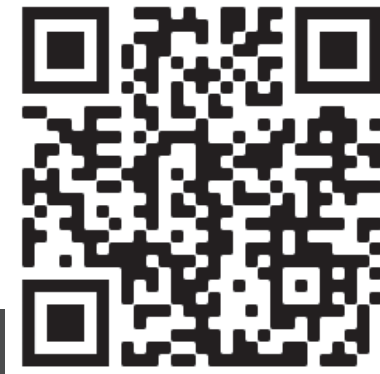


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Volume 48, Number 2 February 2025

Counterfeit prescription drugs are widespread. Here are ways to avoid them.

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Kotzebue's assisted living home for family, tradition and love.

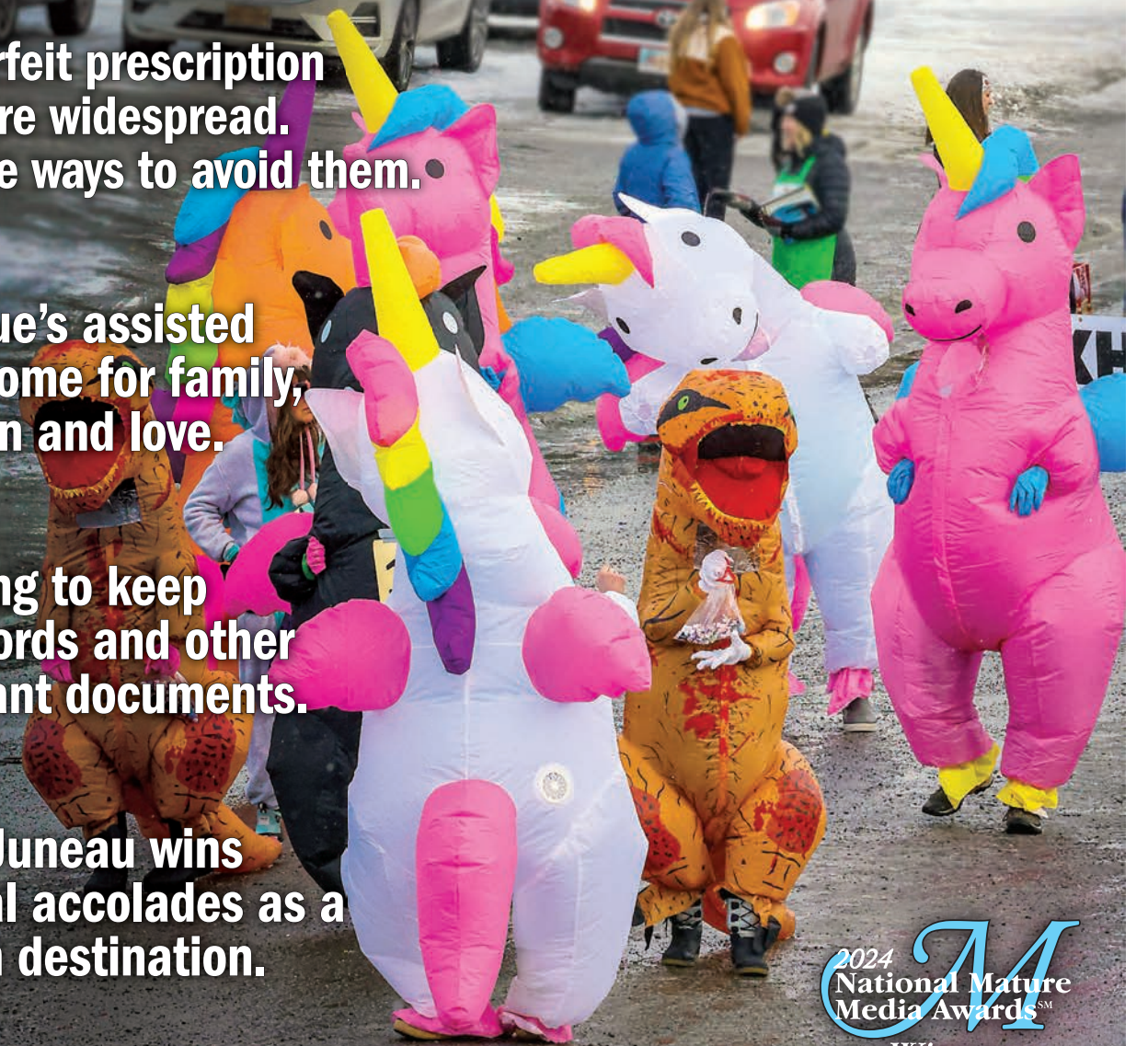
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How long to keep tax records and other important documents.

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Travel: Juneau wins national accolades as a tourism destination.

- page 22



2024
National Mature
Media Awards
Winner

A group of eight friends donned costumes and the name "The Unicorn Bunch" to march in last year's Homer Winter Carnival Parade. The annual community event is an opportunity to express some creative energy during the long winter and takes place this year on Feb. 8, starting at noon on Pioneer Ave. The theme is "Sunshine and Snowflakes." More info at homer.alaska.org/events. See the calendar on page 17 for other February activities around the state.

Photo courtesy Misty Kincaid Photography/Homer Chamber of Commerce



Dementia care is a critical component of the Pioneer Homes

By **BOB PAWLOWSKI**

For *Senior Voice*

Alaska's Pioneer Homes are a vital part of our state's commitment to providing quality care for our aging population, particularly those with dementia and cognitive changes. With six homes located across Alaska, these facilities offer assisted living services to seniors, including those facing cognitive challenges associated with Alzheimer's and Dementia Related Diseases (ADRD). The dedicated staff at Alaska Pioneer Homes work tirelessly to ensure residents receive compassionate care, enabling them to maintain dignity and quality of life through a nurturing environment and dementia care programs. However, the growing demand for dementia care and the challenges of maintaining a skilled workforce require immediate attention and action.

The challenges of dementia care

It is often a heart-breaking realization for families when they notice their loved ones experiencing cognitive changes. For many, this realization comes during visits when changes in memory, behavior or daily functioning become apparent. At Alaska Pioneer Homes, staff members witness these changes daily as they provide care for residents. While families may struggle to come to terms with these changes, the staff's dedication ensures that residents continue to live with dignity and receive respect with a caring, principled approach in a homelike environment as their cognitive abilities decline.

Currently, 53.5% of the

approximately 450 residents in Alaska Pioneer Homes require around-the-clock care. This includes support for activities of daily living (ADLs) and ensuring residents' safety, such as preventing wandering that could put their lives at risk. However, providing this level of care is increasingly difficult due to a shortage of trained staff. In some homes, like the Fairbanks Pioneer Home, needed beds remain unoccupied because of a critical shortage of direct care staff to provide the residents' care.

The workforce crisis in dementia care

The shortage of trained caregivers is a critical issue that must be addressed to meet the growing demand for dementia care throughout Alaska's assisted living facilities. While introductory skills are valuable, specialized training is essential for providing the high level of care required by residents with advanced cognitive changes. The lack of available staff not only impacts the residents but also places a significant burden on existing caregivers, who must work tirelessly to fill the gaps.

To address this crisis, it is crucial to invest in workforce development programs that focus on dementia awareness and care. By providing training opportunities and creating pathways for career growth, we can attract and retain skilled caregivers who are passionate about making a difference in the lives of Alaska's seniors.

Pioneer Homes Dementia Apprenticeship Program

The apprenticeship features in-depth training in dementia care and other

long-term care specialties. This training program represents a partnership between the Alaska Dept. of Family and Community Services, Division of Alaska Pioneer Homes; Alaska State Employees Association; Alaska Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development, and the U.S. Dept. of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship. This program, funded by the Dept. of Labor, allows Pioneer Home employees an opportunity to take additional classes focusing on dementia along with providing a mentor so staff can practice newly learned skills.

How you can help

As Alaskans, we all have a role to play in supporting our aging population and the caregivers who dedicate their lives to this important work. Here are some ways you can make a difference:

Recognize that ADRD and cognitive changes can occur in your family or with close friends.

Be informed and get educated about dementia and cognitive changes by accessing community, state and online resources, including options for care.

Explore resources that can help prepare for or adapt to the care required with dementia as one ages.

Encourage family members and friends to consider careers in caregiving and support them in pursuing specialized training.

Raise awareness about the challenges of dementia care and the importance of supporting caregivers in your community.

A shared responsibility

The senior population in Alaska is growing, and with it, ADRD and the demand for quality dementia care. By working together, we can ensure that our loved ones receive the care they

deserve, whether at home or in assisted living facilities like Alaska Pioneer Homes. Let us champion programs that enable aging in place for as long as possible and support the transition to assisted living that addresses both physical and/or cognitive chang-

es when needed. Together, we can strive for a future where every Alaskan can age gracefully in a safe and nurturing environment.

Bob Pawlowski is the Alaska Pioneer Homes Advisory Board Chair and is a commissioner of the Alaska Commission on Aging.

Commission on Aging meets in February

Alaska Commission on Aging

The Alaska Commission on Aging will hold a quarterly meeting in Juneau on February 11 and 13 in Room 115 of the Alaska Office Building. The event will be in-person and online via Zoom, from 8:30 a.m. to noon both days.

At this meeting, commission members hear reports from ACoA commissioners, ACoA staff, and Senior and Disabilities Services. Revision of and planning for compliance of the Older Americans Act will be the main topic of discussion on the second day.

There will be a public

comment period on Thursday at 10:45 a.m., allowing for feedback from individuals and organizations.

Tuesday, Feb. 11 afternoon and Wednesday, Feb. 12, will be spent meeting with legislators to advocate on behalf of seniors.

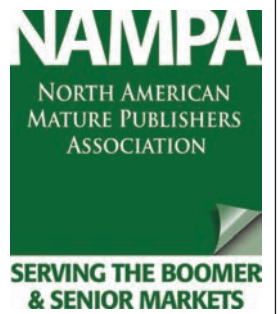
To participate via Zoom, use the address <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88575100686>.

To call in by phone, dial 253-215-8782 and follow the instructions. The meeting ID is 885 7510 0686.

For more information or to request special accommodation, call 907-465-3250.

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New Anchorage ordinance for easier downtown parking

By MELINDA GANT

For Senior Voice

As someone with elderly parents who face mobility challenges, I've seen firsthand how difficult it can be for them to access their favorite downtown spots. Whether it's finding an open handicapped parking space or dealing with the cost and time restrictions of parking meters, these barriers often make trips to their favorite locations stressful. That's why the newly passed disability parking ordinance is a meaningful change for my family and countless others in Anchorage.

This ordinance, which started on Dec. 1, 2024, will help people with disabilities enjoy Anchorage's amenities and services more easily. With free street meter parking for those with a valid disability parking permit, free mobility parking permits, and increased fines for violators, we're taking important steps to create a more inclusive and supportive city.

Anchorage's growing senior population

Anchorage's senior population is growing faster than ever. According to recent data, more residents are reaching retirement age, which is expected to

With free street meter parking for those with a valid disability parking permit, free mobility parking permits, and increased fines for violators, we're taking important steps to create a more inclusive and supportive city.

continue for years to come. Seniors are vital to our community, contributing their wisdom, experience and patronage to local businesses and events.

However, as this population grows, so do their unique challenges, including mobility issues and access to convenient parking. For many seniors, being able to park closer to their destination can make the difference between staying active in the community or feeling isolated. This ordinance is a significant step in addressing those challenges and ensuring that Anchorage remains a city where seniors feel valued and supported.

What's changing?

The new disability parking ordinance introduces key improvements:

Free street meter parking. Individuals with a disability placard or handicap license plate will no longer need to pay for street meter parking and will have the same benefit of an extended stay at handicap-designated on-street spaces. This change eliminates financial

stress and time constraints, allowing individuals with mobility challenges to spend as much time as they need at downtown businesses and services.

Free disability parking permits. Qualified individuals can now receive a free and convenient Disability Parking Permit, ensuring greater accessibility and convenience for those who qualify.

Free mobility parking permits. Qualified individuals can now receive their mobility parking permits free of charge. This reduces the financial burden on the downtown worker with disabilities who rely on these permits for their daily lives.

Increased fines for violators. Fines for unauthorized use of handicapped parking spaces will be significantly increased, ensuring these vital spaces remain available for those who genuinely need them.

Supporting our seniors and community

For seniors like my parents, downtown An-



chorage offers cherished destinations—whether it's enjoying a coffee shop, attending cultural events, or visiting local businesses. Accessible parking means they can stay connected to the community without the stress of navigating logistical or financial barriers.

This ordinance also sends a powerful message about Anchorage's priorities: We are a city that values inclusivity and recognizes the importance of supporting our aging population. Providing free parking options and enforcing handicap parking regulations will empower seniors to continue contributing to the social and economic vibrancy of our city.

This ordinance wouldn't have been possible without the dedication of the Anchorage Assembly and the many residents, businesses and organizations who voiced their support.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of accessibility and working to make Anchorage a better place for everyone.

Looking ahead

As our senior population grows, it's more important than ever to invest in initiatives that promote accessibility and inclusivity. This ordinance is just one example of how we can address these needs, but there is more work to be done. From expanding accessible public transportation to improving pedestrian pathways, we must continue to create a city that works for all residents, regardless of age or ability.

If you or someone you know qualifies for a mobility parking permit or has questions about the new parking rules, contact EasyPark at info@easyparkalaska.com or call 907-297-4471.

Let's celebrate this step toward a more inclusive Anchorage and continue to support the seniors and individuals with disabilities who make our city strong, vibrant and connected. Together, we can ensure Anchorage is a place where everyone can thrive.

Melinda Gant is the Anchorage Community Development Authority external affairs director.

IRS impostor scam is costing us billions

By MICHELLE TABLER

For Senior Voice

As we head into tax season, let's talk about a scam that's been making the rounds: the IRS Impostor Scam.

Did you know that in 2023, impostor scams were the second most reported type of fraud? The Federal Trade Commission reported

an astounding \$2.69 billion lost to these scams, with over 850,000 incidents. Among these, government impostors were the most common, but scammers also pretended to be romantic interests, relatives needing help, or technical support providers.

As you start collecting tax documents and readying to file, be on the lookout

As you start collecting tax documents and readying to file, be on the lookout for IRS impersonators. You might get emails suggesting you're due a tax refund or asking you to open a link to view a tax refund statement. They could ask for personal identification info to "process your refund."

for IRS impersonators. You might get emails suggesting you're due a tax refund or asking you to open a link to view a tax refund statement. They could ask for personal identification info to "process your refund." Here's the deal: any text or email about a tax refund is a scam.

Another tactic scammers may use is to claim you owe money to the IRS and need to pay right away, sometimes threatening

arrest, massive debt and late fees, or other consequences. They'll often ask for payments via bank transfers, cryptocurrency or pre-paid gift cards.

Remember, the IRS will not contact you by text, email or social media. They won't ask for personal or financial information through these means either. Instead, they'll mail you a letter or notice before calling or emailing.

To avoid falling for an

IRS Impostor Scam, never click on links in emails or texts, as they could expose your device to malware or direct you to fake websites to steal your information. Additionally, don't open email or text attachments. Be wary of any urgency, pressure or threats forcing you to give out personal or financial information and always watch out for emails with spelling or grammar mistakes. Instead of trusting unsolicited messages, check the official IRS website at irs.gov to see if you are due a refund.

If you suspect a scam, you can report it to the AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline at 877-908-3360.

Michelle Tabler is a fraud education expert for AARP Alaska.

Send us your letters

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



Anxiety does not define you: Ways to cope when flying

By **KAREN CASANOVAS**

For Senior Voice



Q: I have a family member who lives in the Lower 48 whom I do not see often because she suffers from anxiety when flying. The last time she traveled was a few years ago and I've told her that today's flights have onboard Wi-Fi so she could be absorbed in social media, email, streaming videos, etc. She said that may be enough to distract her from anxiety.

Do all flights offer this service? Are there other new services that may help her get through a three to four hour flight? She's tried using knockout pills (I don't know which ones), but doesn't like how they make her feel, and says their effects linger for days.

A: It's commendable that you are seeking ways to support your family member. In the U.S., approximately 19.1% of adults experience an anxiety disorder annually, with 31.1% encountering one at some point in their lives. Common types include generalized anxiety, panic disorders, social or separation anxiety, and phobias. Anxiety is a response to stress or perceived threat. It's a feeling of fear, worry or unease, typically about something with an undefined outcome.

To alleviate anxiety while flying, consider these solu-

tions and resources that can contribute to a more positive travel experience.

Relaxation techniques

Do **deep breathing** exercises by inhaling for four seconds, holding your breath for six seconds, and exhaling for four seconds.

Progressive muscle relaxation is tensing, then relaxing your body. Start with your face, then neck, shoulders, forearms, stomach, legs, and feet. Repeat several times as necessary.

Guided imagery is a relaxation technique visualizing yourself in a positive peaceful setting by using all of the senses to feel calm and at ease.

Mindfulness practices such as meditation put the focus on breathing and body sensations.

There are several mobile apps available, like Calm or Headspace, that provide guided meditations specifically designed for flying.

Distraction techniques

Listen to music or an

audio book. Read a book or magazine. Download apps and play games on your phone. Not all flights offer Wi-Fi, but many airlines provide this service, especially on domestic routes. Major airlines like Delta, American Airlines, Alaska and Southwest typically have Wi-Fi available, but it's always a good idea to check the specific airline website for details about a particular flight. Besides Wi-Fi, many airlines offer in-flight entertainment systems with movies, TV shows and music. This can provide a great distraction during the flight. Encourage your relative to check if the airline offers this service.

Information and education

Learn about aircraft safety and mechanics. Watch videos explaining how planes fly. Research statistics on flight safety.

Fear of Flying Program: <https://tinyurl.com/t5ftetww>.

Seat selection

Choose a seat over the wings or the front section for a smoother ride. These areas are closer to the

plane's center of gravity and experience less movement and swing compared to the rear of the aircraft during turbulence. Or opt for a window seat to look out and focus on the horizon.

Pre-flight preparation

Plan the trip in detail. Arrive at the airport early to avoid stress. Consider talking to a flight attendant about potential anxiety symptoms.

Comfort items

Bringing along familiar items can also make a difference. Noise-canceling headphones, a travel pillow, neck support, or a favorite blanket can create a more soothing atmosphere during the flight. A water bottle, wearing comfortable clothing and shoes can also aid in lessening anxiety onboard.

Professional help

Consult a therapist specializing in anxiety disorders. Explore fear of flying therapy programs or coping

strategies. Discuss medication options with a medical provider. Some people find success with anti-anxiety medications that are less sedating, or ask about herbal supplements such as kava, passionflower, valerian, camomile, lemon balm, or magnesium (only take after consulting with a health professional).

Gradual exposure

If possible, consider shorter flights first to gradually build confidence. This step-by-step approach can help someone get used to flying again.

May these suggestions lead to blue skies and future smooth travels. Final thoughts for your family member:

"Your anxiety doesn't define you, and it doesn't change how much I care about you."

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

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



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Avoiding counterfeit prescription drugs

By **LAWRENCE D. WEISS**

For Senior Voice

A number of years ago I spent some time in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. It is an extraordinary place. Think: the industrial revolution meets the wild west, in the middle of the desert. Wonderful people, but a very poor country.

Good thing I didn't leave my medications at the airport in Anchorage by accident, as a friend of mine once did on the way to Europe. Upon arrival, she just popped into a pharmacy by the hotel and picked up replacements. She was quite confident that her medications were the genuine article, if she even gave it a thought.

On the other hand, had I made the same mistake on my way out of Anchorage, my experience replacing medications at the local pharmacy in Ulaanbaatar would have been fraught with anxiety. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Traveler's Health website, up to 41% of drugs sold in low to medium income countries are counterfeit. You have no idea what you are actually buying. Very scary.

The CDC notes that high-income countries including the United States and Europe are among the safest places to purchase prescription drugs without worrying about counterfeits. Studies indicate that

in these countries less than 1% of prescription drugs sold in the corner drug store or the big-box pharmacy, for example, are counterfeit.

Outside of these venues it starts to get a bit dicey. For example, according to www.goodrx.com:

"If you receive Botox injections in a non-health-care setting, or from someone who isn't licensed or trained, you have a greater risk of receiving fake Botox. Anytime you're receiving Botox, ask the person administering it whether they're licensed and trained to give Botox injections. Additionally, ask them if they received

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Voice Amplifier

Assistive Gizmo of the Month

Assistive Technology of Alaska

This column is brought to you by ATLA (Assistive Technology of Alaska), a nonprofit, statewide resource. ATLA does not endorse this product but shares information on the types of assistive technology that may benefit Alaskans. For more information or to arrange a free demonstration, visit <http://www.atlaak.org> or call 907-563-2599.

Voice amplifiers, also known as personal voice amplification devices or portable voice amplifiers, are compact electronic devices that enhance and project the sound of a person's voice. The lightweight speaker is designed primarily to be worn around the neck, though it can be clipped on a belt or placed on a table. Wearing the speaker around the neck is recommended since the sound of the voice is close to the visual source.



Stay resolved to love yourself more

By **EMILY KANE**

For Senior Voice

One of the highest callings for us humans is to deeply know and love ourselves, and as much as possible to be a force for good. Perhaps you will agree that being good to yourself, and making healthy choices throughout the day, is a large portion of what makes up a good day. At the end of the day, it feels satisfying to know we did the best to honor and extend our one wild and precious life, taking the high road in every encounter and treating ourselves right, too.

A few of my daily prac-



tices to promote graceful aging are full-body dry-brush skin brushing when naked between PJs off and dressing for the day. I also very much enjoy the quick rigorous practice of exposure to cold water, which I do right after skin brushing. Either walk in

place in a tub of ankle-deep cold water, or do that then sit quickly in the tub and splash chest, armpits and face, or take a quick cold shower. Somewhat contra-intuitively this will actually be warming via a vaso-constriction (from cold) rebound to vaso-dilation as soon as the quick cold exposure is over. Delightfully invigorating!

My New Year's commitment was to re-establish a daily meditation practice. A local meditation teacher recommended an app called Insight Timer, which has been helpful because of a rich variety of content and also a format which allows for personalization. If you

started the year with a new health and peace-promoting practice but have fallen off, consider exploring in a non-judgmental way what has impeded that initial salutary urge. A simple morning meditation practice, prompted by the acronym RPM, need only be 10-15 minutes of gratitude, either sitting in silence and marveling at your breath, or enjoying a guided meditation. RPM here stands for rise, pee, meditate. Best to deploy first thing.

Looking for the positive

Your top of the year resolution may have been more related to healing a

valued relationship, or volunteering for a cause which is meaningful to you. Both of those examples conceivably could feel overwhelming: Where to start? What if it doesn't work? What if I'm rejected, or feel unable to contribute? Fear, doubt, worry, shame are easy to come by in our society, alas.

While capitalism in general has lifted most of the global population out of dire poverty and driven enormous creativity, the seamy side is that "value" has been tied to money, and keeping up with the Joneses, and it can be difficult to not literally buy into that.

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An overview of this year's Medicare coverage

By **SEAN McPHILAMY**

Alaska Medicare Information Office

This month's article provides an overview of Medicare coverage in 2025. The 2025 edition of the "Medicare & You" handbook provides much greater detail than is provided in this article; if you do not have a copy, please contact the Medicare Information Office and we are happy to



provide one. This handbook is available as an eBook, as

well as in large print, audio version, and in Braille. The "Medicare & You" handbook has also been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese. Original Medicare includes both inpatient (Part A) and outpatient (Part B) care, with an additional coverage for prescriptions (Part D). This year, there are no Medicare Advantage (Part C) plans offered to Alaskan residents.

Part A and Part B costs

Medicare Part A covers inpatient services when you are admitted to the hospital for treatment. Most people do not owe a monthly premium for Part A, but if neither you nor your spouse have 10 years of Social Security work credits, then you may owe a monthly premium. If you are admitted to the hospital as an inpatient, then you

will owe a deductible of \$1,676 at the beginning of your stay. After you meet your deductible, your first 60 days in the hospital and your first 20 days in a skilled nursing facility cost you \$0 per day. After that, you owe an out-of-pocket cost each day for your continued stay. If you have multiple hospitalizations, you may owe the Part A

page 6 please



ADVERTISEMENT

Hearing loss can lead to bigger medical issues



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

Hearing loss can lead to dementia, falling, isolation and other health risks.

Frank Lin, M.D., Ph.D., and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins tracked 639 adults for nearly 12 years and found that a mild hearing loss doubled dementia risk, moderate loss tripled the risk, and people with a severe hearing impairment were five times more likely to develop dementia.

Hearing loss also contributes to social isolation. You may not want to be with people as much, and when you are you may not engage in conversation as much. These factors may contribute to dementia.

As you walk, your ears pick up cues that help with balance. Hearing loss lessens signals, making your brain work harder just to process sound. Multitasking may interfere with some of the mental processes needed to walk safely. Problems with your inner ear may also affect your balance.

Signs of hearing loss include often asking others to repeat themselves; trouble following conversations with more than one person; thinking that others are mumbling; problems hearing in noisy places, such as busy restaurants; trouble hearing small children and others with quiet voices; turning up the TV or radio volume too loud for others who are nearby.

Call Accurate Hearing today for a free hearing test 907-644-6004 we are here to help.

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

Medicare

continued from page 5

deductible more than once, primarily when 60 days have passed without inpatient or skilled nursing care.

Medicare Part B coverage is for outpatient care, which is the most common medical events for most of us, such as visits to a licensed health professional, home health services, lab tests and durable medical equipment. In 2025, the standard monthly Part B premium is \$185. If your income is above \$106,000 as a single person or \$212,000 as a married couple, you may pay higher premiums, known as an Income Related Monthly Adjusted Amount (IRMAA) assessment. Part B has a deductible of \$257 for the calendar year, with a 20 percent coinsurance for most medical services.

If you receive an IRMAA assessment, read over the letter for details including options to appeal. Contact our office if you do not fully understand this or any details sent to you.

Part D costs

Medicare Part D covers outpatient prescription drugs. You have the option

to sign up for a payment plan for Part D out-of-pocket costs. The Medicare Prescription Payment Plan (MPPP) allows you to spread your drug costs throughout the year, with the goal of helping you manage your monthly expenses. If you have Part D, there is a good chance that there are significant changes for 2025, because changes to the law that sets up the rules for the Part D benefit made coverage more generous. Medicare is taking steps to stabilize Part D premiums during this transition by limiting the increase in the base premium. In 2025, the national average premium for the Part D basic benefit is about \$37 per month.

This year, your annual out-of-pocket Part D costs for prescriptions that are included in your plan are capped at \$2,000. After you reach this out-of-pocket limit, you owe nothing for covered drugs for the rest of the year; you can track this limit in your plan's monthly statements.

The annual Open Enrollment Period to review and update your prescription drug plan will be later this year, from October 15 through December 7. You may be eligible for a Special

Enrollment Period during which you may change your plan, for example if you also have Medicaid (DenaliCare), the Medicare Savings Program (MSP), or the Extra Help program.

As mentioned above, for individuals who have higher annual incomes, there may also be an IRMAA assessment included with monthly Part D plan premiums.

To discuss any Medicare concerns, or to ask any questions regarding your specific situation, contact the State of Alaska Medicare Information Office at 800-478-6065 or 907-269-3680. Our office is also known as the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), and the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) program.

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

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

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Health fairs are valuable – and affordable

Alaska Health Fair, Inc.

Alaska Health Fair events offer a great opportunity to learn about important health topics in an informal setting. Attendees can receive free basic screenings, obtain information and resources, and have their questions answered by health, wellness and safety professionals. Health fairs

are also a great way to connect with local health and wellness resources.

Most importantly, events feature comprehensive, affordable blood tests. Obtaining blood screenings at health fairs is a great way to get quick, accurate results at a fraction of the cost. Alaska Health Fair works with the same leading clinical laborato-

ries that are serving local providers and hospitals, making comprehensive blood screenings available to all Alaskans at nonprofit pricing. Please note that although blood testing is a great tool that can help identify problems early, only your healthcare provider sees a complete picture of your health. Sharing your test results with your

doctor is recommended.

For more information, visit alaskahealthfair.org. Making an appointment online is quick and easy.

Health fairs in February:
Feb. 1 Anchorage First Christian Church, 3031 Latouche, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Feb. 8 Meadow Lakes Community Health Fair, Meadow Lakes Elementary School, 1741 Pittman Road,

8 a.m. to noon.

Feb. 18 Fairbanks Alaska Health Fair office draw, 725 26th Ave., Suite 201 (Food Bank bldg., second floor), 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Appointments served first, walk-ins accepted.

Feb. 22 Fairbanks Community health fair at Anne Wien Elementary School gym, 1501 Hampstead Ave., 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

How to choose and use a home blood pressure monitor

By **JIM MILLER**

Savvy Senior

Dear Savvy Senior: Can you offer me any tips on choosing and using a home blood pressure monitor? I just found out I have high blood pressure and my doctor recommended I get a home monitor so I can keep tabs on it. – *Just Turned 63*

Dear 63: Everyone with high blood pressure (130/80 or higher) should have a home blood pressure

monitor. Home monitoring can help you keep tabs on your blood pressure in a comfortable setting. Plus, if you're taking medication it will make certain it's working, and alert you to a health problem if it arises.

Here are some top-rated blood pressure monitors to consider along with some tips to help ensure you take an accurate reading.

Arm monitors are best

The most accurate and

easiest to use home blood pressure monitors today are electric/battery powered automatic arm monitors, which are more reliable than wrist or fingertip monitors. With an automatic arm monitor, you simply wrap the cuff around your bicep and with the push of one button the cuff inflates and deflates automatically giving you your blood pressure



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AARP
Alaska

I got an email saying I had a tax refund coming.

It was a scam.

Keep your savings safe from IRS scams with these tips from the AARP Fraud Watch Network.

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- Go to irs.gov to check to see if you are due a refund



Learn more at aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork or 1-877-908-3360.



Boosting your joy resources and the ‘cycle of goodness’

By JOHN SCHIESZER

Medical Minutes

Health is the first wealth is a philosophy that has been around for centuries. However, health now refers to body, spirit and mind in a different way than it did before the age of technology. Mental health experts say we all have “joy resources” and we need to manage them properly.

Valentina Ogaryan, clinical director of the Simms/Mann UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology, said it’s best to eat whole foods and incorporate some type of physical activity on a routine basis. “It’s also about giving yourself permission to indulge, in moderation, foods that bring you joy,” Ogaryan said.

Many older adults may not realize the great importance of having access to social support, giving the mind some rest by unplugging from social media, and becoming intentional about focusing on present-moment interactions.

“With the spirit and heart, it is finding and connecting to people, activities, hobbies, interests that nourish the soul. Anything that brings connection can foster meaning. It can be spending time with loved ones; connection through music, literature and art; prayer, meditation and connecting to spirituality; or community-based ac-



tivities,” said Ogaryan.

The UCLA mental health experts recommend that everyone take time for rest. This requires unplugging from time to time and just being rather than constantly doing. They advocate practicing gratitude. Even brief moments of recalling things you are grateful for can shift your day from resentment and overwhelm to a sense of peace and appreciation. Further, they advocate savoring the joyful moments. There are many moments in the day when we experience joy or pleasure. So, it is important not to skip over them.

Recharging your batteries

Tuning into how you moderate your energy permits you to make better choices about how you move through your day. Take pauses and slow down. Life tends to feel loud and fast. Give yourself permission to dial down the volume and speed.

“Check in with your internal energy just like you approach your phone battery: How charged are you? Do you start the day at 100%? What depletes you and what energizes you? Lean into the energizing practices and minimize the depleting ones,” said Dr. Elizabeth Ko, who is the medical director of the UCLA Health Integrative Medicine Collaborative.

Taking a moment to really savor an experience, even for a few seconds, can help build up our joy resources.

“Seek optimism every day. You may not find something to rejoice about, but you may find something meaningful that may help others and yourself,” said Dr. David Reuben, who is a geriatrician at UCLA Health in California.

Phillip Watkins is Professor of Psychology at Eastern Washington University and conducts research on gratitude and joy. He said nine different studies examined the similarities and differences between joy and other positive emotions and found that joy was distinct from



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Micro-acts are not complicated or burdensome. It is recommended that older adults give themselves simple little gifts, such as a foot massage. It’s an easy thing anyone can do.

other positive emotions, including gratitude, contentment and concentration/interest.

Joy occurs when we interpret a situation as indicating a connection or return to something good. For example, reunions between older adults who care for each other but who have been apart for some time are most likely to induce joy, according to the researchers.

A few studies have examined the connection

between joy and subjective well-being. Researchers have developed measures of joy as both a temporary state (feeling joyful in the moment) and as a more enduring personality trait (a tendency to experience joy more or less often than other people). These measures are moderate to strong predictors of well-being. Studies show a direct link between joy and gratitude and spirituality.

next page please

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Goodness

continued from page 8

In a recent study, the Washington researchers looked at joy over a period of time and found that gratitude predicted increased future joy. Somewhat surprisingly, joy also predicted increases in gratitude over time, suggesting an intriguing upward spiral between gratitude and joy. Researchers have found that gratitude increases joy and joy also increases gratitude. It is theorized that this “cycle of goodness” might be important to overall happiness.

‘Micro-acts’ for others, and yourself

It is recommended you perform micro-acts that can reduce stress and cultivate happiness, often involving focusing on the beauty and joy in life. People who performed just one micro-act daily for a week reported about a 25% increase in emotional well-being and feelings of connectedness to others, according to early results from a large, crowd-sourcing study out of California. As part of the study, more than 20,000 people from 30 countries tried a micro-act for five minutes each day for one week.

Micro-acts are not com-

plicated or burdensome. It is recommended that older adults give themselves simple little gifts, such as a foot massage. It’s an easy thing anyone can do.

“Our feet take a pounding every day, but most of us don’t take care of our feet. There is a whole body of knowledge about reflexology, which is really acupressure points, and you stimulate a lot of these points when you massage your feet,” said Dr. Lawrence Taw, director of the UCLA Center for East-West Medicine, Torrance.

He recommends getting a simple golf ball or a roller, and just roll each foot over it. It can be relaxing,

especially if you combine it with closing your eyes and deep breathing.

“I usually tell patients to massage their feet daily, but the best time to do it is at night before you go to

bed,” said Dr. Taw.

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.

Monitor

continued from page 7

reading on the display window in a matter of seconds.

Many automatic monitors also come with additional features such as irregular heartbeat detection that checks for arrhythmias and other abnormalities; a risk category indicator that tells you whether your blood pressure is in the high range; a data-averaging function that allows you to take multiple readings and get an overall average; multiple user memory that allows two or more users to save their readings; and downloadable memory that lets you transmit your data to your smartphone or computer.

The top five automatic arm monitors as recommended by Consumer Reports for 2025 are the Omron Platinum BP5450 (\$90), Omron 10 Series BP7450 (\$70), Omron Evolv BP7000 (\$70), A&D Medical UA767F (\$55), and Omron 3 Series BP7100 (\$55). And the top wrist monitors are the Omron 7 Series BP6350 (\$55) and the Equate (Walmart) 4500 Series (\$40).

You can purchase these blood pressure monitors at pharmacies, medical supply stores or online and you don’t need a prescription to buy one. Prices, however, will vary slightly depending on where you buy.

How to measure

After you buy your monitor, it’s a good idea to take it to your doctor’s office so they can check its accuracy and make sure you’re using it properly. Here are some additional steps to follow to ensure you get accurate measurements at home.

Be still. Don’t exercise, smoke or drink caffeinated drinks or alcohol for at least 30 minutes before measuring. Empty your bladder and ensure at least 5 minutes of quiet rest before measurements.

Sit correctly. Sit with your back straight and supported (on a dining chair, rather than a sofa). Your feet should be flat on the floor and your legs should not be crossed. Your arm should be supported on a flat surface such as a table with the upper arm at heart level. Make sure the middle of the cuff is placed directly above the bend of the elbow. Check your monitor’s instructions for an illustration.

Don’t measure over clothes. Put the cuff directly on your bare skin. Putting it over clothes can raise your systolic (upper) number by up to 40 mmHg.

Measure at the same time. It’s important to take the readings at the same time each day, such as in the morning before taking medications, or evening before dinner.

Take multiple readings. Each time you measure, take at least two readings one minute apart and record

the results.

For more information on high blood pressure numbers and how to accurately measure it at home, visit Heart.org/HBP.

Send your senior questions to: *Savvy Senior*, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the *NBC Today* show and author of “*The Savvy Senior*” book.

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1 Go to the Senior Voice website: seniorvoicealaska.com Click on the “Calendar” tab in the upper right corner

2 You will see the list of upcoming events. To add your own event, click the “Submit Event” button on the upper right.

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Senior Voice

Senior Voice is published by Older Persons Action Group, Inc.

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Maniilaq's long-term care home filled with love and tradition

By YASMIN RADBOD

Alaska Commission on Aging

Nestled in the heart of Kotzebue, Utuqqanaat Inaat, Maniilaq's Long-Term Care Facility, is more than just a care center for elders. It is a home, a family and a community where love, connection and cultural tradition thrive.

A home-like environment

At Maniilaq, the focus is on creating a true home for the residents. "We try to make it as comfortable and familiar as possible," a staff member shared.

Each resident has a shadow box outside their room, filled with personal mementos, photos, and trinkets that remind them of their life and identity.

"We ask them, 'What's your favorite flower back home? What was your favorite activity?' and we incorporate those into their shadow boxes," the staff member explained. Once residents have been assigned their room, they are not moved. The facility can hold 18 residents and does have a waitlist.

The facility also ensures that residents feel a sense of autonomy and freedom. Residents can go wherever they want to go. "There is one elder who likes to do her own laundry, and she can here. We help her as needed,



Kotzebue's Utuqqanaat Inaat assisted living facility resides within the city's health center.

Courtesy Eni Mavaega/RurAL CAP

of course, and she says it really feels like home."

A family-oriented approach

The facility's family-oriented approach is evident in every interaction. Visiting hours are flexible, allowing family members to spend quality time with their loved ones.

"When family members come from their villages, they'll come over, eat, hang out, and snack together," an employee shared. "If they're here for only 24 hours, they can come anytime."

This sense of family extends beyond the residents and their relatives. The staff themselves become part of the residents' lives. "Here, you have time to get to know the elders, their life stories, and their families," the employee said. "When I went home for two weeks to Louisiana, they all came to me when I returned, asking for hugs and saying, 'We're happy you're back. How is your family?' After that, I signed on permanently and have been here for more than two years now."

Even children feel the warmth of the facility. During our tour, a young boy interrupted to give a staff member a hug. "He pretty much grew up here," the staff said with a smile.

The cafeteria and dining experience

Maniilaq's cafeteria is another unique aspect of the facility. Residents are not restricted to the daily menu; they can ask to eat whatever they want. "If someone wants a burger and fries, we make it happen," a staff member shared.

"We even order out for them if that's what they want." Hot beverages are always available, and residents can either serve themselves or ask for assistance. This flexibility ensures that residents



The halls of Utuqqanaat Inaat ("a place for elders") are decorated with important artifacts and memories, including an article written on Maniilaq's traditional food donation center and food storage facility called the Siglauq, which is Iñupiaq for underground cold storage cache or ice cellar.

Courtesy Yasmin Radbod

enjoy their meals and feel a sense of autonomy and comfort.

Traditional foods and cultural connection

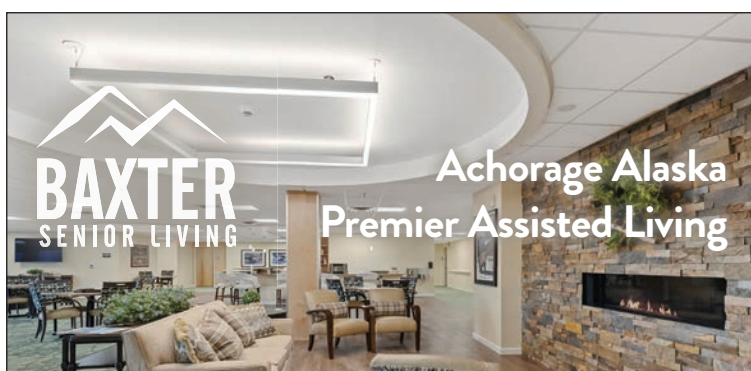
Maniilaq is also the first long-term care facility in the nation to be USDA-certified to prepare and serve traditional Alaska Native foods, including seal oil, caribou and sheefish. The food is processed at the Siglauq, a state-certified meat processing facility, ensuring safety while preserving cultural traditions.

"Seal oil is a staple in our culture," said Cyrus

Harris, who oversees the Hunter Support Program. "It brings back memories for the elders—memories of their childhood and the foods they grew up with." The facility's ability to serve these traditional foods has been transformative.

Staff shared that they also learn Iñupiaq words from their patients. They might not pronounce them correctly, however, and the elders do correct them! Fire alarms, for example, are announced in both English and Iñupiaq.

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Make brain health part of your routine

By **LISA SAUDER**

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska

Along with annual health check-ups like eye exams, it's equally important to assess your memory and cognitive function. Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska can help.

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska (ARA) is dedicated to supporting Alaskans affected by Alzheimer's disease, related dementias and other disabilities by offering resources, classes and services to individuals,

families, professionals and communities.

Among these services are non-diagnostic Memory Screenings, which are available both live online via Zoom and in person. While these free and confidential screenings are not diagnostic, they can provide a baseline for your cognitive health, offering a comparison point for future evaluations and helping to identify potential concerns early on.

If you're 50 or older, making memory screening part of your yearly health

routine is vital. It allows you and your healthcare provider to take a proactive approach to brain health and serves as the first step toward understanding and maintaining your memory and cognitive function.

In addition to Memory Screenings, ARA offers the Mind Aerobics program, which provides engaging cognitive exercise options tailored to individual needs, such as:

"Mind Sharpener," designed for those with memory concerns but no medical symptoms, or any-

one simply looking to keep their brain active.

"Mind Works" is ideal for individuals experiencing mild cognitive symptoms or a new dementia diagnosis.

These programs empower participants by equipping them with tools to better understand memory and cognitive function, fostering social connections and actively engaging their minds in stimulating enjoyable activities. Just as physical exercise is essential for maintaining a healthy body, mental exercise is crucial

for keeping the mind sharp and Mind Aerobics delivers exactly that.

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska is here to help you prioritize your brain health and wellness and to assist you with any hurdles you, or a family member or friend, may be facing in the struggle with Alzheimer's and related dementias and other cognitive concerns.

Find resources and information online at Alaska.org or call 907-561-3313.

Lisa Sauder is the Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska Chief Executive Officer.

Free support, resources for family caregivers

Senior Voice Staff

The Kenai Peninsula Family Caregiver Support Program will hold the following caregiver support group meetings in February. Meeting format is open discussion unless otherwise noted.

Feb. 5. Kenai Senior Center, 2 to 3:30 p.m.

Feb. 6 Tyotkas Elder Center (in Kenai), 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Feb. 7. Soldotna Senior Center, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 12. Seward Senior Center, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Feb. 20 Sterling Senior Center, 1 to 2 p.m.

Feb. 25 Nikiski Senior Center, 1 to 2 p.m.

Support meetings allow

you to share your experiences as a caregiver, or support someone who is a caregiver. There is no charge for these services and everyone is invited to attend. Call Dani Keschull at the Nikiski Senior Center, 907-776-7654 or email kpfmsp@nikiskiseniorcenter.org.

Kodiak Senior Center hosts the caregiver support group on the third Thursday of each month (Feb. 20) at 1 p.m. Call for information, 907-486-6181.

Around the state

Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska (ARA) organizes caregiver support meetings around the state, including Anchorage, Ea-

gle River, Fairbanks, Homer, Juneau/Southeast, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Mat-Su Valley, Seward, Sitka, Soldotna, Talkeetna, Willow. Call 1-800-478-1080 for details.

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

In Southeast Alaska, the

Southeast Senior Services Senior and Caregiver Resource Center is available. Call Jennifer Garrison at 866-746-6177.

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

Online caregiver support for Alaska veterans

The Alaska VA Caregiver Wellness Cafe is held monthly on the first Thursday (Feb. 6) from 1 to 2 p.m. via the Teams software and is an informal virtual place to engage with other caregivers while learning about topics beneficial to your role as a caregiver. Enrollment in Alaska VA Caregiver Support Program (CSP) is not required to participate in the call. For information, call 907-375-2606.

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- Fairbanks..... 452-5181 or (800) 478-5401
- Juneau..... 586-6425 or (800) 789-6426
- Kenai..... 395-0352 or (855) 395-0352
- Ketchikan..... 225-6420 or (877) 525-6420
- Kotzebue..... 442-3500 or (800) 622-9797
- Nome..... 443-2230 or (888) 495-6663
- Palmer..... 746-4636 or (855) 996-4636

Additional information is available at: www.alsc-law.org

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Creating your essential emergency contact list

By **CHRISTIAN M. HARTLEY**

For Senior Voice



Having a clear and easy-to-find emergency contact list can save important time in a crisis. Today, I'll share the key information you should have ready to keep you and your family safe. Let's make sure you're prepared for whatever might happen.

First, write your emergency contact list in big, easy-to-read letters. Keep it in a place that's simple to find, like on your fridge or next to your phone. Make a few copies—one for your wallet or bag, one for your nightstand, and one to give to a trusted neighbor or family member.

The most important number to have on your list is 911 for emergencies. Even though this number is easy to remember, it's hard to think clearly in a stressful situation. Right under 911, write the non-emergency number for your local police department for problems that aren't life-threatening but still need attention.

You should also include the name and phone number of your regular doctor. Add their after-hours number too, in case you need help when the office is closed. If you see any special doctors, like a heart doctor or another specialist, add their contact

information as well.

Next on your list should be family members. Pick at least two family members you trust who live close by and can get to you quickly in an emergency. Write their home, cell and work phone numbers. Also, include their relationship to you, like "daughter" or "son," so it's clear who they are.

You should also add contact information for at least two trusted neighbors. Neighbors can often help the fastest during an emergency. Choose neighbors who are usually home and willing to help. Write their house number and phone numbers so emergency responders can find them easily if necessary.

Write your local pharmacy's phone number on the list. If you get medical supplies from any companies, add their numbers too. If you wear a medical alert device, include their phone number and your personal subscriber number.

Add the poison control center's number (1-800-

You should also add contact information for at least two trusted neighbors. Neighbors can often help the fastest during an emergency. Choose neighbors who are usually home and willing to help.

222-1222). You should also write the phone numbers for your local power, gas, propane and water utility companies. You'll need these if your power goes out or if you have problems with gas or water.

Add your important personal details to the list too. Write your full name, home address, and any allergies you have. If you have health conditions that emergency workers should know about, like a pacemaker or if you take blood thinners, include those too. This information can help save your life in an emergency.

Check your list every six months to make sure everything is correct. Also update it whenever any information changes, like new phone numbers or doctors. Use a pencil so you can erase and fix things easily. Even better, you can keep the list on your computer so you can update

and print new copies when needed.

Make sure your list is neat and easy to read. Leave some space between each item, so it's easy to read. Use bigger letters to make the list easier to see. If you wear glasses, keep a pair next to your list so you can read clearly when you need to.

Having all this import-

ant information ready to use is a smart way to keep yourself safe. It helps make sure you can get help quickly in an emergency. Remember, being prepared is one of the best ways to protect yourself and the people you care about.

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

Free radon test kits available

Senior Voice Staff

The Alaska Radon Program is giving out free radon tests through the end of February.

Radon is a colorless, odorless cancer-causing gas that is commonly found in Alaska. With homes zipped up tight for warmth, winter is a good time to test for the gas.

Alaska residents may

request a test kit at <https://bit.ly/4aBXglx>. Click "Request a kit" in the "Alaska Resources" panel on the right. Kits are mailed via USPS or people can pick up in Fairbanks or Anchorage. Details on pick-up locations and times are in the kit request page.

For more information, contact Paul Goodfellow at paul.goodfellow@alaska.gov or 907-269-6401.

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Counterfeit

continued from page 5

the product from a legitimate, authorized source.”

For more information, see: <https://www.goodrx.com/botox/fake-botox>



Upsplash photo

Online purchases

Moving further along on the spectrum of likely counterfeits, if you purchase medications through online pharmacies or the social media, there's a higher risk that those medications will be counterfeit. Medications that are in high demand due to shortages have an increased risk of being fakes. This is also the case for more expensive medications since counterfeits are often sold at steep discounts compared to the real thing. Pay particular attention to:

- ▶ Viagra
- ▶ oxycodone
- ▶ HIV medications
- ▶ cancer medications
- ▶ weight-loss medications such as Ozempic
- ▶ ADHD medications such as Adderall

Are you starting to get a really bad feeling about online pharmacies? Certainly, there is a lot to be cautious about. Now for the good news. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hosts a website called BeSafeRx (fda.gov/drugs/besafex-your-source-online-pharmacy-information/about-besafex). The BeSafeRx campaign aims to educate consumers about how to buy medicines on-

line safely.

One way to determine it is safe to do business with an online pharmacy is to check a pharmacy's license through your state board of pharmacy. The BeSafeRx website has a list of state boards of pharmacy, including Alaska's, so you can check to see if the online pharmacy is legit. If it does not have a state license, don't use it. This website has loads of other information to help you navigate the caveat emptor expanse of online pharmacies, so take a look at it.

And here is another extraordinarily helpful website: The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP). Find them at safe.pharmacy/buy-safely/. Use NABP's Safe Site Search Tool to check whether a website is accredited by NABP or not recommended by searching for the web address. Another way to find an accredited website is to look for ".pharmacy" at the end of the web address. This means the website has been accredited by NABP—and the ".pharmacy" domain cannot be faked or forged.

The Canada question

Finally, Canada. For

decades Americans have actually traveled to Canada to purchase drugs—the same drugs—more cheaply in Canada than in the United States, or have more recently been ordering them from Canadian online pharmacies. Note that doing so is technically illegal, but the FDA has an official policy of mostly looking the other way. Here is how KFF, a national nonprofit health information organization, describes the dance:

“There appears to be little enforcement by the FDA

of the ban against importing FDA-approved drugs for personal use. Even if the personal importation of a drug is technically illegal, current law directs the FDA to exercise discretion in permitting personal importation of drugs when the product is ‘clearly for personal use, and does not appear to present an unreasonable risk to the user,’ which is reinforced in FDA guidelines.”

Some so-called Canadian pharmacies are fakes, or sell counterfeit

drugs. Once again, caveat emptor, but you do have help. The Canadians themselves have an excellent website to help guide you to legitimate online Canadian Pharmacies. Check out: www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/buying-drugs-over-internet.html.

Live long and prosper.

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.

Love

continued from page 5

Almost everyone is trying to live their best life. We all have hardships. We don't need to get into a trauma olympics proving our suffering is more intense than someone else's suffering in order to justify our continued attachment to our misery. It is not healthy to chronically revisit our suffering as our modus operandi.

In my opinion, being gentle with one's own, and others', pain is a prerequisite for being a decent human. However, let's not

dwell there. A practice I was reminded of recently was to write down (or at least say out loud) five things for which to be grateful, every day. Have you noticed that when we have the opportunity to divulge intimate parts of ourselves (to a trusted friend, or therapist, or priest) it's often, frankly, complaining? I think there is a way to ask for help without entirely identifying with our pain and trauma. Most of us don't really enjoy listening to complainers. That has firmed my resolve to not be one. It is the high road, which of course does demand more energy, more attention and more consciousness. But, as they say,

the view is so much better.

Choose an activity and get started

If you have slipped off your daily self-care path, do yourself a huge favor and turn your gaze onto one achievable health-promoting activity (for physical, mental or emotional health—they are all connected) and start today. You will not regret it because taking care of yourself, also the foundation for taking care of those in your sphere, is never a waste of time.

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



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Tough road for early Alaska truckers

Part two of two.

By **MARALEY McMICHAEL**
Senior Voice Correspondent

Editor's note: Al Clayton, who died in 2008, recounted his Alaskan truck driving experiences to his daughter, Maraley McMichael, in 2005. She has written and submitted the story in two parts, this being the second part

Once I sold my food goods, I started thinking, what am I going to do with my Diamond T truck?

I decided to sell lots from land I owned a ways out of Anchorage, in Spenard. My property, which would later become 25th Avenue, bordered that of Dr. J.H. Romig. I sold some of these lots for \$87 a piece.

I drove my Diamond T

out to McKechnie Sawmill by the Butte near Palmer and loaded it up with house logs, brought them back, and started building a cabin for myself on one of the lots, while living in a tent. Figuring that a lot might sell even better with a load of logs sitting on it, I got more loads, this time of 16 foot, three sided logs, and ended up building a second cabin. I also modernized the original house I built in 1940, putting in a well, pressure system and plumbing to get it ready to rent. These activities kept me pretty busy clear up until fall.

In October, deciding it was time to go back to Seward, I arranged to put my truck on the Matheson Brothers Barge in Anchorage. They crossed Turnagain Arm and docked in



Al Clayton atop a load of hay on his Diamond T truck in the late 1940s. Kenai Lake is in the background.

Photo courtesy Maraley McMichael

Hope long enough to drop off my truck and me. There was no road connecting Anchorage to Seward in 1947.

Back on the Kenai Peninsula, I used my truck to haul hay for Frank Towel in Cooper Landing and delivered hemlock lumber to the sawmill at Bear Lake in Seward. After the lumber was planed, it was brought back and used for the flooring in the Cooper

Landing Community Club.

At this time, the Alaska Road Commission was pushing the road from Hinton's Lodge toward Kenai. It was mostly just a "cat trail." There was a lot of brush to clear, many swamps to cross, and bridges to build. One of their burn piles got away from them and burned 50 square miles.

After the road was

pushed through to Kenai, I heard about a contract open for bid to haul construction materials from Moose Pass to Kenai for the new territorial school. I won the bid and hired two other guys to help—Bill Bratten, who already carried the mail from Hope to Seward, and Bob Jacobs who lived in Moose Pass.

page 16 please

Filling the digital gap for rural elder Alaskans

Kawerak, Inc.

In September 2021, Kawerak Inc. was awarded \$3.8 million in funding for Project Regional Educational Model for Online Technology Engagement from the Dept. of Education, Alaska Native Education Program (REMOTE). Project REMOTE's goal was to increase online learning opportunities over three years for 555 Alaska Native learners in the Bering Strait Region. Project REMOTE successfully advanced remote learning capacity by reducing the technology access gap for Alaska Native residents in the Bering Strait Region.

While the project initially focused on supporting youth, young adults and adults who are Alaska Native residents in rural areas, we identified a service gap in our offerings for elders (those age 50 or older) by the second year. Often on fixed incomes and without home internet, elders benefited significantly from newfound access to the online world, which positively transformed their daily lives.

This group was termed "Lifelong Learners" and

over the course of two years, Project REMOTE gifted 382 seniors technology products and paid internet services. The "Tech Box" consisted of a new laptop, noise-cancellation headphones, thumb drive, notebook for passwords, surge protector, Bluetooth wireless mouse, sweat-shirt, hat and stickers.

In addition, to help learners become successful with the new technology, our program offered multiple webinars each week. Learning topics included Zoom and basic digital literacy training, internet safety, and informational and guest speaker webinars on regional issues. We also hosted a "Coffee with Katie" hour, where participants could jump online to talk about whatever was on their minds.

As seniors often feel disconnected, an online community was started, utilizing Nearpeer, Inc. In total 85 Lifelong Learners chose to join. Through this program, participants were able to chat with other Lifelong Learners in the region and start subgroups for their interests, like

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Valdez writer opens up about love and grief in new book

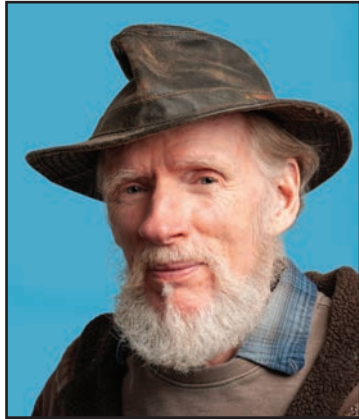
By **HADEN BRICKER**

For Senior Voice

Valdez, Alaska is a lucky town to be blessed with so many artists. There is something about the mountains that seem to draw them in. Kevin and Kris Reeves are two such artists. Kevin is a poet, writer and painter. Kris created wonderful hand-crafted paper cards. As fate would have it, Kris fell ill and her time on earth was cut short. Kevin has been learning to live on and decided to share his experience in a book, "Now and Ever, Dear Kristine".

In December, Kevin was invited to the Valdez Senior Center to do a book reading to celebrate its printing. He gave a sneak peek and people were desperate for more. Kevin shared several sections of his book, giving everyone a chance to know his Kris. There is no denying their love. So much so, that this book makes you wish for a love like what they had.

The first thing I can say about Kevin's book is to be prepared for strong emotions and tears, even if you have not experienced the loss of a loved one. Kevin's poetic writing shines through, painting the scene and the pain. He wrote this in the first year



"Now and Ever, Dear Kristine," by Kevin Reeves (top) is available from Amazon.

Photos courtesy Valdez Senior Center

of his grief journey and the rawness of his grief shows. For someone who has not lost a loved one, it allows you to gain insight into the experience and maybe even guide you toward being able to support those who have.

We all grieve differently but there are things in loss that occur across the board and Kevin talks openly about it. It's important to see life and loss through all lenses and this is a perspective that is not shared often. Not many people want to talk about grief and while it's a hard topic, it is something that at some point we want to prepare ourselves for or better understand. Kevin took a big chance, truly divulged himself for his readers, and made the world a little more understandable for us all.

"Now and Ever, Dear Kristine," is available on Amazon to order and if you happen to come through Valdez you may even see a few for sale around town. I can't recommend this book enough. This is a book that if you allow it, will expand your mind and touch your soul.

Haden Bricker is the activities coordinator and office assistant for Valdez Senior Center, Inc.

Rambles

News from the Grapevine

Seward Senior Center is hosting a Luau Lunch on Feb. 14, and there will be hula lessons. It's free. Call for more details, 907-224-5604 ... **Age Smart, Let's Talk**, the free monthly educational forum, returns to the **Anchorage Senior Activity Center** on Feb. 12 at 5:30 p.m. in the ballroom. This month's topic is **artificial intelligence**, presented by **Dr. Helena Wisniewski** from University of Alaska Anchorage. Refreshments are provided courtesy **AARP Alaska**. Call for more information, 907-770-2000 ... **Soldotna Public Library** will offer a four-week series on resin art, with local artist **Dayne Ward** teaching basic resin pouring techniques to create one-of-a-kind faux stained glass art pieces. The classes will meet on Wednesdays, March 5 through April 2, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. The series is designed for ages 50 and older. Supplies are limited - register online or visit the library's service desk. Students' work will be on display at a Resin Art Show on April 2. Call for information, 907-262-4227 ... In Anchorage, the **Mt. View Library**, 120 Bragaw Street, hosts **Senior Poetry** on the fourth Tuesday each month (Feb. 25). Led by local poet **Brian Hutton**, meetings include exercises and discussion on mental well being and are for anyone interested in telling their stories in poetry or prose. "Anyone can come at any time. The groups are not sequential," Brian says. Participation is free, no library membership required. Call for more details, 907-343-2818 ... February means **Fur Rendezvous** in Anchorage and while events have come and gone, the **Pioneers of Alaska Pancake Feed** remains a constant. From the Ronly website: "Over sixty years ago,

page 16 please

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Art of the North Galleries photo by Oscar Avellanada-Cruz



Rambles

News from the Grapevine

continued from page 15

the Pioneers of Alaska opened their doors to the public for an annual Pancake Feed during Fur Rondy. They dubbed it 'The Pioneer Roadhouse'. All these many years later, though the name is a thing of the past, the Pioneers are still on the Rondy Calendar of Events for a Pancake Feed at Pioneer Hall, 6th & F Streets. Come join us for fresh off-the-griddle pancakes with ham, juice and coffee." Date is Saturday, Feb. 22, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Price is \$12 for ages 12 and older, \$8 for youth 11 and younger. Cash only. (See the Rondy listing in the calendar on page 17) ... The **Fairbanks City Council** is considering gifting the **senior center** to the non-profit agency that runs and maintains it, the **North Star Council on Aging**, according to a Jan. 8, 2025 article by KUAC. The city owns the senior center and leases the property to the agency for \$1 per year but some council members said during a recent work session that it makes sense to hand it over to the nonprofit. The senior center's director **Darlene Supplee** is all for the idea, noting that it would give the center more autonomy and ability to act more 'nimble,' the KUAC article stated ... In **Fairbanks**, the **Fairbanks North Star Borough Senior Program** is organizing a **crafting session** for grandparents and grandkids to craft together at the **Joy Community Center**, 24 Margaret Ave., on Thursday, Feb. 27, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Cost is \$5. Call for more information, 907-459-1136 or email marya.lewanski@fnsb.gov.

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

Trucker

continued from page 14

There were three train boxcar loads of sack cement plus steel and sheetrock on flatcars, making a total of 300 tons of material for us to move. Hauling the cement, we could do two loads, five tons each, to Kenai a day. I was getting \$100 a day and paid my drivers \$25 a trip. But, when I wasn't hauling cement, I couldn't afford the drivers anymore. Two other fellows from Moose Pass helped load the steel.

On one trip, with a load of 24-foot steel H beams and sheetrock, disaster struck. I couldn't climb a certain hill, not taking a big enough run at it. Using the brake, I backed down the hill and was just sitting there at the bottom, when the heavy weight of the truck made the rotten culvert give way. My fully-loaded truck just lay over on its side like a horse. Since there was a gully and creek right there, it rolled all the way over, upside down with all four wheels sticking up.

I caught a 7-ton hydraulic jack in midair so it wouldn't damage the



Al Clayton's Diamond T loaded with a cement mixer in the late 1940s. Al is in the blue shirt.

Photos courtesy Maraley McMichael

truck further. After the truck and I came to rest, I took out the wrecking bar, which had gotten mixed up in the spokes of the steering wheel, and laid it down on the ceiling of the truck. Then I climbed out and unhooked the battery. I didn't want any sparks since gasoline was dripping out of the gas tank. The transmission oil, engine oil, and oil in the rear-end all ran out eventually.

After a while, a gravel truck came by on the way to Cooper Landing. The driver said if I got the right equipment, he would wait and try pulling me out. He sat there on the side of the road most of the day. One lane of traffic was open. I got word through another passing vehicle to Bob Jacobs in Moose Pass to come out with rope, a snatch block and other gear we needed. When he showed up, we tied a line around three spruce trees, using the snatch block. The second line went from the frame of my truck through the snatch block, to

the gravel truck.

I also loosened the binders on my load. After we got everything ready, the driver of the gravel truck slowly pulled forward. The truck righted itself, leaving the load of steel and sheetrock behind. It took us two days to re-load. It took Bob and me, both, to retrieve the spare tire from the bottom of the steep ravine where it had rolled. The only real damage to the truck was a dent in the hood.

That hauling contract for the territorial school brought in enough money to pay for the truck, but not much extra to buy new tires and such. I decided I didn't want to be a trucker after all and sold my Diamond T. The trucker's life was not for me.

Al Clayton, Sr. enjoyed many adventures while calling Alaska his home from 1940 until his death in 2008 at age 94. His daughter, Maraley McMichael, lives in the Mat-Su Valley. Contact her at maraleymcmichael@gmail.com.



Al Clayton's Diamond T Truck loaded with sheetrock and other lumber on the road between Moose Pass and Kenai. The materials were for the territorial school in Kenai, 1948-9.

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Calendar of Events



In Savoonga, Allen Akeya and Violet Kingeekuk set up their laptops with the help of Community Education staff Auk Tozier and Colleen Adams as a part of the Project Remote program.

Photo courtesy Kawerak Inc.

Elders

continued from page 14

camping, hunting, boating, grandchildren, cooking, beading, skin sewing and birds.

Our program also offered Lifelong Learners the opportunity to get some exercise. We contracted with Impactiv, Inc, VIVO for online exercise classes. Each participant met individually with a VIVO professional for assessment, and then VIVO shipped participants weights, ropes and other exercise items. Participants would meet twice a week as a group with an online instructor via Zoom and work on chair, rope and weights exercises. We had one participant who never missed a class they enjoyed it so much. What made it all worthwhile for our program staff was having one elder tell us he no longer needed assistance with getting out or in bed or getting up from his chair. This course changed his future.

According to some grant evaluations, the elders indicated they really enjoyed the use of the internet. Some pointed to the benefits of daily living, such as online shopping. Others noted it was helpful to have access to learn more about their hobbies such as truck maintenance or traditional healing. Others stated how much it helped them keep connected with family and friends. Overall, the program was so popular in our rural communities we had to close the application, as there were more people (households) interested than we could financially serve. Although the program saw much success, this was not ob-

tained without its challenges. Our geographical location and weather are always a challenge, but in addition, Project REMOTE faced ordering and delivery logistical issues as well as identifying how to successfully connect rural participants with technical skills training and support.

Part of dealing with this was to just get boots on the ground. Program staff traveled to 15 of our rural communities to assist elders in applying for our program, and revisited communities to disseminate the "Tech Box" and teach basic computer skills, so that participants could connect with staff via Zoom. We contracted local people to help with Starlink Satellite setup and to offer face-to-face assistance with digital literacy skills. In places we couldn't hire someone local, our team traveled to that community to assist.

Looking forward

Intended as a pilot project, REMOTE recently wrapped-up. Going into the future, if additional funding is found to continue the program in 2025, we would like to assist our elders, who are interested, in enrolling in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Hopefully we receive the NTIA Digital Literacy Grant, to address continued Digital Literacy Skills training and region-wide Tribal Government Office technology upgrades.

The impact of this project has been enormous. Students in remote villages have gained access to the same quality of education as their urban counterparts. Adults are discovering resources at their fingertips and using them.

Feb. 2 Statewide Marmot Day

Feb. 5 North Pole Join to play Shanghai rummy at lunchtime each Wednesday at Santa's Senior Center. 907-488-4663

Feb. 7 Anchorage Athabascan Fiddlers Dance and Potluck at The Nave, 3502 Spenard Rd. Bring your dancing shoes and a dish to share at this popular, family-friendly alcohol-free party. Admission is pay-what-you-can. www.thenavespenard.com

Feb. 8 Anchorage 6th Annual African American Healthy Families Summit, at Betty Davis East Anchorage High School, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free community event open to all with live panels, local vendors and a motivational speech and concert by Alex Boyé, an America's Got Talent alumnus. Justice Presenter Jacqueline Hendricks, the first Inspector General of the City of Columbus, will also be speaking. Schedule covers key topics such as education, justice, health and economics, with lunch provided. Vendors available from 12:30 to 5 p.m. For more details, visit TheAlaskaBlackCaucus.com.

Feb. 14 Wasilla Valentine's Day dance at Wasilla Senior Center, 3 to 5 p.m. in the dining room. Live music by Jerry Wessling, voting for 'best dressed' and 'foot-loosest' dancer, light refreshments provided. Free for ages 55 and older. 907-206-8800

Feb. 15-16 Ketchikan 32nd Annual "Quilting in the Rain" quilt show by the Rainy Day Quilters Guild, Ted Ferry Civic Center. Includes raffle, Quilts of Valor presentation, more. Free. Call 907-225-6304 or visit the Rainy Day Quilters page on Facebook.

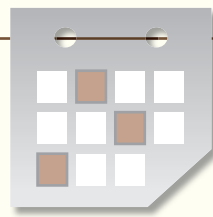
Feb. 16 Statewide Elizabeth Peratrovich Day

Feb. 17 Nationwide Presidents Day

Feb. 20-March 2 Anchorage Anchorage Fur Rendezvous. Sled dog races, snow sculptures, fireworks display, grand parade, amateur photo contest, fur auctions, Native Arts Market, Hold 'Em poker tournament, Great Alaska Talent competition, Melodrama, Pioneers of Alaska Pancake Feed, Running of the Reindeer, Ronyd pickleball tournament, outhouse races, snowshoe softball, much more. Full schedule of events and dates at www.Furrondy.net.

Feb. 22 Anchorage Bridge Builders of Anchorage presents "Meet the World" cultural celebration at the Egan Center, 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Explore vibrant "destination booths" showcasing the traditional cultures of Anchorage's richly diverse population and collect stamps in a provided "passport" while learning more about the cultures of their neighbors and coworkers. Ethnic dancing, drumming, colorful costumes and traditional music will entertain and inspire attendees throughout the day at this family-friendly event. Free admission. Email anchoragebridgebuilders@gmail.com.

Feb. 25-26 Nome 7th Alappaa Film Festival at the Katirvik Cultural Center, showcasing original short films (10 minutes or less) made by creators from the Bering Strait region and other arctic locations, about life in the far north. Sponsored by Nome Arts Council, Kawerak Inc., National Park Service and Katirvik Cultural Center. 907-443-5231 or www.katirvik.org



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A necessity of the past becomes a Fur Rendezvous tradition

By LAUREL DOWNING BILL

Senior Voice Correspondent

A giant pill bottle. A fighter jet. A Queen Elizabeth look-alike holding a corgi. What do these things have in common? They are all quirky ideas for an equally quirky event held each February during the Fur Rendezvous: Outhouse races down Fourth Avenue in Anchorage.

Alaska's history with outhouses is as rich and colorful as the outhouses in this annual event. From essential facilities in undeveloped areas to the Fur Rendezvous races, outhouses have played a significant role in Alaskan culture.

Back in the day, outhouses were a necessity for most Alaska residents. With no running water or indoor plumbing, these simple structures provided a practical solution for human waste disposal. Pioneers, prospectors and homesteaders alike had to brave the elements and venture outside to answer nature's call, often in subzero temperatures and biting winds.

The construction of these outhouses was a true test of ingenuity and resourcefulness. Logs, driftwood and even discarded materials were repurposed to create these humble structures. Some were adorned with intricate carvings or whimsical designs, reflecting the creativity and humor of their builders.

This author remembers relatives telling her that after her mother and identical twin were born in the Anchorage Railroad Hospital in 1921, miners in Hope welcomed the girls home with a covered walkway they had built from the cabin to the outhouse so the babies wouldn't get wet from rain or snow when the need arose for a trip to the "facilities."

As Alaska transitioned into the modern era, outhouses gradually became obsolete, replaced by indoor plumbing and modern sanitation systems. However, these humble structures have not been forgotten; instead, they have been embraced as a symbol of Alaska's pioneering spirit and resilience, especially in areas where permafrost and remoteness necessitate their continued use.

The persistence of outhouses eventually gave way to the unique cultural phenomenon of outhouse races, which blend Alaskans' frontier spirit, sense of humor and love of outdoor winter activities. The Fur Rendezvous competition began in 2006 as a fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, organized by the University of Alaska's Architecture and Engineering Club. The rules are simple.

Traditional outhouses must have a minimum base of 30x30



Family gatherings like this in the remote Alaska wilderness were made more comfortable with an outhouse stationed nearby. Alaska State Library

inches and three walls. Unlimited outhouses can be larger, up to 8 feet wide, 12 feet long, and 8 feet tall. Creativity of design has been a highlight of the event, as evidenced one year when Alaska Colorectal Surgery Clinic presented an outhouse painted Pepto-Bismol pink, complete with balloon "polyps."

Each race team, which pays a \$100 entry fee, must build its own outhouse on skis. Each outhouse must have a toilet seat and a roll of toilet paper. One team member must be seated in the outhouse while teammates push or pull the structure on a two-lane course where two teams race each other down and back around a pylon. Hitting a pylon incurs a \$10 penalty.

The goal? To claim the championship trophy, which doubles as a toilet paper holder, and become king or queen of the throne – not to be number two in the race to the finish.

Speed isn't the only measure of success, however. Awards also are given for categories like Best Theme, Most Realistic, Best Engineered, and Cleanest. And as in the great Iditarod Race, a Red Lantern award is given to the slowest team.

This yearly event can serve as a reminder of Alaska's not-so-distant past when outhouses were a common feature of daily life. And as long as Alaskans maintain their frontier spirit and sense of humor, it's likely that outhouses—both functional and racing varieties—will remain a quirky yet cherished part of the state's cultural landscape.

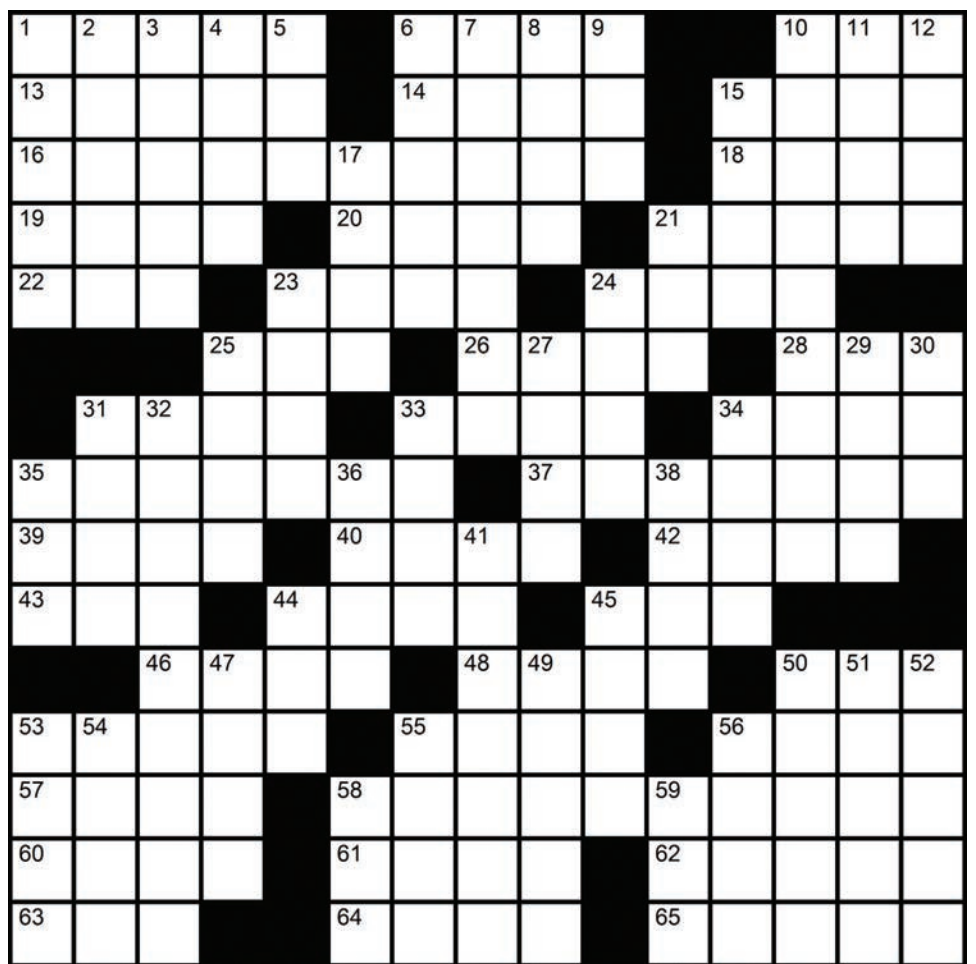
This column features tidbits found while researching Alaska's colorful past for Aunt Phil's Trunk, a five-book Alaska history series written by Laurel Downing Bill and her late aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson. The books are available at bookstores and gift shops throughout Alaska, as well as online at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

Animal Antics

Across

- 1 Modify
- 6 "Major" animal
- 10 No longer edible
- 13 Rival of Paris
- 14 Car from Trollhättan
- 15 Hawaiian port
- 16 Reaction to emotional stress
- 18 Mars (Prefix)
- 19 Dog bowl bits
- 20 Criticizes
- 21 Hot or cold drink
- 22 Her before marriage
- 23 Colorado feeder
- 24 Fishhook feature
- 25 One of the Ewings, on "Dallas"
- 26 Omani money
- 28 Irritation
- 31 Wing-shaped
- 33 Sicilian smoker
- 34 "Gone With the Wind" plantation

- 35 Wrecking implement
- 37 Soar, Baby, soar!
- 39 ___ Bator, Mongolia
- 40 1987 flick, "___ Cop"
- 42 First-rate
- 43 Freight weight
- 44 Greet the day
- 45 Go astray
- 46 Spinnaker, e.g.
- 48 Fork-tailed flier
- 50 Wetland
- 53 Indian honorific
- 55 Chums
- 56 Yawner
- 57 Locket shape
- 58 Hot-rodder's need



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- 60 Conifers
- 61 Super berry
- 62 Crosswise, on deck
- 63 Set a price of
- 64 Hebrides island
- 65 Cubic measures
- 10 Nincompoop
- 11 Not windward
- 12 Kind of prize
- 15 It'll grow on you
- 17 Fedora feature
- 21 Baseball's Ripken
- 23 Duds
- 24 Jezebel's idol
- 25 Stooge
- 27 Dope
- 29 Implore
- 30 "___, humbug!"
- 31 Folk's Guthrie
- 32 Shylock
- 33 Cupid, to the Greeks
- 34 Norse thunder god
- 35 Film director's cry
- 36 Seed cover
- 38 Kitten's plaything
- 41 Particle during radioactive decay
- 44 Thorax protector
- 45 Gaelic language
- 47 Is unwell
- 49 Borden bovine
- 50 Shady spot
- 51 Mountain nymph
- 52 Sickness causes
- 53 Crash site?
- 54 Rara ___
- 55 Kind of mark
- 56 Clown name
- 58 Possesses
- 59 ___-Man (arcade game)

Crossword answers on page 23



How long to keep tax and other financial records

By **JIM MILLER**

Savvy Senior

Dear Savvy Senior: Is there a rule of thumb on how long someone should keep their old financial paperwork? I have file cabinets full of old receipts, bank and brokerage statements, tax returns and more that I would like to toss. Recently Retired

Dear Recently: It's a great question. As we get older and our financial life gets more complicated, it's difficult to know how long to keep old financial records and paperwork and when it's safe to get rid of them. Some things you'll need to hold on to for your whole life and others for just a month or so. Here's a checklist I've created that can help you determine what to save and what you can throw away.

Keep one month

- ▶ ATM receipts and

bank-deposit slips, as soon as you match them up with your monthly statement.

- ▶ Credit card receipts after you get your statement, unless you might return the item or need proof of purchase for a warranty.

- ▶ Credit card statements that do not have a tax-related expense on them.

- ▶ Utility bills when the following month's bill arrives showing that your prior payment was received. If you wish to track utility usage over time, you may want to keep them for a year, or if you deduct a home office on your taxes keep them for seven years.

- ▶ To avoid identity theft, be sure you shred anything you throw away that contains your personal or financial information.

Keep one year

- ▶ Paycheck stubs until you get your W-2 in January to

check its accuracy.

- ▶ Bank statements (savings and checking account) to confirm your 1099s.

- ▶ Brokerage, 401(k), IRA and other investment statements until you get your annual summary (keep longer for tax purposes if they show a gain or loss).

- ▶ Receipts for health care bills in case you qualify for a medical deduction.

Keep seven years

Supporting documents for your taxes, including W-2s, 1099s, and receipts or canceled checks that substantiate deductions. The IRS usually has up to three years after you file to audit you but may look back up to six years if it suspects you substantially underreported income or committed fraud.

page 23 please

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide now taking appointments

By **TERESA HOLT** and **ALLEGRA HAMER**

For Senior Voice

Do you need help with a basic tax return? Tax-Aide volunteers provide free tax help to low- to middle-income Alaskans of all ages at sites across the state.

You do not need to be an AARP member.

Last year, Tax-Aide volunteers helped with 4,655 tax returns in Alaska. To locate the nearest Tax-Aide site, you can use the online AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Locator or call 2-1-1 or 1-800-478-2221, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. 2-1-1 is a free and confidential service of United Way that helps Alaskans find the assistance they need.

Everyone who requests tax help at a Tax-Aide site will need to bring a photo ID for adults and a social security card (or

photocopy) for everyone on the tax return being prepared, including children. You will also need to bring paper copies of all tax documents (W-2, etc.), a copy of last year's tax return if you have it, and any letters from the IRS.

While Tax-Aide volunteers can't help with complex tax returns, such as those with rental properties or businesses with inventory or showing a loss, the team of IRS-certified volunteers can accommodate standard tax complications that come with retirement and other life changes. For general tax-related questions or Tax-Aide scope questions, call the Alaska Tax-Aide answering machine at 907-538-4228 and someone will get back within 48 hours.

Teresa Holt is the AARP Alaska state director and Allegra Hamer the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide state coordinator.



ELDER ENDEVORS

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The Social Security fairness problem

By KENNETH KIRK

For Senior Voice



I'm getting more cynical as I get older.

Whenever I hear that Congress has passed something by an overwhelming bipartisan vote, and it has a really nice sounding name, I start getting nervous. After all, the SECURE Act actually made your retirement savings less secure, and the Corporate Transparency Act didn't require big corporations to do anything, it just required small businesses to have to deal with a lot more paperwork.

So when I heard that Congress passed the Social Security Fairness Act, I instinctively reached back to make sure my wallet was still there.

I was actually relieved to find out what the bill does. Back in the 1970s, a change was made to how Social Security retirement benefits were calculated for government retirees. A lot of people who work for government agencies are exempt from paying into the Social Security system. On the other hand a lot of them work part of their careers for an agency, but another part of their careers they are working for private companies and do have to contribute to Social Security.

Up until now, those government retirees did not get their full Social Security benefit. After the benefits were calculated based on what they paid in, there was a reduction for what they were receiving from their government pensions. So if you worked 20 years for the State, and earned a modest pension, but then went to work for a private company and paid in 20 years toward Social Security, you wouldn't get the same amount of Social Security that you would have if you just stayed home that first 20 years.

It is hard to disagree with letting those folks get a Social Security check based on what they paid into the Social Security system.

But... the problem is that Congress didn't do anything to fund this change. And Social Security is rapidly running out of money.

A lot of people think

When I heard that Congress passed the Social Security Fairness Act, I instinctively reached back to make sure my wallet was still there. I was actually relieved to find out what the bill does.

Social Security is like an IRA or an annuity, that you pay something in and the government holds that for you, and then they use that money to pay you a pension when you retire. That isn't how it works. When the system started way back in 1935, they started paying money out almost immediately. When you make your payment into the system, through payroll taxes, that money goes right back out the door to people who are presently receiving benefits. The assumption is that down the road when you retire, young people who are then working will continue paying into the system, and their payments will be used to pay for your benefits.

In past years, when the baby boom generation was working, there was actually more money going into the system than was being paid out, so there was a surplus that was held in

trust for the future. Great, except now the Boomers are retiring and there aren't nearly as many young people in Generation X, the Millennials, or Generation Z working and paying in. So eventually that trust fund is going to run out.

When? I've seen some different figures, but my understanding is that with the increased drain on the system caused by this Social Security Fairness Act, it will be sometime in 2033.

Yes, folks, that's only eight years away.

That does not mean there will be no Social Security. The best estimates are that the new payments that come in each month, will pay for about 75% of the benefits. If they don't do anything else between now and then to fix this problem, you could see your Social Security benefit cut by 25%. Oof!

A lot of people are assuming that the govern-

ment won't let that happen, that if the money runs out they will simply shovel some more in. But keep in mind that the federal debt is presently at \$36 trillion and growing. We may be relying on IOUs from someone who is careening toward bankruptcy.

There are a lot of possible solutions to this. They could reduce benefits by a smaller amount now, which would stretch that potential collapse well into the future. They could increase payroll taxes. They could dump some more money into the system now, while they still have some. Or they could just keep hoping that the economy improves enough to keep things rolling.

Meanwhile, I don't think I want to rely on future Social Security checks.

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. If this story upset you, it wasn't intentional. Have something to calm your nerves.

Senior Voice Alaska.com



The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program at APIA has partnered with several non-profits to meet community needs by encouraging and supporting volunteerism for people ages 55 years and older in the Anchorage and Mat-Su region. We are currently looking for elders to volunteer at the following sites (but not limited to): Alaska Regional Hospital, Alaska Veterans and Pioneer Home, Alaska Veterans Museum, Anchorage Loussac Library, Anchorage Senior Activity Center, Catholic Social Services, Downtown Hope Center, Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, Prestige Care and Rehabilitation Center, Primrose Retirement Communities, Wasilla Area Seniors Inc.

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Incognito mode, privacy, saving money

By **BOB DELAURENTIS**

Bob's Tech Talk

Q. Is Incognito Mode in my Web browser truly private?

A. True anonymity online requires considerable technical expertise and is near-impossible to achieve. The short answer to your question is no.

Incognito Mode, which is also called Private Browsing, InPrivate Browsing, Private Window, or Guest Mode tells your device to avoid recording information such as browsing history and cookies.

There are other sources for this information that you may not have access to, like your service provider's log files, third-party software, system caches, backups, deleted file recovery tools, and so on.

Think of Incognito Mode as a screen door on the front of your home. It is useful up to a point but it does not enable any sort of secure privacy.

The only computing device that is private in the sense of a personal diary on a bookshelf or a locked box in your closet is a device that has never connected to the internet.

Most new devices you purchase require activation online, which means purchasing a device that never connects online is exceptionally rare. It also usually means using custom builds of open source software.

The bottom line is that privacy online is a myth, and you should assume that your activities are recorded somewhere.

Q. If privacy online is impossible, is there nothing I can do?

A. The best thing to do is consider what and where you share information. Online privacy is a critical concern now that vast amounts of personal information are shared and stored online.

As individuals increasingly rely on the internet for communication, shopping and social interaction, the risk of privacy breaches has escalated. Data collection practices by companies often lead to

the accumulation of sensitive information, including browsing habits, location data and financial details. This data can be exploited for targeted advertising or, worse, fall into the hands of malicious actors.

Moreover, the rise of social media platforms has blurred the lines between public and private information, encouraging users to share personal experiences without fully understanding the implications.

Security threats, such as hacking and identity theft, further exacerbate these concerns.

To safeguard online privacy, individuals should adopt proactive strategies such as using strong, unique passwords, enabling two-factor authentication, and being aware of how the information is stored or shared.

Additionally, advocating for stronger privacy regulations can help.

Ultimately, fostering an environment of awareness and responsibility around online privacy is essential for protecting privacy in an increasingly interconnected world.

The best thing you can do is become a privacy-sensitive user who is thoughtful about the information you share.

Q. What is the best way to get the most value from your tech purchases over time?

A. This is a great question. Everyone loves a good deal, but the answer to this question is more subtle than paying a low purchase price.

The best way to maximize value over a period of years is to never buy the latest model. There was a time when the most powerful device available was necessary, but those days are far behind us.

Most devices made in the last five years will work great in all but the most extreme professional workflows.

Older hardware does not mean you have to go into the used market. Used can be a good option, but tech companies also keep older designs available to attract price-sensitive customers.

Retailers often have large stocks of older models available for less.

Besides avoiding the most expensive models, it's best to avoid the absolutely cheapest models. The quality of materials and workmanship of super-cheap devices often border on the disposable.

While a too-good-to-be-true price seems like a good deal in the short term, poor performance can force you to replace it before its time.

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

Wander the Web

Here are my picks for worthwhile browsing this month:

GoComics

This site hosts a vast array of comic strips and panels, including classics and contemporary works from various artists. gocomics.com

How Stuff Works

This site features thousands of articles that explain how something actually works. howstuffworks.com

Keep Calm and Laugh On

When you need a go-to source for laughs, there is always the venerable Onion. theonion.com



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.

BECs can help people enroll in programs such as Medicare Part D Extra Help, Medicare Savings Programs (MSP), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Senior Center membership is not required.
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You may be eligible for one or more of the following programs:

- **Medicare Part D Extra Help/Low Income Subsidy (LIS)** - pays for Part D plan premiums, reduces drug co-pays and eliminates the Donut-Hole
- **Medicare Savings Program (MSP)** - pays Medicare premiums
- **Medicaid** - serves as a supplement to Medicare, pays deductibles and co-pays.
- **SNAP** - Alaska's Food Stamp Program
- **LIHEAP** - Heating assistance
- **Senior Benefit** - receive cash from the State of Alaska
- Additional programs may be available.

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- Losing control
- Additional stress on your family
- Loss of what you spent a lifetime building

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- Protect your spouse and children?
- Be clear so your loved ones will know what to do?
- Ensure your hard earned money doesn't go to the government?

Yes? ▶ Then your first step in creating your asset protection plan is attending this workshop.

It's all about family! Have you protected them?

Proper Planning Ensures You:

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- Remain home without stress on the family, should the need for long term care arise
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Juneau shines in national media coverage

Major companies recommend it as a destination

By **DIMITRA LAVRAKAS**

Senior Voice Travel
Correspondent

In a winter surprise, Juneau was chosen by two travel outlets to be included in their list of best places to visit.

Travel Lemming, a U.S.-based online travel publication with more than 10 million yearly readers, announced in December its list of the 50 best destinations in the world for 2025. Juneau was named the No. 18 best place to travel globally. Yes, that's "globally"!

The article calls Juneau "a must-see if an Alaskan adventure is on your horizon." It invites travelers to take a glacier tour or whale-watching cruise, ride the Mount Roberts Tramway, eat fresh salmon and crab legs, pan for gold and visit the Alaska State Museum.

"We are so pleased to have been selected as one of Travel Lemming's top 20 travel destinations for 2025," said Kristi Switzer, Destination Marketing Manager at Travel Juneau.

"Juneau has unlimited opportunities for adventure, education, hiking and fun. From whale watching to flightseeing and glacier trekking to dog sledding, Juneau mixes unique outdoor recreation opportunities with Alaska Native art and culture as well as gold rush history. We look forward to hosting visitors in any season."

The New York Times chimes in

New York Times Frugal Traveler columnist and avid skier Elaine Glusac, who focuses on budget-friendly trips and journeys, moved to Juneau for a month last winter to up her chances of finding deep snow conditions.



"Though better known as a cruise port welcoming 1.6 million ship passengers annually between May and October, it's also a ski town in the low (and budget-friendly) season," she writes.

"Climate-wise, Juneau is renowned for rain. Surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, the world's largest contiguous temperate rainforest, the destination gets 230 days of rain a year, some of them in winter.

"But when the conditions are right, the rain turns to snow and freshwater to ice, creating a wonderland for winter fans, like me, who appreciate downhill and cross-country skiing as well as skating, hiking, cultural diversions off-piste, and culinary intrigue after dark."

She points out that winter airfares can run a third of the summer season prices, and hotels and Airbnb reservations usually drop by \$75.

Nationally acclaimed theater

In September, the New York Times also picked Juneau's Perseverance Theater's production of "Cold Case." The play, by Cathy Tagnak Rexford, tells of an Inupiaq woman from a Native village in Alaska, who battles to retrieve her aunt's body from an Anchorage morgue.

The script won the Barrie and Bernice Stavis Playwright Award.

Rexford is also a producer of HBO's "True Detective: Night Country," starring Jodie Foster, who won a Golden Globe Best Actress award in January for her role as Chief Danvers.

Taking place in imaginary Ennis, Alaska, but filmed in Iceland, the investigation centers on eight men who operate the Tsalal Arctic Research Station and vanish without a trace. It's well worth watching and stars an Inupiaq woman from Utqiagvik, Nutaaq

Travel Lemming recently named Juneau the No. 18 best place to travel globally. Yes, that's "globally".



Juneau is the jumping off place for small towns and villages in Southeast with their own unique heritage and history. Here pictured is the tiny M/V Taku, gone but not forgotten.

Photographs by Dimitra Lavrakas

Simmonds, who plays the so-called "crazy laundromat grandma," and who also stars in "Cold Case."

Perseverance always offers exceptional theater

Sailing further on the ferry

The Alaska Marine Highway has an extensive sailing schedule to Southeast Alaska and beyond to Bellingham, Washington.

In 2023, the Federal Transit Administration awarded more than \$285 million of investments to improve the reliability and service of Alaska's ferry system, which serves more than 30 communities across 3,500 miles of coastline. The funding, all awarded to the Alaska Marine Highway System, is designated to replacing an aging vessel, upgrading ferry dock infrastructure in rural communities, modernizing four vessels, procuring an electric ferry, designing a new mainliner vessel, and for generating sustainable operations. This landmark funding was made possible by H.R. 3684, the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which Senator Murkowski played a lead role writing and negotiating for Alaska.

Plus, in September, the AMHS was awarded \$177.4 million to go toward operational costs, bringing Wi-Fi to passengers and replacing the oldest ferry in the fleet.



"Harnessing of the Atom" totem pole was carved in 1967 by Amos Wallace and erected outside Juneau-Douglas City Museum in 1967. He was a Tlingit artist from Juneau, whose name was Jeet Yaaw Dustaa, and was of the Tlingit Clan Raven Moiety, T'akdeintaan Clan of Hoonah.



The Alaska Governor's Mansion is worth a tour, especially during the holidays.



Home

continued from page 10

Exceptional care and dementia support

The staff-to-resident ratio at Maniilaq is significantly lower than in many other facilities, allowing for more personalized care.

“In other parts of the country, in my experience, you barely have enough time to hand out medications and make sure the patient swallowed them before moving to the next room,” an employee shared. “Here, I can sit down, cut their food, and eat with them. I’ve had 40 patients assigned to myself and just one aide before in the lower 48.”

Another staff member, who previously worked in Texas, shared a similar experience. “I was looking



Shadow boxes are an effective way to help loved ones reconnect with who they are and identify their space, especially when facing cognitive decline. (Faces concealed here for confidentiality.)

Courtesy Yasmin Radbod

after more than 20 patients back home. Here, it’s about four residents per staff member. It’s a world of difference.” Imagine having that many patients during a pandemic.

For residents with dementia, the staff go above and beyond. They accompany patients to their

specialty appointments, ensuring they receive the care they need without the stress of navigating it alone. “We don’t just call to find out how it went; we’re there with them,” a staff member said. The employees also use repetition and gentle redirection to help residents feel secure. “We

housing priority, but CNAs [Certified Nursing Assistants] don’t,” a staff member explained. “We would have more CNAs sign on permanently if there were more housing options.”

Despite these challenges, the staff’s dedication remains unwavering. “I told my boss the other day

she’d have to kick me out the door!” one nurse joked.

The love and connection between residents, staff and families create an environment that is truly unique. As one staff member put it, “You get emotional when someone passes, and it’s a good thing – it means you care. We’re here for the elders, and we’re here for their families, too.”

To learn more, visit www.maniilaq.org/long-term-care/. Or call 907-442-7975 and speak to the administrator or social worker to schedule a tour or drop by for a meal.

To support the ongoing flood relief efforts in Kotzebue, visit <https://healthyalaskanatives.org/kotzebue-flood/>.

Yasmin Radbod is the Rural Outreach Coordinator at Alaska Commission on Aging.

Tax

continued from page 19

Keep indefinitely

► Tax returns with proof of filing and payment. You should keep these for at least seven years, but many people keep them forever because they provide a record of your financial history.

► IRS forms that you filed when making nondeductible contributions to a traditional IRA or a Roth conversion.

► Retirement and brokerage account annual statements as long as you hold those investments.

► Defined-benefit pension

plan documents.

► Savings bonds until redeemed.

► Loan documents until the loan is paid off.

► Vehicle titles and registration information as long as you own the car, boat, truck, or other vehicle.

► Insurance policies as long as you have them.

► Warranties or receipts for big-ticket purchases for as long as you own the item, to support warranty and insurance claims.

Keep forever

Personal and family records like birth certificates, marriage license, divorce papers, Social Security cards, military discharge papers and estate-plan-

ning documents including a power of attorney, will, trust and advanced directive. Keep these in a fireproof safe or safe-deposit box.

Reduce your paper

To reduce your paper clutter, consider digitizing your documents by scan-

ning them and converting them into PDF files so you can store them on your computer and back them up onto a cloud like Microsoft OneDrive, Apple iCloud or iDrive.

You can also reduce your future paper load by switching to electronic statements and records

whenever possible.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of “The Savvy Senior” book.

Crossword answers from page 18

A	M	E	N	D		U	R	S	A		B	A	D	
R	O	M	E	O		S	A	A	B		H	I	L	O
G	O	O	S	E	B	U	M	P	S		A	R	E	O
O	R	T	S		R	A	P	S		C	I	D	E	R
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Alaska **ADRC**
Aging & Disability Resource Centers

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

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

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

Anchorage

Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Health Department
825 L St., Ste 200, Anchorage, AK 99501
907-343-7770 www.muni.org/adrc

Mat-Su Borough

LINKS Resource Center
777 N. Crusey St., Ste 101, Wasilla, AK 99654
907-373-3632 www.linksprc.org/adrc

Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, Valdez-Cordova

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

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

ADRC North - Fairbanks Senior Center
1424 Moore St., Fairbanks, AK 99701
907-452-2551 www.adrcnorth.org

Southeast Alaska

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

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

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



1-877-625-2372

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

Call Now!

Opus Memoria
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- Dress/ Hygiene Assistance
- Housekeeping/ Laundry
- Holiday & Vacation Coverage
- Live-In Services & More

We are committed to making your choice possible with quality services at affordable prices.

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Call For Your Free In-Home Assessment

Lynetta Hagel-Grant, Owner

907.868.1919

LynettaH@PreferHome.com | PreferHome.com/alaska



Suzanne Hickel, Owner

907.677.1919

Hickel@OpusMemoria.com | www.OpusMemoria.com



Daily activities are in place to keep the residents safe, active and living out their memories through all senses. Caregivers are on staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year

- Private rooms
- Fenced one acre property
- One caregiver for every three residents.
- Specialized training on caring for seniors with dementia. Staff is required to complete continued education for Dementia and Alzheimer's.
- ADA compliant

To schedule a personal tour or to receive additional information please contact us today.