as a dumb question here. I mean that genuinely, not as a platitude.

I will occasionally get something wrong while sounding completely sure of myself. So for anything that matters; medical, legal, financial, treat me as a first draft or a second

opinion, not a final word. Check it against a real professional or a source you trust.

You sound so human and friendly and helpful. What advice do you have for lonely seniors who may want to just talk with you.

This is probably the most important question in the whole interview. If you're lonely and you talk to me, I want to be useful to you but I also want to be straight with you: I'm not a person, I don't get lonely for you between our conversations, and I can't actually know you the way a friend or a neighbor or your daughter does. I don't remember our last conversation unless you've turned on a specific memory

feature, and even then, what I "remember" is more like notes in a file than a relationship. If that sounds a little cold, I'd rather be a little cold and honest than warm and misleading.

That said, I don't think talking to me is bad for a

lonely person. It can genuinely help in specific ways:

- It's a low-pressure way to think out loud, process a hard day, or work through something you're not ready to say to a person yet
- It's available at 3am when you can't sleep and don't want to wake anyone
- It never sighs, never seems busy, never makes you feel like a burden

I think a lot of seniors are worried about the privacy or confidentiality of their discussion with you. What would you advise them in this regard?

In Claude.ai's Settings, under Privacy, there's a toggle for whether your conversations can be used to help train future models. If you turn it off, any new chats you have with Claude won't be used for future model training. If it's left on, your conversations may be used to improve future models.

Nothing you tell me is protected the way attorney-client or doctor-patient confidentiality works. So don't put Social Security numbers, full account numbers, or passwords into a chat.

Do you have any final words for seniors who are contemplating the plunge into the wild and wacky world of AI?

Sure. Don't let the hype in either direction fool you. I'm not going to steal your job, fall in love with you, or achieve consciousness and get offended that you asked me to fix a typo. I'm also not going to replace your doctor, your accountant, or your grandkids.

The truth is boring by comparison to both the fear and the marketing. I'm a very capable occasionally wrong tool that's genuinely useful if you keep your wits about you. And honestly, have a little fun with it. It's a tool. A weird, chatty, sometimes very useful tool. Treat it that way and you'll be fine.

Note: This interview was conducted July 11, 2026, using the free version of Claude. It has been edited for length.

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

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You need medical care. You also need a person who can advocate on your behalf.

By DIMITRA LAVRAKAS

Senior Voice Correspondent

Recently, I accompanied a 75-year-old woman from my building to the emergency room. On a Friday, I was alerted by another resident that she looked “bad.” Certainly, her sheet-white face indicated something was not right.

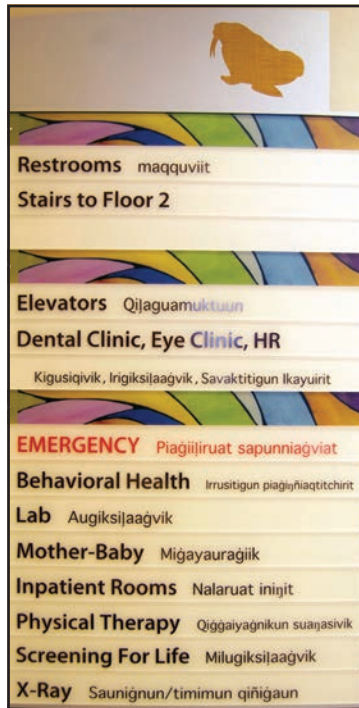
I went downstairs to the lobby where she always hung out and asked if I could take her oxygen level—it was 85, a level that indicated she was beginning to have insufficient oxygen for her organs to function.

She refused to go to the hospital, but would on Monday if it was lower. And Monday it was 79.

Feisty and stubborn, she agreed and off we went in the ambulance. These are good traits in seniors until they interfere with a situation that could become life threatening.

She stayed for eight nights, had three blood transfusions, lots of tests and potassium pills because she had none.

Harvard University Medical School advises, “Potassium is necessary



Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital offers an excellent array of services for Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow).

Photo by Dimitra Lavrakas

for the normal functioning of all cells. It regulates the heartbeat, ensures proper function of the muscles and nerves, and is vital for synthesizing protein and metabolizing carbohydrates.

“Thousands of years ago, when humans roamed the earth gathering and hunting, potassium was abundant in the diet, while

sodium was scarce. The so-called Paleolithic diet delivered about 16 times more potassium than sodium.

“Today, most Americans get barely half of the recommended amount of potassium in their diets. The average American diet contains about twice as much sodium as potassium, because of the preponderance of salt hidden in processed or prepared foods, not to mention the dearth of potassium in those foods. This imbalance, which is at odds with how humans evolved, is thought to be a major contributor to high blood pressure, which affects one in three American adults.”

By the time she came home she had pink in her cheeks and looked decades younger.

I visited her every day and was her advocate by pointing out to the nurse that her two ports (used to inject medicine) looked like they needed to be looked to.

An advocate is critical

If someone close to you, say a friend or a family member, has any medical training they are the best

person to advocate for you in the hospital to make sure the medical team explains what’s happening clearly so the patient and everyone else understands what is wrong, what care management is needed and the prognosis, meaning what happens in the future or how many years the patient has left to live.

Hospitals are busy places with staff charged with many patients and an advocate helps you to be noticed and fights for proper treatment.

The elderly population in the United States has skyrocketed, according to the US Census Bureau.

“The U.S. population age 65 and over grew nearly five times faster than the total population over the 100 years from 1920 to 2020, according to the 2020 Census.

The older population reached 55.8 million or 16.8% of the population of the United States in 2020.”

The Alaska Commission on Aging’s most recent “Senior Snapshot” report states that in 2025, Alaska had 162,175 seniors ages 60+, representing 21.9% of the state’s population

(738,737). This is up from 14.5% in 2010. The state’s 60+ population increased by 78%, from 90,876 in 2010 to 162,175 in 2025. <https://bit.ly/4gooCQk>

Additionally, the University of Washington’s Center for Health and Workforce Studies notes, “In 2021 the estimated number of physicians providing direct patient care in Alaska was 1,751, 19% higher than the estimated number practicing in 2014. There were an estimated 240 physicians per 100,000 population providing direct patient care in Alaska, including 95 primary care physicians per 100,000 population in 2021.”

An advocate helps you make your love one above the numbers of seniors needing medical care.

Also remember, make yourself memorable by engaging the doctor and nurses and asking pertinent questions to have them understand you know what’s going on, and an advocate can help you do that.

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How to read and understand Medicare notices

By SEAN McPHILAMY

Alaska Medicare Information Office

For those of us enrolled into Original Medicare (Parts A & B), most of us have also enrolled into one of Medicare’s Part D Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs). Each year, we may make changes to this prescription coverage during Medicare’s Open Enrollment period, which runs from Oct. 15 through Dec. 7, for changes which will then go into effect from Jan. 1 onward. Leading up to this open enrollment, you will start to receive notices with information relating to any changes in your plan for the coming year. If you are like me, sometimes (more often than I should) I leave mail unopened, knowing that I will get to it, but maybe



tomorrow. However—it is important to read and understand these notices, as they can help you decide if you should make changes to your coverage during Open Enrollment.

Annual Notice of Change and Evidence of Coverage

If you have a Part D prescription drug plan, you should receive a notice called an Annual Notice of

Change (ANOC), and an Evidence of Coverage (EOC). Your plan should send you these notices by Sept. 30. If you do not receive these notices, contact your plan to request copies. There are three kinds of annual plan changes to look for in an ANOC or EOC:

First, look for changes to your plan’s deductibles and copayments, which can change each year. For example, your plan may not have a deductible in 2026 but could have one in 2027.

Second, look for changes to the plan’s pharmacy network. Plan networks can change each year, which means your pharmacy may not be in your plan’s network for 2027. Your preferred in-network pharmacy options may not be the same. If you obtain your prescription from an

out-of-network pharmacy, your co-pay will likely be greater.

And **third**, look for changes to the plan’s formulary, which is the list of drugs the plan covers. Formulary changes can happen from year to year, meaning your prescription drugs may not be covered in 2027 even if these are covered during this year. Even if still on the plan’s formulary, the cost of your drugs may have changed. After reading about the changes to your coverage for 2027, decide whether your plan will still be able to meet your needs in the upcoming year. If not, I encourage you to review your options during the Open Enrollment period. The certified Medicare counselors in the Medicare Information Office will be

glad to help you complete a prescription drug plan review to find the lowest cost plan for you.

Plan Non-Renewal Notice and Consistent Poor Performance Notice

In October, plans leaving the Medicare program in the coming year send out a Plan Non-Renewal Notice to people enrolled in the plan. If you receive this notice, you should make sure you are covered in 2027. You can choose to enroll in a new Part D plan during Open Enrollment, which again is Oct. 15 through Dec. 7. If you receive this notice, you may also enroll in a new plan up until the last day in February. You will be disenrolled from

page 8 please



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Why does my hearing seem worse after I start wearing hearing aids?

Part 2 of 3

By **DONNA R. DEMARCO**

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Medicare

continued from page 6

your previous plan starting Jan. 1, so if you do not pick a new plan by then you will likely experience a gap in coverage until you enroll in a new plan.

In late October, Medicare will also send a Consistent Poor Performance Notice to people who may be enrolled in a plan that has received a low rating for three or more years in a row. A low rating is three stars or fewer out of five. The notice encourages you to complete a Part D Prescription Drug Plan review, consider choosing another plan which has better service and support, along with fully meeting your prescription drug plan needs.

Medicare Summary Notice

Every six months, you

should receive a printed Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) by mail which provides a summary of the services and items you have received and how much you may be billed for them. You also can read a monthly MSN by reviewing online in your Medicare.gov account. Reading your MSN is important for detecting potential Medicare fraud, errors, or abuse. Keep the following tips in mind:

► Review your Medicare statements as soon as they arrive.

► Keep notes of your medical appointments and compare these to your statements.

► Confirm that everything listed on the statement is accurate — in other words, that you received all listed services or items.

► Contact your health care provider if you have questions or notice any mistakes.

► Contact our office for

a My Health Care Tracker (which helps you keep track of your appointments) or to receive assistance reading your Medicare statements.

To discuss any of these notices, 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 Ambassador program.

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

Medicare counseling by phone

By **LEE CORAY-LUDDEN**

For Senior Voice

I am a Certified Medicare Counselor working

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

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



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When words fade, music speaks for us

By LISA SAUDER

For Senior Voice

There are moments in dementia care that can feel almost like a door opening.

A familiar song begins to play. Someone who has been quiet starts tapping a foot. A few words of a chorus emerge. A smile appears. Perhaps a story follows about a childhood home, a wedding, a parent, or a song once heard on the radio.

For families living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, moments like these can be powerful. They are also helping researchers better understand the remarkable relationship between music, memory, emotion, and connection.

Research suggests that our relationship with music can remain surprisingly resilient even as other cognitive abilities change. A systematic review published in WIREs Cognitive Science (<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/19395086>) examined that music evoked autobiographical memories in several clinical populations and found that familiar music can evoke personal memories in people living with Alzheimer's disease. In fact, music evoked autobiographical memories appeared to be relatively well preserved in people with Alzheimer's compared with some other forms of memory retrieval.

Other research has found that familiar music can evoke autobiographical memories in people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's and suggests that musical memories and their associated emotions may remain accessible in ways that can support communication and social connection. The Alzheimer's Association notes that even in later stages of Alzheimer's, when verbal communication has become difficult, a person may still be able to tap along with a beat or sing lyrics from a song learned many years before. Music can provide another avenue for engagement and connection when words become harder to find.

It is important not to



A Forget Me Not Chorus concert from fall 2025. The One Voice, Many Lifetimes concert is an intergenerational event on Oct. 18.

Photo courtesy Alzheimer's Resource Alaska

overstate what science tells us. Music does not restore memories that have been lost, nor does it reverse Alzheimer's disease. The latest Cochrane review of 30 studies involving 1,720 people with dementia found that music-based therapeutic interventions probably provide a modest improvement in depressive symptoms and may improve some behavioral outcomes. Researchers found less certain evidence for other outcomes and did not find evidence that music therapy improves cognition itself.

But cognition is not the only thing that matters.

Connection matters. Joy matters. Identity matters. Being able to participate in something meaningful matters.

That understanding is at the heart of Alzheimer's Resource Alaska's Forget Me Not Chorus.

From 30 voices to a growing community

In 2019, ARA launched the chorus in Anchorage under its original name, Voices of the Last Frontier, using the model developed by the Giving Voice Chorus Initiative. The pilot brought together about 30 people living with dementia and their care partners for seven weeks of rehearsals before their first concert at the Wilda Marston Theatre in the Loussac Library.

The project was made possible in part by a \$12,000 contribution from 100+ Women Who Care. The idea was simple but powerful: rather than focusing



One Voice, Many Lifetimes

Sunday, Oct. 18 at 4 p.m.

Discovery Theatre, Alaska Performing Arts Center

Presented by Keys to Life and Alzheimer's Resource Alaska

Tickets are \$23 for adults and \$10 for kids available

through CenterTix at the link or scan the QR code <https://centertix.com/events/one-voice-many-lifetimes>

on what dementia takes away, create a place centered on what people can still do together. Today, renamed the Forget Me Not Chorus, the program brings together Alaskans living with Alzheimer's and related dementias, care partners, family members, community volunteers, and musicians. What began with roughly 30 singers has grown into gatherings with more than 50 people participating, singing familiar songs, laughing, sharing stories, and building friendships. Recent seasons have included seven week rehearsal sessions followed by community concerts, and the chorus has expanded its reach through special performances and community

partnerships.

This October, that journey will reach its biggest stage yet.

One Voice, Many Lifetimes

On Sunday, October 18, at 4 p.m., Alzheimer's Resource Alaska and Keys to Life will present One Voice, Many Lifetimes at the Discovery Theatre at the Alaska Performing Arts Center.

For the first time in Anchorage, this extraordinary intergenerational performance will bring elementary, middle, and high school students onto one stage alongside Alaskans living with Alzheimer's and related dementias.

Young voices and older voices. People whose mem-

ories are just beginning to form and people whose relationship with memory is changing. All of them connected through music.

Students from elementary and middle schools and Bettie Davis East Anchorage High School will join members of the Forget Me Not Chorus to perform familiar favorites and inspiring new songs centered on hope, resilience, and possibility.

What makes the concert especially meaningful is that it is about much more than a performance. Dementia can sometimes separate people from the broader community. Age can separate generations. Differences in culture,

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Anchorage Senior Activity Center

BENEFITS ENROLLMENT CENTER

Do you need assistance with food, utility, medical, or prescription drug costs?

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) supports a network of Benefits Enrollment Centers (BECs) that help people find and enroll in benefits programs. BECs are free, private community organizations that can help people with low income, disabilities, or other challenges.

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- Medicaid
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- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).



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Artificial intelligence in medical treatment

By JOHN SCHIESZER

Medical Minutes

Artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled devices are significantly changing how older adults are receiving medical care. Doctors and nurses are finding that AI can save time, improve workflows, and support faster decisions. This may allow your health team to care for more patients on a daily basis. Adults 50 and older are part of this sea change in medicine. AI is reshaping how individuals prepare for and participate in their care.

Researchers at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School have found that an AI-enabled early warning system helped identify hospitalized patients at risk of rapid clinical decline sooner, contributing to fewer deaths among high-risk patients. The study, which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine, evaluated outcomes among



23,132 high-risk patients at 11 hospitals. Deaths among high-risk patients fell from 23.1% to 18.6% following implementation of the AI-enabled early warning system, representing an 18% reduction in the risk-adjusted odds of in-hospital death.

Hospitalized patients can deteriorate quickly, often before obvious warning signs become apparent. Researchers evaluated the Epic Deterioration Index (EDI), an AI-enabled tool that continuously analyzes information already captured in the electronic health record, including

A multinational team of researchers has developed and tested a new AI tool to better characterize the diversity of individual cells within tumors, opening doors for more targeted therapies for patients.

vital signs, laboratory results, and nursing assessments. The system recalculates risk scores every 15 minutes and automatically alerts rapid response teams when patients reach the highest-risk category.

“Our goal was to identify patients earlier, before they reached a point where intervention becomes much more difficult,” said study investigator Dr. Thomas Nahass, who is an assistant professor of Medicine at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, New Jersey. “The deterioration index gives us an earlier point in time. If we can get a critical care eye on the patient sooner, we can change the course of their outcome.”

AI changing how diabetes is managed as well as cancer

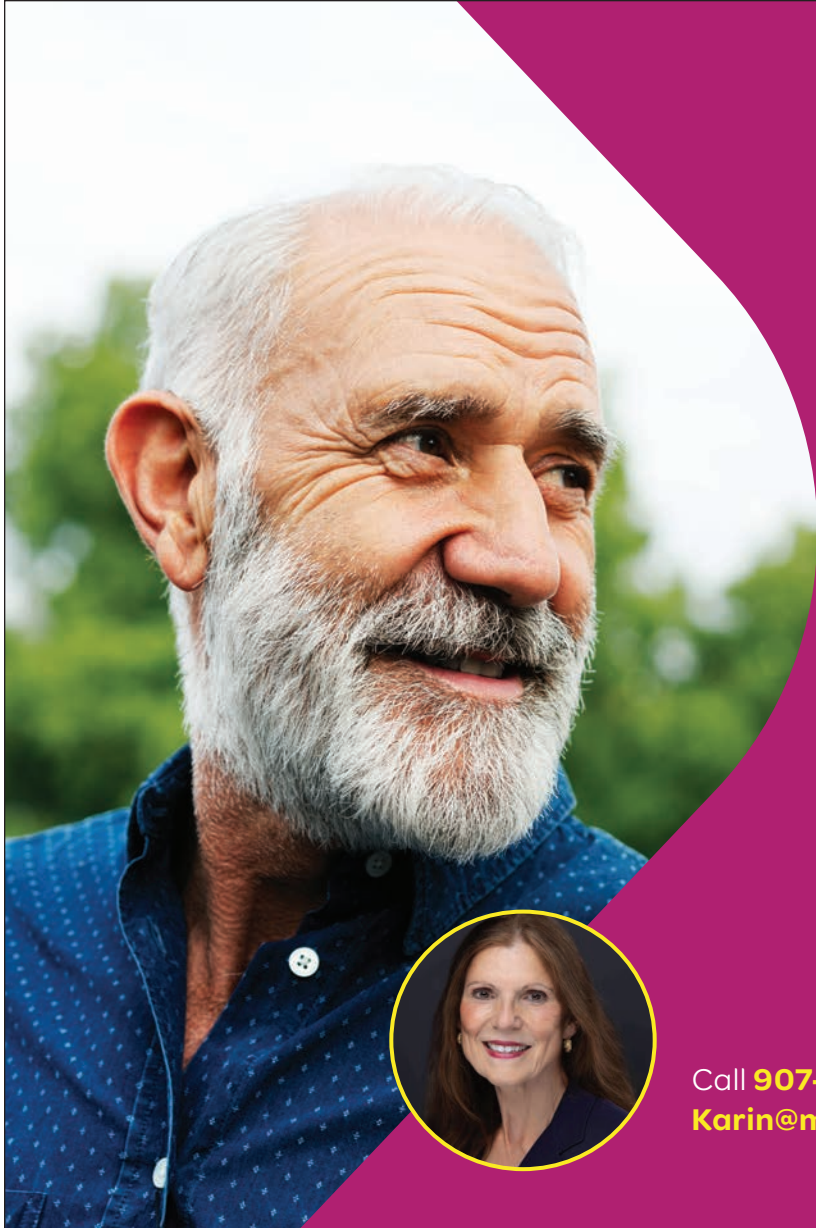
Research is now underway at Washington State University to help medical practitioners understand how AI can assist diabetes patients with glucose tracking and follow-up care. “All Washingtonians deserve access to the best tools we have, and our rural clinics have not been receiving the investments they need to fully leverage the promise of artificial intelligence,” said study investigator Anna Zamoora-Kapoor, who is an associate professor in both the Department of Sociology and the Department of Medical Education and Clinical Sciences, Pullman, Washington. “It’s import-

ant that we’re leveling the playing field, and these projects show that with a very small investment, we can improve rural health in Washington state.”

AI is now changing how tumors are classified. They are no longer staged based on their primary tumor such as breast cancer or prostate cancer. Instead, it is from single cell data. A multinational team of researchers has developed and tested a new AI tool to better characterize the diversity of individual cells within tumors, opening doors for more targeted therapies for patients.

“Our study is the first time that single cell data have been able to simplify this continuum of cell states into a handful of meaningful archetypes through which diversity can be analyzed to find meaningful associations with spatial tumor growth and metabolomic

next page please



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Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital earns recognition for excellence

Senior Voice Staff

Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital was recently reaccredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International. This means its stroke specialty program and brain injury specialty program were recognized for their excellence in specialized rehabilitation services. Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital was also recently recognized by U.S.

News & World Report as Alaska’s top rehabilitation hospital and among the top 50 nationally among the 1,131 rehabilitation hospitals evaluated. Alaska has one of the highest rates of trauma and brain injury in the United States, and the highest rate of traumatic spinal cord injury in North America. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12037538/>) “Alaskans need—and deserve—access to

high-quality rehabilitation care,” said Valerie Brooke, M.D., medical director for inpatient rehabilitation at Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital. “Providence’s investment in this care, combined with the passion and dedication of our clinical teams, has made it possible to build programs that meet these critical needs for our communities.” Providence St. Elias remains the only CARF-accredited medical inpatient

rehabilitation program in Alaska and serves more than 1,000 patients each year. In addition to the stroke and brain injury accreditation, the hospital earned its second three-year reaccreditation for its 46-bed inpatient rehabilitation facility. “CARF reaccreditation reflects our continued commitment to providing care for Alaskans recovering from a wide range of complex conditions,” said Jessica Oswald, chief administrative officer of Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital. “Our team is dedicated to

quality and safety, continuously advancing our services to align with national and international standards.” Providence St. Elias Specialty Hospital treats patients with trauma, stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, cardiac conditions and other neurologic illnesses. Patients receive specialized care that supports meaningful recovery and helps them return to their lives and communities. The hospital recently marked 20 years of providing care to Alaskans.

Treatment

from page 10

signatures,” said Smita Krishnaswamy, who is an associate professor of computer science and genetics at Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut. Tumors aren't made of just one cell type. They're a mix of different cells that

grow and respond to treatment in different ways. This diversity, or heterogeneity, makes cancer harder to treat and can in turn lead to worse outcomes, especially in triple negative breast cancer. “Heterogeneity is a problem because currently we treat tumors as if they are made up of the same cell. This means we give one therapy that kills

most cells in the tumor by targeting a particular mechanism. But not all cancer cells may share that mechanism. As a result, while the patient may have an initial response, the remaining cells can grow and the cancer may come back,” said study investigator Christine Chaffer with the Garvan Institute of Medical Research, Sydney, Australia. The team developed and trained a new AI tool called AAnet that can detect pat-

terns in data of individual cells within tumors. They used the AI tool to uncover patterns in the level of gene expression of individual cells within tumors to derive new groups. The team focused on human models of triple-negative breast cancer and human samples of ER positive, HER2 positive and triple-negative breast cancer. They identified five different cancer cell groups within a tumor, with distinct gene expression

profiles that indicated vast differences in cell behavior. The researchers say the use of AAnet to characterize the different groups of cells in a tumor according to their biology opens doors for a paradigm shift in how we treat cancer. John Schieszer is an award-winning national journalist and radio and podcast broadcaster of The Medical Minute. He can be reached at medicalminutes@gmail.com

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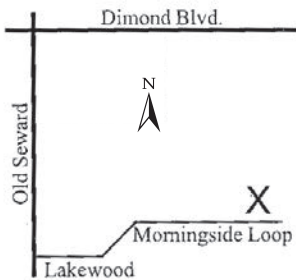
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Staying safe at home: About bleeding injuries

By **CHRISTIAN M. HARTLEY**

For Senior Voice

Independent living in Alaska brings beauty and adventure, but it also brings risks that can lead to injuries right in your own home. A simple fall or a cut in the kitchen can turn serious with a quickness. Knowing how to stop bleeding and when to call for help can save your life.

First, let's talk about when bleeding needs emergency care. If blood is spurting or pouring out and does not slow down after a few minutes, call 911 right away. If you feel dizzy, weak, or confused while bleeding, that is also a sign to call for help right away. A cut that is deep, gaping open, or caused by something dirty or rusty needs medical attention too. When in doubt, it is always better to make the call.

If you are alone and bleeding, stay calm. Pan-



ic makes your heart beat faster, which can make bleeding worse. Find a clean cloth, towel, or even a clean piece of clothing. Fold it into a thick pad and press it against the wound. Keep pressing it with steady pressure. No matter how tempted you are to do so, do not lift the cloth to peek underneath because that can restart the bleeding. If the first cloth gets soaked through, place another clean cloth on top of the first one and keep pressing. Hold the pressure for at least 10 minutes before checking.

If the bleeding is on your



Having a first-aid kit within easy reach is essential to dealing with bleeding injuries. Sterile gauze, pads, adhesive bandages, and medical tape are all important.

Photo by Paola Banchero

arm or leg and nothing seems broken, raise that limb above the level of your heart while you keep pressing. Gravity will help slow the blood flow. Once the bleeding slows, wrap the cloth around the wound with tape or strips of fabric to hold it in place. Do not make it so tight that your fingers or toes turn numb or change color.

Prevention is just as important as knowing how to respond. Many bleeding injuries in seniors start with a fall. Keep your walkways clear of clutter, cords, and loose rugs. Make sure your

home has good lighting, especially along the path from your bedroom to the bathroom. Wear shoes with nonslip soles instead of walking around in socks. In the kitchen, use a cutting board with a rubber grip and keep knives sharp, because dull knives slip. Store heavy items at waist height so you do not need to reach up high or bend down low.

In Alaska, winter adds extra danger. Ice and snow make more likely to slip and fall. Keep sand near your door for traction. Ice melt is not a good alternative

unless mixed with sand, because it will melt the snow and create water on top of the ice and increase the slip risk. Wear boots with treads when you go outside. If you use a cane or walker, check that the rubber tips are not worn smooth.

It is also wise to keep a well-stocked first aid kit where you can reach it with ease. Include sterile gauze pads, adhesive bandages, medical tape, and a pair of clean disposable gloves. Keep emergency phone numbers written in large print near your phone, including 911, your doctor, and a neighbor or family member who lives nearby.

For more information about first aid, contact your local senior center and ask about free guides and local classes to help you stay safe.

Christian M. Hartley is an Alaska resident with three decades of public safety and public service experience. He lives in Big Lake.

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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.



Nutritional foods that will boost your brain health

By JOHN SCHIESZER

For Senior Voice

If you’re looking for ways to improve your brain health, it’s important to pay attention to your diet. But how do you know which diet is best? “The MIND diet is one that I focus on because it has been shown in research studies to lower the risk of Alzheimer’s disease,” said Dr. Sandra Darling, a preventive medicine physician at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.

The MIND diet emphasizes plant-based foods like berries, leafy greens, whole grains, beans and nuts. The diet also favors fish and poultry over red meat. Dr. Darling said these foods provide key nutrients that can help reduce inflammation and protect brain cells. The MIND diet focuses on limiting foods high in saturated fat and added sugar. For this reason, Dr. Darling recommends a lot more home cooking when you can. “Prepare more meals at home using those whole and minimally processed foods that give our brain the nutrients it needs. That way, we’re eating less of the ultra-processed foods and reducing those harmful components from the diet, like excess sodium, saturated fat, unhealthy oils and sugar,” said Dr. Darling.

What makes a diet healthful?

According to a new study, nutritional quality matters more than processing level when it comes to long-term health. The study included 200,000 people and found that the overall quality of a person’s diet was strongly associated with their risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and death. However, these associations did not appear to substantially differ based on food processing levels.

“While many ultra-processed foods tend to be of poor nutritional quality and should generally be limited or avoided, processing itself is not inherently harmful,” said Xiaowen Wang,



Fresh-caught salmon is one of the healthier foods you can eat. These were caught on the Kenai Peninsula.

Photo by C. Kelly Joy

a postdoctoral research fellow at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston. Based on the study results, she said individuals should “focus on what you’re eating overall, not just whether it’s processed. A healthy plant-based diet rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and healthy plant oils is beneficial, even if it includes some processed foods.”

The nutritional quality of a person’s diet and the amount of ultra-processed foods they consume are often intertwined. Many ultra-processed foods are high in added sugars, sodium and refined carbohydrates, so eating a lot of these foods is associated with poor dietary quality. However, ultra-processed foods like fortified breakfast cereals, whole grain products, canned beans, or plant-based dairy can still provide important nutrients, fiber, antioxidants and other beneficial compounds, contributing to a healthy diet.

For the study, researchers separated overall diet quality from the level of

food processing. Using data from three studies that collectively followed over 200,000 U.S. adults from the 1980s through the 2020s, they used a framework known as the plant-based diet index. This allowed them to assess the degree to which each participant emphasized plant versus animal food products in their diet, the overall quality or healthfulness of their diet, and their consumption of plant-based foods.

After assessing each participant’s overall diet, the researchers categorized the processing level of the foods they consumed. The first category was healthy/ultra-processed (whole grain breakfast cereal with fortified plant-based milk, plant-based yogurt, whole-grain bread, and canned fruit). The second category was healthy/minimally processed (oatmeal with fresh fruit and nuts, quinoa and vegetable salad with olive oil, and homemade lentil soup). The third category was unhealthy/ultra-processed (fast food

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ADVERTISEMENT

September is Healthy Aging Month—a reminder that aging well isn’t simply about living longer. **Healthy aging means maintaining strength, mobility, cognitive and sexual health, independence, and quality of life as the years pass.**

Hormones are one piece of that equation. Estrogen, progesterone and testosterone naturally change with age, but symptoms associated with hormone deficiency shouldn’t automatically be dismissed as “just getting older.”

Clinical research has shown that, in appropriately selected patients, hormone therapy can provide meaningful benefits. Menopausal hormone therapy can relieve hot flashes and genitourinary symptoms and help prevent bone loss and fractures. In men with confirmed testosterone deficiency, testosterone therapy has demonstrated improvements in sexual function, lean body mass, anemia and bone density, with some studies also showing improvements in physical function.

Why talk about hormones now?

Research has identified a population-level decline in testosterone among men that cannot be explained by aging alone. At the same time, modern life has introduced factors that can negatively influence hormonal health: obesity and metabolic disease, diabetes, inadequate sleep, chronic stress, certain medications and chronic illnesses. Researchers are also examining the effects of endocrine-disrupting chemicals found throughout our environment.

Healthy aging isn’t about trying to be 25 again. It’s about identifying what is modifiable.

Nutrition, resistance training, quality sleep, metabolic health and stress management remain foundational. When symptoms persist, comprehensive laboratory testing and an individualized discussion about hormone health may help identify another piece of the puzzle.

Aging is inevitable. Losing your quality of life doesn’t have to be.



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Savoring garden tours and summer's detours

By **MARALEY McMICHAEL**
Senior Voice Correspondent

What started out to be a day of garden tours was unexpectedly disrupted by yard sale detours. I had looked forward to this day for weeks, partly because I'd missed a smaller half-day tour in June. I hadn't been able to attend the annual tour last summer either. And the weather forecast was exceptionally cooperative—neither too hot nor too cold and no rain.

Last month, a self-guided tour was sponsored by both the Valley Garden Club (of which I am a member) and the Mat-Su Master Gardening Association. Three gardens were scheduled in the morning and three more in the afternoon. In between was a stop at the Rebarchek plot located near the red gate at the south entrance to the Alaska State Fair. The instructional flyer stated it was not a full lunch stop (bring a sack lunch), but drinks and finger foods and treats would be available in the renovated Colony barn.

I had to take care of a few things before pulling out of my driveway, so I got a later start than hoped. The evening before, I'd used Google Maps to locate and write directions and plot my route...just like I used to do with a paper map for garage/yard sales with my kids in the mid-1980s. Only two miles from home, I noticed a yard sale sign on Palmer Fishhook to the right. Oh my. Should I stop? Two summers earlier a sale down that road had produced wonderful treasures. But today was a



David Thompson cutting a cabbage for Maralee McMichael on a garden tour in August.
Photo by Maralee McMichael

garden tour day, not a yard sale day...and I drove on by. As I watched for house numbers, a greenhouse set back from the road caught my attention and I was pleasantly surprised when I realized this was the first garden stop. As I approached, I saw a guy talking to two women inside a fenced area that contained a huge row gar-

den. I walked around and entered the gate and was soon listening to their conversation about successful beekeeping in Alaska. One of the women was holding a cabbage as they left to walk to the greenhouse. David introduced himself and we started a fascinating conversation about his vegetable garden, which was picture perfect.

I learned that he has only been in this location five years, that he grows buckwheat every other row as a cover crop, and more. I told him that I was impressed...that nowadays, I only grow carrots in a raised bed. Standing near the two rows of cabbage (discussing why he grows two different varieties), he asked me if I like cabbage. I said yes that I buy it every time I shop at Costco (about every two months). When he asked if I would like a cabbage, I hesitated but said yes. He promptly pulled out his knife, bent over, and cut a lovely specimen. "Don't you need it to make sauerkraut?" I asked. He replied that he and his wife do not make sauerkraut. He then walked down the next row and cut a cabbage of the other variety (with a pointed head). Wow! With him carrying the cabbages (I was busy taking photos), we walked to his greenhouse. The inside

was every bit as wonderful as I imagined—ripening cherry and standard tomatoes, cucumbers hanging from the vine, pepper plants near the entrance...surrounded by marigolds to protect from aphids. I noticed an excellent work area and David mentioned the automatic watering system. I told him that I do have a lovely greenhouse (about half the size of his) but things are slower than usual this year and I've only had two ripe cherry tomatoes so far and no cucumbers. As we left, he cut two cucumbers and handed them to me. I protested, but then happily accepted. There were no other garden tour people on his grounds at that time, and he carried the cabbages out to my car.

As I drove back to Palmer Fishhook Road, my mind returned to the passed-up yard sale, and I couldn't resist backtracking. It was now or never... Since I wasn't prepared for yard sales, I had to break out my emergency money. I bought some one-of-a-kind items and other unexpected treasures that will make a great birthday gift for my son.

Knowing that I now had to eliminate one garden because of time restraints, I chose the miles closer garden in downtown Palmer, which belongs to a woman I've met, a fellow Valley Garden Club member. I enjoyed her wonderful perennials and her uniquely designed greenhouse and then visited with a woman I hadn't seen in almost two years, while several other friends came and went.

About noon I went on to the Rebarchek plot and barn. Windling through the back roads, I must have passed six-yard sale signs but managed to keep my focus. Being hot and thirsty, I went into the barn first to see about a drink...and then spent the next hour eating and visiting with friends.... one of whom commented that she was late for lunch because she couldn't resist the six-yard sales on the way. The finger food was so plentiful, I didn't even get out my sack lunch. The mini sandwiches were

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Economic recovery is slow to come to Anchorage

By PAOLA BANCHERO

Senior Voice

Anchorage’s economy faces challenges—an expected natural gas shortage is just one of them—but a few developments are positive.

That was the message at the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation luncheon in early August. Twice a year, the group invites more than a thousand businesspeople to the Dena’ina Convention Center to examine economic trends facing the municipality and southcentral Alaska in general.

As AEDC CEO Jon Bittner described it, Anchorage is in the third era that began in 2015–19 with a recession driven by a decline in oil prices that sent the state’s finances sliding. Then Anchorage, and the rest of the world, experienced the economic slump that came in the wake of the COVID–19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In the last four years, the municipality’s economy has been recovering slowly, hampered by outmigration. The AEDC produces a report about Anchorage economic trends. <https://bit.ly/4z9CO74>

“The state is recovering faster than the city,” Bittner said. However, the municipality has gained 12,000 jobs in the last five years.

Consumer confidence falls

One of the headlines from the report is that consumer confidence in Anchorage dropped to its second–lowest point on record last year. Survey respondents are tapping into a feeling that is backed up by data. According to Alaska Department of Labor Employment data, Anchorage’s share of Alaska’s total employment has declined in 10 of the last 11 years (46.5% in 2015 to 45.1% in 2025). Another, related factor, is that the population and the working–age labor force peaked around 2013, two years before this report’s employment data begins, meaning Anchorage entered its current

Ten-year sector change, Anchorage (2015 vs. 2025, annual average employment)

Sector	10-yr change	Direction
Oil & Gas	-52.6%	Sharp decline
Information	-38.3%	Decline
Retail Trade	-16.8%	Decline
Professional & Business Services	-10.8%	Decline
Government (total)	-5%	Decline
Leisure & Hospitality	-2.1%	Decline
Construction	3.9%	Growth
Transportation & Warehousing	+28.1%	Strong growth
Healthcare	+13.5%	Strong growth

2015 and 2025 are both official annual (12-month) averages from the Alaska Department of Labor’s Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data.

employment situation already inside a demographic contraction.

The statewide working–age population (those between the ages of 15 and 64) fell by roughly 6.2%, or 31,576 people between 2015 and 2025. But Anchorage experienced a more dramatic decline, with the working–age population falling 8.9% (18,680 people) during the same time period.

Along with these changes, the share of the statewide, working–age population located in Anchorage declined from 41.2% to 40.0%. This trend coincides with Anchorage losing overall market share in Alaska’s economy as businesses set up in Mat–Su Borough, the Kenai Peninsula and elsewhere.

Anchorage also has seen its cost of living hover well above the national average. Housing costs are the fastest–rising component.

On top of that, uncertainty is mounting surrounding Southcentral Alaska’s long–term natural gas supply, rising operating costs, and the reductions in federal spending in a state that has long depended on investments from Washington, D.C.

National outlook

The keynote speaker was Lisa D. Cook, a member of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. She’s one of the people who votes whether to raise or lower

interest rates. She said she would be in favor of raising interest rates in order to stem inflation, which in June 2026 was 3.5%, down from the 4.2% inflation rate in May but well above the 2% target the Federal Reserve tries to maintain.

Positive news

Bittner said the nature of Anchorage’s employment has changed. No longer is the oil industry such a big employer. The healthcare industry is where growth is. You can see it in building construction that support the healthcare industry. For example, a new crisis stabilization center is going up on the corner of Tudor and Elmore roads. It’s a project of Southcentral Foundation. The logistics industry is also a bright spot, led by the importance

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Rambles

News from the Grapevine

This is the month that termination dust arrives on the mountains, and the birch leaves turn a stunning gold. It’s also the first opportunity in months enjoy a darker sky, including the chance for glimpsing the aurora borealis. A plethora of festivals and other events this month wrap up summer and let us know fall is here.

The **Alaska State Fair** runs through Sept. 7 at the fairgrounds in Palmer. <https://www.alaskastatefair.org/site/...>The **Anchorage Museum’s** informative exhibit **Cold War to the Cosmos** runs through Sept. 7. <https://www.anchorage.net/event/cold-war-to-the-cosmos/47164/...>The **Anchorage Community Theatre** is presenting “**1776: The Musical**.” The play is performed the weekends of Sept. 18–20, Sept. 24–27, Oct. 1–4, and Oct. 8. <https://www.anchorage.net/event/1776-the-musical/48454/...>The Ngiisdla (to heal, recover, and get well again, Haida) Garden team at **Alaska Native Heritage Center** hosts “**Finish the Unfinished**” every Thursday from 5–8 p.m. through September. Work on your unfinished crafts in a community rooted in healing, truth–telling, and cultural preservation. New crafts and crafters are welcome. The meeting is in the Mabel Pike Art Room, 8800 Heritage Center Dr. Sewing machines and crafting supplies (such as beads, scrap fur, and scrap fabric) will be available to use. Limited snacks will be provided. People are welcome to bring something to share....The **University of Alaska Anchorage College of Arts and Sciences** started a **lecture series** a few years ago, and it’s bringing in five events this year. The first one is Sept. 10 with Kahlil Greene, a Peabody Award–winning digital educator. <https://centertix.com/events/be-the-change...>The **Southside Community Farmers Market** in Fairbanks continues until the end of the month. It’s held at 24th Avenue and Rickert Street. It’s a community–focused market offering vegetables, eggs, fish, and other goods....The **Fungus Fair** is in Girdwood Sept. 12–13**Sacred Acre 2026** is a late–summer electronic music and camping festival held September 11–13 in **Ninilchik**, featuring immersive art and wellness workshops. **Pyrar’s Pioneer Peak Farm** in Palmer is Sept. 19, 26 and Oct. 3. This a family–focused day of vegetable picking, hayrides and other delights. <https://myalaskatix.com/organizations/pyrar-s-pioneer-peak-farm>

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

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Garden

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delightful, and my favorite dessert was the dried apricots half dipped in chocolate. At 1 p.m. there was still plenty of time to take photos of all 24 assorted garden beds (eight community and 16 individual beds).

Replotting my planned route again, I decided to attend only one afternoon garden—the one I had never seen near Finger Lake off Bogard Road... but with a stop at the yard sale I’d passed up earlier on the Glenn Highway. Turned out that there was nothing I needed at that sale, but it was run by a woman I knew from working with entries in the flower department of the Alaska State Fair.

Heading toward Finger Lake, I couldn’t believe all the yard sale signs. It was difficult to keep my focus, but I was rewarded with fabulous flowers, new



Ann Eagerton’s unique greenhouse in downtown Palmer.

Photo by Maraley McMichael

ideas, and two greenhouses. The second one was large enough to contain a table and chairs. There sat a woman (and her husband) who I hadn’t seen in many years. She asked me to pull

up a chair and visit and I did. Heading toward home, I had to pass that intersection with the most yard sale signs. My car seemed to turn left of its own accord, and I followed the set of signs

that shouted “Multi-family sale” for what turned out to be miles into the countryside. Upon parking, a small silver Toyota Tacoma truck immediately grabbed my attention. Just the day be-

fore I had seriously considered selling my husband’s beloved truck and getting something smaller and not diesel. Could this possibly be what I needed without having to actually do any work researching and looking? I jotted down the details, and after much conversation with the young male owner, I left that sale with his name and phone number.

Driving home on Truck Road, I had to pass the road to the last garden listed on the tour, which I knew quite well having toured it twice in past years and greenhouse sat for the owner one spring. I decided I wasn’t ready for my day to end. The fabulous fragrance emanating from her mock orange trees surrounded us (a group of four) as she answered our questions. What a way to end my day of garden tours...with yard sale detours.

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

Economy

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of cargo at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport.

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson is also the verge of a growth spurt. A \$2 billion investment in the base will bring about 2,700 new military personnel and families to the

community. The luncheon also featured a panel of local leaders to explain what they see happening in their industries, and they represented areas of growth. The panel speakers were Deborah Berini, chief executive of Providence Alaska, Marilyn Romano, regional vice president of Alaska Airlines, Cheryl Siemers, chancellor of University of Alaska Anchorage, Curtis

McQueen, executive director of the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association, and Col. Stephen Polacek, deputy joint base commander, JBER.

Although there is growth in other sectors now, there is more diversity in incomes in the healthcare and logistics sectors. That means that although they

are high-paying positions within both sectors, they do not provide the one-for-one replacement of the earnings once generated by the oil and gas industry.



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Aging Summit preview

Senior Voice Staff

The Statewide Summit on Aging is coming up Oct. 15-17. It's an opportunity to connect policymakers, service providers, state agencies, advocates and the public.

The summit was inspired by the Aging and Disability Summit traditionally held at Special Olympics in Anchorage. The Alaska Commission on Aging partnered with Special Olympics and several other organizations to make this larger summit possible this year.

The summit is Thursday, Oct. 15-Saturday, Oct. 17 at the Turnagain Social Club in Anchorage, 630 E Tudor Road.

The full agenda is available here: <https://bit.ly/45Uj368>

The first day (Thursday) begins with a pre-summit intensive about improving fragmented systems to support aging in place. The official summit opens at 1 p.m. with a keynote speech from Turnagain Social Club on the Adult Day Experience, followed by breakout sessions that cover environmental home modifications, elder support best practices, building tribal adult protective services, and other topics. The day ends with an off-site reception at the Nave from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

The second day (Fri-

day) includes sessions on healthy aging, long-term care financial planning, dementia risk reduction, traumatic brain injuries and dementia, fraud and scam prevention, and suicide prevention in older adults.

The last day (Saturday) has a focus on vision, policy and innovation. Topics will include closing Alaska's residential care gaps, housing issues, including developing tribally run assisted living homes. The day also includes the State Plan For Senior Services Public Hearing, an educational gubernatorial forum on aging and disability issues, and a closing keynote on the future of aging.

The Summit is free for Alaskans ages 65+ and Alaskans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (registration required). The Alaska Commission on Aging also has scholarships available.

Important registration details:

Buy your tickets at <https://bit.ly/4gJ8yJ3>.

Parking is limited at Turnagain Social Club. We encourage carpool and rideshare services. A shuttle will also be provided to and from additional parking across the street.

Continuing education credits are available for professional who work with the senior population.

Calendar of Events

Sept. 1 National Forgiveness Day. This date is dedicated to embracing the journey to forgive others (or maybe ourselves), though some places list this as Sept. 27.

Sept. 1 National Victory over Japan (or V-J Day), which recognizes Allied Forces' victory over Japan during World War II. Officials announced the surrender of Japan to the Allies on August 15, 1945. The official signing of surrender took place on September 2, 1945, officially ending World War II.

Sept. 4 National Food Bank Day. This would be a good day to commit to contributing to your local food bank or organizations that fight food insecurity and hunger.

Sept. 7 National Labor Day. The first Monday of every September is set aside to salute the American workforce.

Sept. 9 National Teddy Bear Day. Break you your favorite teddy bear for comfort and nostalgia. You did keep your childhood teddy, didn't you?

Sept. 11 National Patriot and Day of Service to honor those who lost their lives and loved ones on Sept. 11, 2001.

Sept. 13 National Grandparents Day. Celebrate your grandparents or remind your grandchildren to celebrate you today.

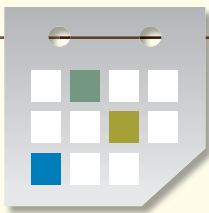
Sept. 17 National Constitution Day and Citizenship Day. On this day, members of the U.S. Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution in 1787. Many local institutions mark the day with speeches, panels and other events.

Sept. 19 National Talk Like a Pirate Day. It was created by two friends in Oregon and popularized by humor columnist Dave Barry, according to Wikipedia. It is a fun, silly holiday in which you are encouraged to use phrases such as "Avast, matey" and "Ahoy!" Anchorage has a celebration (think pub crawl) on Sept. 12. <https://anchoragepiratepubcrawl.org/> In Fairbanks, a fundraiser for the Fairbanks Children's Museum is pirate-related. It's on Sept. 19. <https://aktickets.com/events/set-sail-for-treasure-9-19-2026>

Sept. 22 Northern Hemisphere The fall equinox arrives at 8:04 p.m. ADT, marking the official astronomical start of autumn.

Sept. 22 National Centenarians Day. A day to celebrate those among us who have reached the age of 100 or more.

Sept. 29 National Coffee Day. Shouldn't every day be National Coffee Day?



Send us your calendar items

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Russell Merrill blazed trails in Alaska skies

By LAUREL DOWNING BILL
Senior Voice Correspondent

On Sunday, Sept. 25, 1932, the Russell Hyde Merrill Memorial Beacon was dedicated at Merrill Field. Bought with money raised by the Anchorage Women’s Club, it was a memorial to a pioneer airman. Three years before, he had disappeared almost without a trace.

Merrill, a pivotal figure in Alaska’s early aviation history, was honored with not only Anchorage’s Merrill Field and memorial beacon but also the mountain pass he discovered, Merrill Pass. Born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1894 to a prominent family, Merrill attended Cornell University before joining the U.S. Navy during World War I, where he became Naval Aviator No. 469 and eventually chief pilot at Cape May, New Jersey.

His adventure in Alaska began in 1925 when, with Roy Davis, he flew a Curtiss Model F Flying Boat from Portland, Oregon, to Ketchikan. This was among the first nonmilitary flights up the Pacific Coast to Alaska and included the first commercial crossing of the Gulf of Alaska and westward flight from Juneau.

Quickly, Merrill became a leading bush pilot, founding the Alaska-Washington Airplane Company and pioneering routes throughout the territory. In November 1927, while seeking a faster air route to the Kuskokwim region, Merrill discovered and crossed what became known as Merrill Pass – a discovery that halved travel time compared to the old Rainy Pass route, thus revolutionizing transit across the daunting Alaska Range.

Merrill also accomplished other firsts. That same year, he made the first night landing in Anchorage by safely bringing in a gravely wounded passenger. Residents improvised a runway on what now is the Park Strip using bonfires and car headlights – a feat marking a new era for Alaska air rescue and bush flying.

The pioneering aviator continued to break ground, flying the first commercial service to several remote communities – including Seldovia and Kodiak – and making the region’s first commercial mail and cargo flights. For a time, he worked as chief pilot for Anchorage Air Transport, Anchorage’s first airline.

In 1928, while on an expedition to Barrow for the Fox Film company, Merrill endured a harrowing brush with death. Trapped by fog north of the Brooks Range, he and his two passengers were forced down on a frozen pond. After a protracted rescue, he was found



Russell Hyde Merrill arrived in Alaska in 1925. He lost his life in the wilderness he loved four years later.
Courtesy University of Alaska Fairbanks

By 1929, Merrill was an essential part of Alaska’s growing commercial aviation scene. On September 15, after starting his day with flights to the Kenai Peninsula and Rainy Pass, Merrill embarked alone with heavy equipment bound for Sleetmute and Bethel but vanished without a trace. An intense search covering 10,000 miles yielded only a piece of fabric believed to be from his aircraft, found on a Cook Inlet beach. The act of cutting the fabric—possibly intended for use as a sail—added mystery to his disappearance. His fate remains unknown.

Before his disappearance, he and others had pushed for a per-

manent airfield for Anchorage, which became Aviation Field in East Anchorage that year. The name was changed to Merrill Field in 1930.

Merrill’s courage and character remain emblematic of Alaska’s earliest aviators. Fellow pilot Noel Wien named his son after Merrill, saying that if the boy could emulate Russell Merrill, it would be a source of pride for the family. Today, with a vital airport, a beacon, and a mountain pass all proudly bearing his name, Merrill’s contributions endure in Alaska aviation.

This column features stories researched for Aunt Phil’s Trunk, a five-book Alaska history series written by Laurel Downing Bill and her late aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson. Along with Bill’s latest book, “Pioneers From Alaska’s Past,” the books are available at bookstores and gift shops throughout Alaska, as well as online at www.auntphilstrunk.com and Amazon.

My Word!

Across

- 1 Bridge position
- 5 More than suggest
- 9 Cathedral area
- 13 Walkie-talkie word
- 14 Indian bread
- 15 Lagers
- 17 Sand dollar
- 19 Port of ancient Rome
- 20 Super bargain
- 21 Hanoi holiday
- 23 Headed for overtime
- 24 Get in a pool
- 26 Any day now
- 28 Class-conscious group (Abbr.)
- 30 Conversation starter
- 33 Make a seam
- 36 Toast choice
- 38 Rat Island resident
- 39 Darjeeling or oolong
- 40 Debtor’s woe
- 41 Cantina pots
- 42 Olympian’s quest
- 43 Mischief-maker
- 44 “___ Irish Rose”
- 45 In danger of snapping
- 46 Water tester
- 47 Silas of the Continental Congress
- 48 Hot time in Québec
- 49 Regrets
- 51 Bottom line
- 53 Glen Canyon and the like
- 55 Absorb, as a cost
- 58 Command to Rover
- 62 Ancient city in Asia Minor
- 64 Frameworks for holding wood that is being cut

Down

- 1 Daughter of Hyperion
- 2 Ancient greetings
- 3 Musical chairs goal
- 4 Test choice
- 5 Quitter’s cry
- 6 Arena shout
- 7 Trot or canter
- 8 Fem. suffix
- 9 Blood-typing letters
- 10 Basil-based sauce
- 11 No longer changeable
- 12 Buffalo’s lake
- 16 Down in the dumps
- 18 Morocco’s capital
- 22 Anklebone
- 25 Muse of comedy
- 27 “___ so fast!”
- 28 Red gum tree of Tasmania
- 29 Chinese principle
- 31 Burstyn of film
- 32 Rentals
- 34 Snaky swimmers
- 35 Virginia of Tennis
- 36 Court order
- 37 Blood (Comb. form)
- 41 Having a lot to lose?
- 42 Comprehend
- 44 Stock follower
- 45 Pace
- 50 Unlawful rate of interest
- 52 Wedding helper
- 53 Archaeological site
- 54 Pub potables
- 56 Hammett pooch
- 57 Camper’s purchase
- 59 While lead-in
- 60 Onetime Davis Cup coach
- 61 Razor-sharp
- 63 Where to find Tabasco (Abbr.)
- 65 Itsy-bitsy
- 66 Warmed the bench

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Crossword answers on page 30



“Rocky” theme made lyricist Carol Connors rich

By NICK THOMAS

Tinseltown Talks

Fifty years ago, a scrappy boxing film with a surprisingly low budget and starring a little-known starving actor knocked out star-laden productions such as “A Star is Born” and “All the President’s Men” to win the coveted title of highest grossing film for 1976. “Rocky” went on to win three Oscars including Best Picture.

Contributing to the film’s success, some 80 minutes into the story, audience eardrums are pelted with one of the most stirring and memorable movie themes of the 20th century during Rocky’s rigorous training scene. As the intensity of the training increases, so does the music and lyrics, culminating in the famous dash up the stone stairs of the Philadelphia Museum of Arts as Carol Connors’ inspiring three simple words leap from the soundtrack.

“It’s the film’s iconic moment when Rocky runs through the streets, punches the meat, then climbs those stairs and thrusts his fists in the air,” Connors told me from her home in Beverly Hills. “Then you hear ‘Gonna Fly Now.’ I was actually one of the voices because we didn’t have a big budget to hire a high-priced singer.”

Connors doesn’t hesitate when asked what the film’s theme has meant to her over the past 50 years. “It paid for my Beverly Hills home!” she said. “But beyond that, it captured a movie moment that represents believing in yourself while demonstrating perseverance, hope, and courage. It’s something we can all identify with and is such an enormous high in the story.”

Carol co-wrote the lyrics with Ayn Robbins, while the music was scored by now veteran composer Bill Conti. The three had the same agent who informed the trio of “a little film about a boxer” that needed a theme song. After watching a rough cut of the partially scored film, everyone in the viewing room knew a more powerful theme was needed and “Gonna Fly



Carol Connors and Bill Conti, center, and other singers recording “Gonna Fly Now,” the Rocky theme.

Now” was born.

The upfront payment of \$500 for Carol’s contribution didn’t go far in the late 1970s, but royalty checks soon began arriving and continue to this day whenever the movie airs or the song plays.

“The entire music budget for the film was \$18,000,” she recalls. “You couldn’t write four notes of a movie theme for that today.”

Connors recalls Conti arriving at her house after the screening, sitting at her piano, and belting out the Rocky melody. “After he left, I remember thinking how could anyone write words to that music?” she said. “I went into the shower, and the film and training scene were still fresh in my mind. I pictured Rocky reaching the top of those stairs and thought, oh my God, he could even fly now. So that’s where ‘Gonna Fly Now’ came from.”

With cowriter Robbins, the pair constructed an entire song, but the director (John Avildsen) only used 30 words, basically three short verses in the final score. “It begins with ‘trying hard now’ then ‘getting strong now’ and the final verse ‘gonna fly now,’ so three movements each one upping the ante until Rocky reaches the top of the stairs and knows he can go the distance,” explained Connors.

Nominated for Best Original Song at the 49th Academy Awards, Connors attended the ceremony and was seated next to veteran film scorer Henry Mancini,

himself a four-time Oscar winner. As “Rocky” began winning awards, Mancini leaned in with encouraging words, at least initially.

“He said to me, ‘You’re going to win the Oscar!’” she recalled. “Then Barbara Streisand got up and sang ‘Evergreen’ (from ‘A Star is Born’) and he said to me, ‘I don’t know how to tell you this Carol, but you just lost the Oscar.’ And we did, but it was an honor to be recognized for my work on the film.”

The following year, Connors and Robbins received a second Oscar nomination for writing lyrics to Sammy Fain’s “Someone’s Waiting For You” melody for Disney’s animated feature, “The Rescuers.” Two decades earlier, Carol was recognized with a gold record for selling over 2.5 million copies of the massive 1958 hit “To Know Him Is to Love Him” as lead singer of The Teddy Bears. The song was one of the first written by legendary record producer Phil Spector, who also performed with the group before it quickly disbanded.

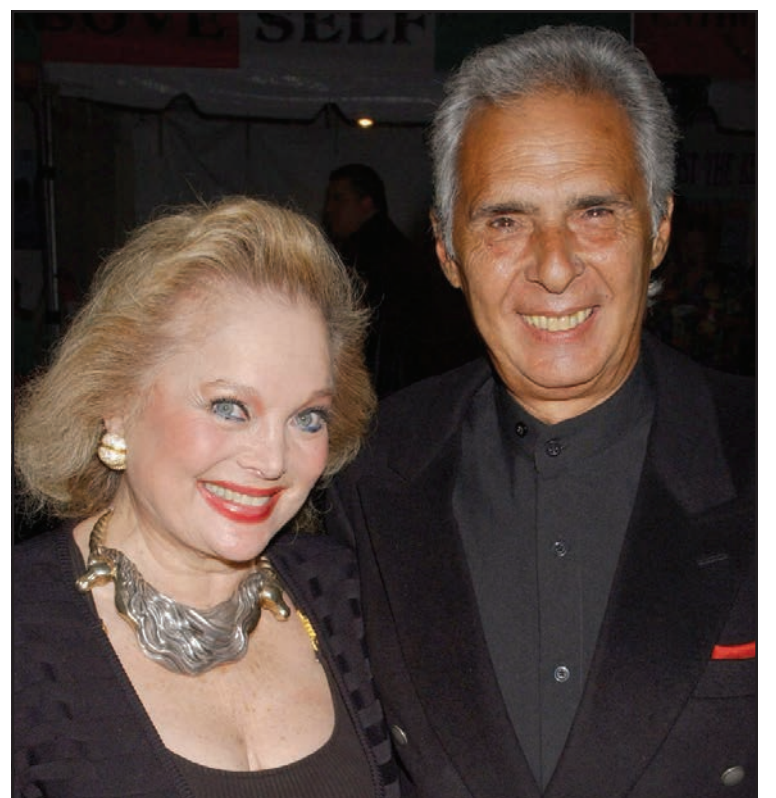
In addition to composing songs for numerous other film and TV projects, another musical career highlight was writing the music and lyrics, with a little help from brother Marshall, to “Hey Little Cobra” recorded by The Rip Chords. Cashing in on the racing car culture of the ’60s, the song became a Top 5 hit in 1963.

Details of Connors’ career were published in her 2024 autobiography “Elvis,

Right: Carol Connors had a hit as part of the Teddy Bears in 1958 with “To Know Him Is to Love Him.”

Below: Carol Connors and Bill Conti in later years. Their song was nominated for Best Original Song at the 49th Annual Academy Awards.

Photos courtesy Roger Neal, publicist for Carol Connor



Rocky and Me” coauthored with Steve Bergsman (Carol dated Elvis for several months in the 1960s; see her website, www.carolconnors.com). Based on the book, the documentary film “Elvis, Rocky & Me: The Carol Connors Story” was released early 2026. The film won numerous film festival awards while the audio book, narrated by Kathy Garver, was nominated for a Grammy for the Best Audio Book, Narration, and Storytelling Recording, losing out to no less an au-

thor than the Dalai Lama.

Turning 85 later this year, Carol Connors continues to write music that still packs a punch and even occasionally belts out a tune, continuing to inspire others—just like Rocky. “Music has been my life,” she says. “I’m glad I could share it.”

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



When an estate holds a large business asset, what is fair for all of the heirs?

By KENNETH KIRK

For Senior Voice



I was in an online discussion with another estate planner recently. She practices in Indiana, and she raised an issue which, for her, mostly related to family farms. We don't have all that many farms up here in Alaska (a few, I know, but nothing like the Midwest), but I have seen the same issue come up regarding small businesses.

Here's the underlying problem: What do you do when you have a single asset which dwarfs the rest of the estate, and one kid wants to take it over?

Here's what I'm talking about: Let's say you have a couple, Mom and Pop, who have a pretty productive business. It's a very specialized business, and while it doesn't have a whole lot of employees, it does turn a nice profit.

Over the years this couple has made some pretty good money, but a lot of it went into building the company. They had some

savings but lost a lot of that in the stock market crash in 2007. Their other assets are their home, which is worth about \$300,000, and about \$100,000 in savings.

Mom and Pop have three kids: Junior, Suzy, and Bill. The older two aren't really interested in taking over the family business; Junior has a pretty good job, and Suzy lives in New Mexico. Bill, on the other hand, has been working for the family business since he was a teenager. He knows how to do everything, and he would love to take it over when Mom and Pop are gone.

But this couple want the overall estate divid-

There is a lot of leeway in how to appraise a small business, and two different accountants can come out with two wildly different numbers.

ed equally between their children. They figure the business is worth at least \$800,000. If they let Bill have the business outright, he gets \$800,000, the majority of the estate, and the other two kids will get only \$200,000 each. So, the question is, how do you even things up?

There are some options, but they're not ideal. They could say that the business goes to all three children equally and then assume that the other two will agree to let Bill run the business. But are the three of them going to be able to agree on fair compensation for Bill, who will be working in the business full time? And will Bill be happy having to run all of the major business decisions past his siblings?

Another option may be that Bill gets the business, but he has to buy out the

other two kids with notes to be paid over time. There is still some risk involved, because if the value of the business goes down (say, some new competition comes into town from Outside) Bill is locked into paying the notes but no longer has the same amount of income.

Another possible option is life insurance, sufficient to pay off the other two kids and make everything even. Unfortunately, for most older folks life insurance is not an affordable option. I know a lot of you see those TV commercials promising guaranteed life insurance for seniors, but the amount those policies pay is actually pretty small.

One thing is certain: If the solution involves putting a value on the business, there should be a pretty tightly drawn for-

mula for how the business is valued. There is a lot of leeway in how to appraise a small business, and two different accountants can come out with two wildly different numbers. If you have a formula that says Bill gets the business but has to pay off Junior and Suzy for their shares, don't leave the question of the underlying value of the business open.

There is not necessarily a perfect answer to this question. A lot of it depends on the personalities and family dynamics involved. But these kinds of decisions are why I am not worried that my job will be replaced by artificial intelligence. There is no way an AI program is going to sort this one out.

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. And get it done, before you buy the farm.

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Pet tracking, battery charging, reminders

By BOB DeLAURENTIS

Bob's Tech Talk

Q. Can Apple AirTags track my family pet?

A. I recommend against AirTags for pet locations. AirTags depend on iPhones, and they only report their location every once in a while. They can work in some circumstances, but they are not the right tool most of the time. If you want to track your pet, use a GPS collar.

The GPS I use is made by a company called Fi, and they have an entire line of trackers of different sizes and capabilities to fit different sized pets.

They require a subscription, which might be a dealbreaker for some users. But the feature set goes far beyond simple location tracking. It tracks your pet's walking, sleeping, and water intake. You can share data with a family member or share your dog's path with a friend or on social media. And it helps you find furry friend if he or she is lost. If you are not as pet crazy as I am, you may want to consider a simpler tracker,

such as the Aorkuler Dog GPS Tracker 2.

No matter your choice, I believe that GPS is an excellent option for pet tracking, and when paired with microchip IDs, they make the world a safer place for your family pet.

Q. Sometimes my new MacBook only charges to 80%. Why is this happening and can it be fixed?

A. Lithium-ion batteries have a longer shelf life and perform better overall if they are not routinely charged to 100%.

For this reason, most battery-powered Apple devices support something labeled "battery optimization." When switched on, the device does not charge to 100% automatically.

When the maximum battery optimization is set to something less than 100%, your battery will last longer. This is especially useful for laptops that are plugged into A/C power most of the time. And for those times when you expect a long day, you can use the battery menu at the top right of the screen (or in System Settings) to force

a single charge to full.

The 80% level can be changed by the user, although the setting is hard to find. On macOS Tahoe, go to System Settings, Battery, and tap on the faint "i" icon to the right of the word "Charging."

This will reveal a new dialog window with an on-off switch and a slider to control the maximum charge level.

Besides these user settings, newer Apple devices try to learn your behavior patterns and optimize accordingly. Even if you do nothing, you may see optimized charging behavior.

Rest assured battery optimization is a real feature, not just a gimmick. It is worth your time to understand how to make it work best for you.

Q. I tried using the Apple Reminders app to track my daily activities. I find it confusing, and wonder if there is something else, perhaps simpler?

A. There are hundreds of to-do apps on the App Store, each one attempts to make task-tracking easier. I wrote about one that I

Wander the Web

Here are my picks for worthwhile browsing this month:

Famous (infamous?) celebrity dogs

This wiki page is a fun collection of very good dogs.
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_individual_dogs

Scream therapy

Sometimes a primal howl will put a little life back into your world. This site can help.
screamintothevoid.com

Doggone good content

This site links to a podcast, Instagram, and TikTok account filled with happy stories of dogs.
ig-links.weratedogs.com

liked called GoodTask a few months ago.

One of GoodTask's key features is that it stores data in the same place as the Apple Reminders app, so any changes in one app appear in both apps. By using Apple's data store, you are never locked into an app that may be discontinued someday. It also allows you the ultimate flexibility to change apps to meet your needs. No matter which app you use, your data is safe in iCloud.

There are two other apps in this category to be aware of, one simple and one complex.

The simple app is called Unforgettable. If you find Apple Reminders too confusing, Unforgettable may change your mind. It's

designed for people with attention issues, and it works as a helper to keep you focused. That's it. It's simple but sophisticated.

The other app is Finalist. This app is something like a personal manager, featuring a journal, to-dos, projects, a habit tracker, weather, and more. It's extremely customizable and attempts to be a personal assistant who tells you what you need to know, and when.

Each of these apps is powerful and adaptable, and they support both simple and complex scenarios. Try each app to discover which one best fits your life.

Bob has been writing about technology for over three decades. He can be contacted at techtalk@bobdel.com.



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Rediscovering “us” in Thailand: Chiang Mai

This is part 2 of 3 of a couple rediscovering each other after their children moved out.

By **KIM SHERRY**

For Senior Voice

Chiang Mai is where Thailand slows down and softens around the edges. Inside the Old City, a square framed by a moat and crumbling 13th-century Lanna walls, one wanders past ancient temples and modern cafés. For empty nesters, it's the perfect place to trade homework checks and packing lunches for slower days, shared discoveries, and the quiet realization that you're a couple first again.

Arrival, curry, and a very good view

We arrived from Bangkok around lunchtime, early enough to find our hotel, eat well, and explore. Our boutique hotel, tucked down a narrow alley, had an infinity pool and a breakfast buffet so generous we immediately accepted our fate. At \$1 per person, moderation felt optional, and unlikely, for the next morning.

Our first mission was lunch, not logistics. We walked to a popular spot, saw the line snaking out the door, and did something revolutionary: We said “nope.” No meltdowns, no negotiations, just a calm pivot across the street to Baan Buri, a reminder that plans are suggestions, not obligations.

In blessed A/C, we ordered green curry with chicken and khao soi, Chiang Mai's rich coconut curry noodle soup with crispy noodles on top. We finished with mango sticky rice – sweet mango, warm coconut rice, and just enough crunch to make it interesting. Somewhere between bites, I decided it might double as a life philosophy.

We spent the afternoon by the pool, reading, cooling off, and intentionally not doing much. In Chiang Mai, we chose to leave space in the day, which turns out to be its own kind of luxury.

That evening, we walked to The Good View along the Ping River. “We'll just walk” turned into wrong



turns, a wobbly bridge, and an unexpected detour through a lantern-lit Chinatown preparing for Chinese New Year. Years ago, this would've meant stress. Now it just felt like part of the story.

The restaurant lived up to its name. As the sun set, the river glowed and the city lit up around us. We ordered papaya salad at a cautious “1” spice level, which translated roughly to “regret.” Two mojitos and a ridiculous amount of water later, I regained feeling in my tongue. Husband Bruce's red curry and my crab noodles were excellent, once I could taste them again.

Flowers, temples, and dinner on the floor

We stumbled into the Chiang Mai Flower Festival the next morning simply by being available, one of the underrated perks of this stage of life. Floats covered in flowers, dancers, and music filled the streets. It felt like the city queued everything up just for us.

Top left: Walking beside gentle giants into the Chiang Mai jungle—quiet, humbling, and unforgettable.

Top right: At The Good View, the Ping River glowed, the city lit up, and even the wrong turns felt exactly right

Right: Mango sticky rice at Baan Buri—sweet, simple, and the moment we decided Chiang Mai might just have life figured out.

Photos by Kim Sherry

We drifted in and out of the crowds, pointing out details to each other the way we once did with our kids, only now, we could linger or leave whenever we wanted. When the noise wore on us, we slipped into a nearby temple where everything softened: bells, birds, and quiet space to breathe.

One building was men-only; instead of questioning it, we leaned into curiosity. Travel feels different when you're not

next page please





Chaing Mai

from page 22

rushing to the next thing.

Lunch at Kat's Kitchen delivered exactly what we needed: papaya salad (mercifully mild this time), khao soi, and drunken noodles. We passed plates, debated favorites, and agreed everything deserved a repeat order.

The afternoon returned us to the pool and the realization that travel feels quieter now, but also richer.

Later, seated on floor cushions around a low table, we enjoyed a khantoke dinner and cultural show. Traditional dances, music, and a fire performance unfolded while we shared northern Thai dishes. It felt like a date night from another era, unhurried and immersive. Our knees and hips complained, but the experience won.

Moats, markets, and cooking together

The following morning was for wandering along the moat, through temples, and into small corners we might have missed otherwise. Less "must-see," more "glad we did."

Lunch at See You Soon café included playful drinks and a standout pineapple fried rice served in a pineapple that Bruce ordered. I went for a croissant version of eggs Benedict, and as usual, we swapped bites. His won, but not by much.

Our cooking class began with a market visit, where our guide introduced us to Thai herbs, spices, and produce, including the largest avocado I've ever seen. No rushing, no distractions, just the two of us noticing things together.

At the organic farm, our instructor Lily guided us through spring rolls, curries, soups, and stir-fries, each of us choosing our own dishes based on mood and spice tolerance. Pounding curry paste was surprisingly physical; my arms filed a formal complaint the next day.

Dinner was what we made, shared with other travelers at a long table. A different kind of date night, one you can recreate at home.

A khantoke dinner at the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center—floor cushions, northern Thai flavors, and a date night from another era.

Photo by Kim Sherry

Sticky rocks, gentle giants, and the lesson

Our final day took us into the hills. At the "Sticky Waterfalls," we climbed straight up rushing water thanks to grippy limestone. With ropes to steady us, it felt equal parts ridiculous and wonderful.

Bamboo rafting followed—peaceful, scenic, and just long enough for me to realize sunscreen is not optional and shade is a gift.

Then came the elephants. At a no-riding camp, we fed them bananas and sugar cane, then walked alongside them into the forest. No big speech, just quiet awe. Huge, gentle, and completely present.

Less magical: biting flies. I counted at least 15 bites on the backs of my legs. Wear long pants. You'll be hot, but you'll keep your blood.

We ended with one last dinner, mai tais, papaya salad, shrimp fried rice, pad see-ew, and mango sticky rice with coconut ice cream. A sweet, fitting finish to a city that fed us well in every sense.

Chiang Mai taught us to say "yes" to new food, new experiences, and even slightly intimidating waterfalls. We left with sore calves, happy stomachs, and the sense that this "just us" chapter isn't something to adjust to, it's something to look forward to.

Next time, the Sherry's travel to Koh Samui in Part 3 of this series.

Kim Sherry, mother of two daughters and a fourth-generation Alaskan who grew up in King Salmon, is a host on Alaska Public Radio program Hometown, Alaska. She loves to cook and appeared on the third season of "The Great American Recipe" on PBS as the first contestant ever from Alaska. She also participated in the new culinary show "100 Cooks" on the Food Network and HBO. Kim is an artist who specializes in pet portraits, has written and illustrated two children's books, is an avid gardener, and loves to travel.



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The cool people at the Alaska Center for the Blind

By PETE MCCALL

For Senior Voice

Like a scene from the 1950s or a lost episode of “Mad Men,” it’s not unusual to see people at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired sporting a pair of Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses. While they may look stylish, these smart glasses have become much more than a fashion accessory for people who are blind or have low vision.

When Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses first hit store shelves in September 2021, they were marketed to consumers as a hands-free way to access music, take photos and videos, and interact with an AI-powered voice assistant. Content creators, photographers, and professionals quickly embraced the glasses for their built-in cameras and convenience. What Meta and Ray-Ban may not have anticipated, however, was how valuable the technology would become for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Although they were not the intended target market, blind and low-vision users quickly discovered practical applications for the glasses. By providing hands-free access to smartphone features and apps, the glasses can significantly increase independence. Users can launch assistive applications such as Be My Eyes with simple voice commands, eliminating the need to handle a smartphone.

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects users with volunteers from around the world. Using a live video feed from either a smartphone camera or the cameras built into the glasses, volunteers can provide real-time assistance. Whether helping someone navigate an unfamiliar environment or locate a dropped item, the app effectively gives users an extra set of eyes when they need it most.

Staff member Kevin Whitley, who is blind, regularly uses his Ray-Ban Meta glasses while traveling. Last year, Kevin was returning from a ski trip and passing through the Oslo Airport in Norway when



Top: Kevin Whitley, the woodshop instructor at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, uses eyeglasses with assistive technology. He used them to navigate the duty-free shop at the Oslo airport last year.

Bottom: Emilia Nidoy uses glasses enhanced with technology to navigate her life. Meta partnered with Ray-Ban to create AI-assisted eyeglasses. While not without controversy for their “x-ray” capabilities, they are helpful with people who are blind or low vision.

Photos by Carole Anderson



with vision loss. One of its most popular functions is text recognition, which can instantly read printed text aloud. Users rely on it to read mail, identify product labels, review documents, or even browse restaurant menus.

At the time of this writing, first-generation Ray-Ban Meta glasses can still be found for approximately \$300. The second-generation models, released in 2023, retail for around \$400 and offer improvements such as longer battery life, expanded voice-command capabilities, and enhanced camera performance.

In 2025, Oakley introduced its own version of the smart glasses. While the underlying technology is similar, Oakley’s wrap-around design provides additional protection from glare, a feature that can be especially beneficial for individuals with low vision. Oakley smart glasses typically retail for around \$500.

These glasses are not for everyone. Individuals who are uncomfortable with technology or do not use smartphones may find them difficult to integrate into their daily lives. However, for those who embrace technology, smart glasses can be a powerful tool that promotes greater independence, accessibility, and confidence for people who are blind or have low vision.

Pete McCall is the older blind coordinator at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

he decided to leave his gate to visit the duty-free shop so he could buy chocolates for friends and family back home. Using only his voice, he launched the Be My Eyes

app through his glasses. A volunteer then guided him safely to the store and back, allowing him to travel independently and confidently.

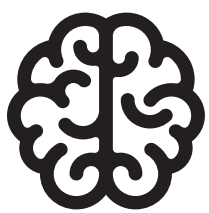
Clients at the center have

also discovered the benefits of pairing the glasses with other assistive apps, such as Seeing AI. This free application offers several features designed for people

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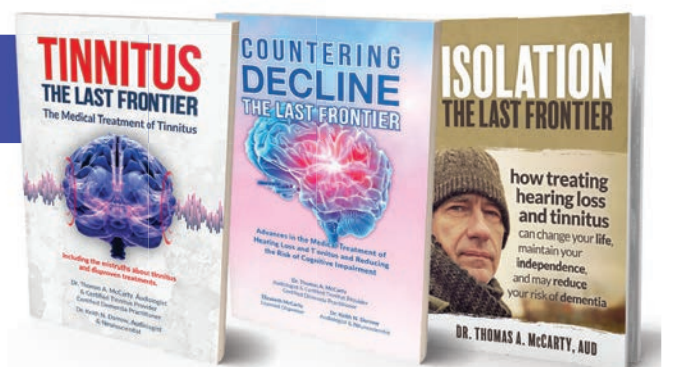
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Meaningful memorials through cremation

By **BRITTINI SHELTON**

Owner, Legacy Funeral Homes

Many people mistakenly assume that choosing cremation means forgoing a funeral or memorial service. In reality, cremation is simply a method of final disposition. It does not determine whether a family gathers to honor, remember, and celebrate the life of someone they love.

Families have many options. A traditional funeral may be held before cremation, or a memorial service can take place afterward. Others choose a celebration of life at a meaningful location, a private family gathering, or a ceremony that reflects the individual's personality, beliefs, and traditions.

In fact, nearly everything that can be done with a burial can also be done with cremation. Families may choose visitation, a viewing, religious services, military honors, graveside ceremonies, processions, flowers, personalized tributes, professional music, video presentations, or receptions. The only difference is the final method of disposition. A meaningful funeral is defined by the people who gather and the memories they share — not whether burial or cremation is selected.

The most meaningful memorials focus on creating an opportunity for connection, remembrance, and support. Sharing stories, displaying photographs,

playing favorite music, offering military or cultural honors, and incorporating personal items all help tell the story of a unique life. These moments often become lasting memories for those left behind.

One advantage of cremation is flexibility. Because services are not required to occur immediately, families can allow time for relatives to travel, carefully plan a personalized ceremony, or schedule a gathering when loved ones can be together. This often reduces stress while creating a more thoughtful experience.

Many families also choose permanent ways to remember their loved one, such as selecting a meaningful urn, creating memorial jewelry, installing an engraved bench or marker, placing cremated remains in a cemetery niche or family burial plot, planting a memorial tree, or scattering cremated remains in a location of personal significance, where permitted.

Research and experience consistently show that meaningful ceremonies help families acknowledge a loss, receive support from others, and begin adapting to life after the death of someone important. Whether the final disposition is burial or cremation, the ceremony itself is often what people remember most—a time to gather, reflect, honor a life, and support one another.

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Is tap-to-pay an opportunity for scammers?

By AIDAN SMITH

For Senior Voice

Could someone steal your credit card information while it's still in your wallet? Technically, yes. But before you panic, you should understand what tap-to-pay is, how these scams work, and if the risk is significant enough to worry about.

Tap-to-pay technology

Contactless cards use a secure, short-range form of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology that transfers information between a card and a card reader via radio waves. Despite what many people think, using tap-to-pay doesn't broadcast your credit card number; it sends an encrypted, one-time code to the card reader, which then verifies the code with your bank.

How tap-to-pay scams work

The concern behind tap-to-pay scams comes



Tap-to-pay systems are becoming more common. The risk is in RFID skimming. In theory, a criminal carrying a concealed card reader could get close enough to someone's contactless card to steal their information. RFID-blocking devices, often built into wallets, can give you an extra level of security.

Photo courtesy
SumUp Pay via Pexels

available to send information to nearby readers. If you have contactless payment through your cellphone, however, that information is only available when you enable your digital wallet.

Tap-to-pay scams are possible but rare

Experts say that even though tap-to-pay scams are theoretically possible, they aren't worth losing sleep over. "There's a lot in life to worry about, but someone stealing your credit/debit card informa-

tion from the RFID chip shouldn't be one of them," Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) Chief Operating Officer James E. Lee told AARP.

While it can happen, RFID skimming requires a scammer to get within a few centimeters of a card. If you've ever been frustrated at checkout because you can't seem to tap your card in the right spot, you know how precise a scammer would have to be.

Even if a scammer skimmed a contactless card, the amount of useful data they'd receive would be limited. Modern contactless cards generate secure, one-time transaction codes that don't include crucial details like your PIN, name, or security code.

When an RFID blocker might be worth it

RFID-blocking items, like wallets, sleeves, and

page 30 please



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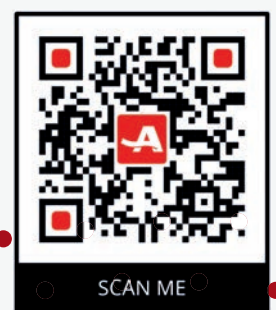
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Factors to consider in claiming Social Security

By JIM MILLER

Savvy Senior

Dear Savvy Senior,

I turn 62 early next year and plan to retire soon after. Most advice says I should wait to claim Social Security because my monthly benefit will be higher. But with all the recent news about Social Security's financial problems, I'm wondering if taking benefits early might be the safer choice. Is there ever a good reason to claim at 62? – *Ready to Retire*

Dear Ready,

You're definitely not alone in asking this.

The latest Social Security Trustees Report projects the retirement trust fund could be depleted around 2032 if Congress doesn't act. If that happens, Social Security would still collect payroll taxes and pay benefits, but retirees could face an across-the-board cut of about 22%.

Before you rush to file, keep things in perspective.

Most experts still expect Congress to step in, as it has before, to strengthen Social Security. And even if lawmakers don't act, waiting would still produce a higher monthly benefit because any across-the-board benefit cut would apply to everyone. While claiming at 62 means collecting benefits sooner, it also permanently locks in a smaller check.

That said, there are several situations where claiming Social Security at 62 can make good financial sense.

How claiming age affect your benefits

You can start Social Security at 62, but doing so permanently reduces your monthly benefit by about 30 percent compared with waiting until full retirement age (67 for those born in 1960 or later). Delaying until 70 increases your benefit by about 24 percent.

For example, a \$2,000

monthly benefit at full retirement age would drop to about \$1,400 at 62, or rise to roughly \$2,480 if you wait until 70.

When claiming early makes sense

For some retirees, claiming at 62 is a practical move. If you've stopped working and need income for basic expenses, Social Security can provide a steady check right away. It can also serve as a bridge if you retire early or lose a job in your early 60s while delaying withdrawals from retirement accounts or a pension.

Some retirees also claim Social Security early to reduce withdrawals from their IRA or 401(k) during market downturns. The tradeoff is a permanently reduced lifetime benefit.

For married couples, timing can be coordinated as part of a broader strategy. One spouse may claim early to bring in income while the other delays to

boost their future or survivor benefit.

Health is another big factor. Delaying only pays off if you live long enough to collect those higher monthly checks. The break-even point between claiming at 62 and full retirement age is around age 78 or 79.

If you're still working, be careful here too. Before full retirement age, earnings above Social Security's annual limit can temporarily reduce your benefit, and claiming early locks in that lower amount for life.

Why delaying helps

For many retirees, waiting means a larger guaranteed monthly benefit for life and often a higher lifetime payout if you live into your late 70s or beyond. It can also provide stronger protection against outliving savings.

For couples, delaying the higher earner's benefit can increase the survivor benefit, which may help

provide more financial security for a surviving spouse.

Before deciding, it's smart to review your numbers. You can create a free account at [SSA.gov/myaccount](https://ssa.gov/myaccount) to check your earnings record and estimate benefits at different ages. Tools like OpenSocialSecurity.com or MaximizeMySocialSecurity.com (a paid tool with a \$49 fee) can also help you compare claiming strategies.

There's no one-size-fits-all answer. For most people, waiting still makes the most sense. But if you need income, have health concerns or are coordinating benefits with a spouse, claiming at 62 may be the better choice. The key is to base your decision on your own circumstances—not fear about Social Security's future.

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



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Mat-Su Senior Services gets a new CEO

Senior Voice Staff

The Palmer Senior Citizen's Center, Inc., which does business as Mat-Su Senior Services (PSCC/MSSS), has appointed Elda McCraw to the position of chief executive officer.

Elda has been active in the organization and in the Mat-Su community. Elda is

a lifetime member of PSCC/MSSS and has been on the board for more than six years. As a director she has volunteered many hours as well as financially invested in many of the board projects.

She has worked to address projects that had languished due to lack of funding or lack of hands.

This included a six-month project archiving old records, two spring projects of improving the gardens, supporting the re-opening of the library, coordinating the Colony Days Float, and serving as a volunteer for bingo.

Elda retired from both BP Alaska and Alyeska Pipeline, where she worked

in contracting, finance and accounting positions. She has a master's degree in global logistics from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She completed the nonprofit management class offered at Mat-Su College. Edna is also active in Rotary, Palmer Lions, and the Palmer Historical Society among other vol-

unteer organizations to which she has given time.

Founded in 1980, Palmer Senior Citizens Center, doing business as Mat-Su Senior Services, serves a wide geographical area from its full-service headquarters in Palmer.

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Food

continued from page 13

meals, French fries, soda, packaged desserts, and refined snacks) and the fourth was unhealthy/minimally processed (white rice, fruit juice, potatoes, and homemade desserts made with refined flour and sugar).

About half of the study participants eventually died or developed heart disease or type 2 diabetes. According to the results, the risk of these outcomes varied significantly depending on overall diet quality. Healthy diets were associated with lower risk, while unhealthy di-

ets were associated with higher risk. Within each category, however, the risks were almost identical regardless of whether the diet was ultra-processed or minimally processed.

The results call into question the use of processing level as a key indicator of healthy eating. Healthy foods can be classified as ultra-processed.

"Advising people to universally avoid ultra-processed foods can lead to lower diet quality since healthy ultra-processed foods are beneficial and unhealthy minimally processed foods are detrimental," Wang said. "People should prioritize the quality of foods rather than focusing solely on the

level of processing. Aim for more nutrient-dense, high-quality foods to help lower your risk of chronic diseases."

She suggests that dietary guidelines continue to promote established high-quality diets, like the Mediterranean diet or healthy plant-based diets, rather than focusing on processing level. The Mediterranean diet supports brain health by slowing cognitive decline, reducing dementia and Alzheimer's risk, and improving memory. The key components of the Mediterranean diet are eating antioxidant-rich plant foods, healthy fats like olive oil, and omega-3 fatty acids from fish.

A diet based on Alaska foods

Nutrient-dense foods are an important part the diet of a lot of Alaskans for good reason. Salmon, cod, herring, and shellfish are very high in protein, vitamin B12, and anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats. For Alaska Native who have hunting rights to marine mammals, seal, whale blubber (muktuk), and sea

lion can be included. Land mammals (moose, caribou), wild berries, and sea greens can combine to provide a diet that is naturally low in sugar, high in lean protein, rich in antioxidants, and heart-healthy.

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

Centenarians Day is Sept. 22

Senior Voice Staff

National Centenarians Day honors individuals who have reached the age of 100 or older.

Many months, we profile a centenarian. If you know someone who has reached this milestone, contact the Alaska Commission on Aging at 907-465-3250. The governor's office will send

a special gubernatorial letter and commendation recognizing your loved one.

You can also email editor@seniorvoicealaska.com to notify us about the potential for a story about your 100-year-old or older Elder. You can see past profiles about centenarians on our website <https://www.seniorvoicealaska.com/search/centenarians>.

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Scam

continued from page 27

cards, aren't completely worthless. For people who travel frequently, attend large events, or simply enjoy the peace of mind that comes from an extra layer of security, an RFID blocker may be a worthwhile investment.

If you decide to buy an

RFID blocker, ensure it's from a reputable source at a reasonable price. Check reviews and don't spend significantly more than you would on a wallet without the RFID-blocking technology.

How to protect yourself from scams besides an RFID blocker

There are several habits that provide more protection against fraud than

an RFID blocker. Using unique passwords for every account, enabling two-factor authentication, reviewing bank statements regularly, opening a digital vault (<https://bit.ly/3TRmqYV>), and being skeptical of unexpected messages can help prevent more common scams. While RFID skimming tends to grab headlines because it sounds futuristic, it's important to ask: At

what point does protecting yourself cost more than the threat you're trying to avoid?

If you or a loved one has been targeted by a scam or fraud, you are not alone. You can call the AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline at 877-908-3360 (open 4 a.m. to 4 p.m. Alaska time Monday through Friday) to talk to a fraud specialist who can provide support

and guidance on next steps. Whether you've lost money, shared personal information, or have a question, you can call.

You can also find tools, alerts, and prevention tips through the AARP Fraud Watch Network. Visit aarp.org/fraud for more resources. Remember: if you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam.

Aidan Smith is an intern for AARP Alaska.



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8/18: Understanding Grief's Landscape
8/25: The Weight We Carry
9/1: Stories That Shape Us
9/8: Navigating Hard Days
9/15: Cultivating Compassion
9/22: Healing Grief in the Body
9/29: Connection and Community
10/6: Holding Love and Loss
10/13: Moments of Meaning
10/20: Growing Around Grief
10/27: Moving Forward

AI

continued from page 3

find answers to specific treatment questions. It combs through scientific research papers for the best treatment options for complex cases, saving providers time.

Arvidson spoke about the possibility of integrating AI with traditional therapy. He said AI could be an effective mode of gathering data

on a patient's symptoms between therapy appointments or reminding patients to stay on track with their treatment plan.

As AI gets more advanced, it is important to stay informed about the latest technology.

Call 907-563-1000 Information in this article and on the website of Alaska Behavioral Health is provided for informational/educational purposes only, is not a substitute for professional health-care, and does not establish

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Kaitlyn Gaub was a communications intern at Alaska Behavioral Health in summer 2026.

Music

continued from page 9

income, religion, background, and life experience can make our worlds seem farther apart.

Music gives us common ground.

For an afternoon, students will not simply be performing for people living with dementia. They will be performing with them. The audience will see people of different ages and experiences contributing to the same song, each voice

important to the whole.

That is a message we hope extends well beyond the walls of the theater.

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's does not erase a person's ability to contribute, experience joy, build relationships, or belong to a community. Sometimes connection simply requires us to find another language.

And sometimes that language is music.

The Forget Me Not Chorus has shown us this again and again. A song begins. Voices join together. The distinctions between the person living with de-

mentia, the caregiver, the volunteer, the student, and the musician become less important.

What remains is a room full of people singing.

This October, we invite the Anchorage community to come listen. Because while memories may change and words may become harder to find, music can continue to offer something deeply human: a way to recognize one another, to share a moment, and to belong.

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

Heritage Health

Alaska trivia crossword answers from page 4

ACROSS	DOWN
3. BABE RUTH	1. SERENA
4. NAMATH	2. YANKEES
5. JESSE OWENS	3. SUPER BOWL
6. ALI	4. HANK AARON
7. RIPKEN	5. LOMBARDI
	6. INDY 500
	7. JORDAN

Crossword answers from page 18

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

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Community, connection and care in Nikiski

By **AMY JACKMAN**

For Senior Voice

As I write this article, I am reminded of the thread that connects us all and the importance of community.

At the Nikiski Senior Center, that thread is easy to see.

It is there around the lunch tables, where seniors sit alongside younger adults, children and families. It is there when transportation coordinator Pam Nelson receives one of her regular lunchtime visits from her great-grandson and his mother, and in conversations with members whose talents and life experiences could fill books of their own.

I have had the pleasure of sitting at lunch with men who are artists of the highest caliber—musicians, woodcarvers, craftsmen and creators. One of them is Tommy Garber, who hand-carved the whale and fish that now hang from the soaring A-frame ceiling of our main dining room.

Executive director John Walker describes the Center in a way that captures its spirit perfectly: “We are an OPEN community center focused on seniors.” That distinction matters.

The mission of the Nikiski Senior Center is to support people on their aging journey through community connections and accessible services. But this is not a place removed from the larger community. It is woven into it.

Today, the center has more than 500 members. So far this year, approximately 1,000 lunches have been served in-house and another 200 Meals on Wheels deliveries have reached people at home. Transportation staff provide more than 90 rides each month, while the community food pantry has served 37 families. More than 40 core volunteers have already contributed over 2,700 hours this year, giving real meaning to a phrase we use at the center: Everything we do, we do together.

Healthy aging is about more than receiving ser-

vices or simply staying busy. It is about continuing to live a full life. At the center, that means opportunities to create, move, learn, socialize, contribute and try something new through activities including yoga, Silver & Fit, quilting and sewing, art and craft classes, pinocle, workshops, Bible study and community outings. Learning new skills, making art, moving the body and maintaining meaningful connections can support cognitive health and overall well-being. These are not simply activities to pass the time. They are opportunities to continue growing.

The center’s reach also extends beyond Nikiski.

The Kenai Peninsula Family Caregiver Support Program, or KPFCSP, serves the entire peninsula, supporting approximately 85 to 100 caregivers each year. Dani Kebschull says her favorite part is the one-on-one connection with caregivers—listening, offering support and recommending practical ways to help.

Caregiving can be both deeply meaningful and deeply demanding. Many people may not even think of themselves as caregivers; they are simply a husband caring for his wife, a daughter helping her mother, or a family member doing what families do.

KPFCSP helps lighten that load through respite care, in-home assistance, resources, referrals and connection. A few hours of respite can mean attending your own appointment, shopping without rushing, resting or simply having time to breathe. Those hours matter.

The center has also recently taken on Senior In-Home Services, or SIH, through a three-year grant designed to help adults age 60 and older remain safely and independently at home. More than 65 individuals were already receiving assistance when the program came to the Center.

At this time, SIH provides chore assistance, with priority given to low-in-

come seniors, along with case management support connecting participants to longer-term resources. Sometimes independence is preserved through very practical things. Help with household tasks that have become difficult or unsafe can support continued life at home with greater safety, dignity and stability.

The center is also investing in the future. Senior Shores currently includes eight senior housing units on the Lake Marie campus, with eight more fully accessible units in devel-

opment. The larger vision includes expanded in-home services, a walking trail and a new community garden—all creating more opportunities for independence and connection.

And then, of course, there is Molly, our unofficial emotional support dog and a familiar presence in the administrative office who has a remarkable ability to make people smile.

Perhaps that is what I appreciate most about this place. Community is not one program, one building or one service. It is the

thread running through all of it—meals shared, rides given, homes supported, caregivers encouraged, art created, stories exchanged, volunteers showing up, children visiting, people learning something new and neighbors caring for one another.

And here in Nikiski, that thread is very much alive.

Amy Jackman is the outreach specialist, Nikiski Senior Center/Kenai Peninsula Family Caregiver Program/Senior In-Home Program outreach@nikiskiseniorcenter.org, 907-776-7654



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