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'A Dream Come True'

Dreams Go On named 2025 Season of Sharing recipient

By COLETTE COSTLOW
ccostlow@altoonamirror.com

HOLLIDAYSBURG — The Altoona Mirror's 2025 annual Season of Sharing fundraising campaign will benefit a local nonprofit organization offering therapeutic horseback riding sessions to those with disabilities.

Debbie Kelly, program manager for Dreams Go On Inc., said she cried upon hearing that news.

"It's a dream come true," she said.

As a nonprofit 501(c)(3) program that aims to help physically and/or emotionally challenged individuals, Kelly said the organization regularly applies for grants and relies on donations to keep the doors open, to care for the horses and more recently, to keep a new barn project moving forward.

Because the program will be able to expand once the new barn is complete, "it's a really neat time for a community to come together for a cause," said Jodi Cessna, executive director of the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation, which manages the Season of Sharing funding effort.

Cessna said she appreciates the work done by Dreams Go On "for those who don't have the opportunity to ride a horse and to have those experiences."

The program is geared toward those with physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy, down syndrome, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida and blindness, and mental challenges such as autism, learning difficulties and brain injuries.

Certified instructors and volunteers work with participants and their families to teach responsibility, trust, rules, patience, compassion, self-confidence, teamwork and safety.

Altoona Mirror
*Season
of
Sharing*



Mirror photos by Patrick Waksmunski

Aaron Rose, 39, of Altoona has assistant instructor Loretta Johnson pet Lena as part of his mounting routine.

In addition, participants find that riding strengthens and tones muscles, improves balance, head control and coordination. Families also report seeing their loved one build confidence and self-esteem.

Mirror Publisher Dan Slep said he is pleased that Season of Sharing can help the program and its participants.

"We understand how expensive a program like this can be and are thrilled to offer our assistance so the program can continue well into the future," Slep said.

"Seeing the joy on a rider's face as they become confident around horses and other people ... It's very heartwarming."

Benefits visible

The therapeutic riding program began more than 35 years ago after Sue Lehman was injured and paralyzed in a car accident.

Until the accident, Lehman was an avid horseback rider, according to Melinda Anderson, a therapeutic riding instructor and Lehman's friend. And despite being

paralyzed, Anderson said Lehman was "insistent," on returning to the saddle, so family members helped her onto a horse. Lehman's physical condition improved after each ride. Now, she can sit independently in the saddle, use the reins and embark on trail rides with Anderson.

"I couldn't believe it," Anderson said. "This really works. She turned me into a believer."

Because Lehman wanted to share the therapeutic benefits of riding with others

SEE DREAMS, PAGE 4

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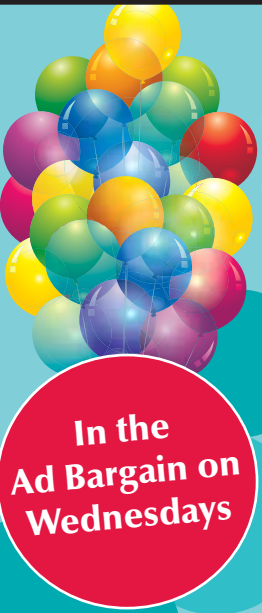
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DREAMS: “Socialize, have fun and get a therapeutic experience at the same time.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in similar situations, they began High Hopes in 1990, Anderson said. The name was later changed to Dreams Go On Inc. after two programs merged into a single entity.

Kelly also became a believer in Dreams Go On, after seeing the benefits firsthand. She enrolled her 4-year-old daughter, Erin, who was born with cerebral palsy, and watched the improvements that followed.

Started with one horse, four riders

Starting with just Lehman’s horse and four riders, the organization has grown to seven horses, 60 riders and a waitlist of interested individuals who could benefit from the program.

Running from March to October, therapeutic riding sessions are offered four days a week.

The benefits of the program are clear, both organizers and participants said.

Hank Bumbarger, 11, who has autism, was initially not open to the idea of trying something new, Altoona resident Lindsay Bumbarger said. But after she brought up horseback riding, Hank showed interest.

While riding a horse, she said Hank is able to “do his own thing at his own pace,” and on the car ride home, he is calmer.

Aaron Rose, 39, has been involved with Dreams Go On since high school, his mother Cathy Rose said.

Aaron has multiple disabilities that make him unable to do many activities. But when riding a horse the mother said her son is happy, having a good time and enjoying something he can physically do.

When mounting a horse, Rose said her son has a routine that begins with him petting the horse, then all the sidewalkers petting the horse. When he gets off the horse, “everyone has to tickle the horse,” the mother said.

Aiden Andrews, 10, was a first-time rider this season after being on the program’s waiting list, according to parents Merin Andrews and Andrew Karunakaran.

Being fond of outdoor activities, Andrews said Aiden gets a chance to “socialize, have fun and get a therapeutic experience at the same time.”

“The kids really gain a lot from this program,” she said, because individuals like Aiden who have autism can become involved, communicate, exercise and learn social skills.

“I spread the word to everyone” about Dreams Go On, Andrews added.



Instructor Melinda Anderson directs the riders and leaders on different tasks.

Building project underway

Dreams Go On operates with six to seven staff members — plus volunteers who devote time and effort because they believe in the program. Volunteers not only walk with riders to ensure they remain comfortable on the horse but also help with barn work and fundraisers.

Currently, Dreams Go On holds lessons inside a private boarding facility, Lakeview Stables near Canoe Creek, but because it is a shared facility, there is not a lot of room to expand, Anderson said. That will hopefully change soon.

In 2020, Dreams Go On purchased a 14.5-acre parcel along Turkey Valley Road, Frankstown Township, with the intention of building its own facility. Ongoing efforts toward that goal got a boost in 2023, when Frankstown Township was awarded a \$1 million grant on behalf of Dreams Go On for construction and engineering costs associated with building a 12-stall barn and indoor riding facility now under construction.

The new barn is designed with an



Hank Bumbarger, 11, of Altoona throws his hands in the air as Nate Feagy leads Black Jack.

indoor arena for riding and a parent observation room. An outdoor arena is also included in the plans. The project is costing about \$1.6 million, program vice president Tracy Pellegrino said.

In addition to covering the difference, Kelly said Dreams Go On also has monthly expenses — feed for the horses, equipment, utilities, etc. — running \$9,000 to \$10,000 a month.

When the organization has its own facility up and running, it expects to expand hours and serve more people.

The new facility “opens the doors for us and our clients,” Kelly said.

As the 2025 recipient of Seasons of Sharing, she said it’s “rewarding to feel a bit of comfort going into our new facility.”

Pellegrino also looks forward to serving more people, including those who have been waiting to participate.

“There are a lot of people on that list who want to move into the program,” she said. “With our expansion, we will have the opportunity to do that.”

Dreams Go On Board member Debbie Wentz is recommending people donate to the organization because it’s a “good cause.”

“There is no such thing as a small donation, any amount is greatly appreciated,” Slep said. “When everyone pulls together, great things can happen.”

Like others, Wentz remains enthusiastic about Dreams Go On because of the riders’ reactions that she’s observed when they’re on their horses.

“The smiles on their faces make it worthwhile,” Wentz said.

Mirror Staff Writer Colette Costlow is at 814-946-7414.

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'17 Lincoln MKX - 3.7L, AWD, 102K

'17 Ford F150 - 5.0L, 4x4, 148K

'17 GMC Acadia - 3.6L, AWD, 3rd Row, 130K

'17 Jeep Renegade - 2.4L, 4x4, 99K

'16 Nissan Sentra S - 1.8L, FWD, 125K

'16 Mini Cooper Tradesman - 1.6L, AWD,
125K

'14 Hyundai Santa Fe - 2.0L, AWD, 118K

'14 Chevy Impala - 3.6L, FWD, 97K

'12 Dodge Ram 1500 - 5.7L, 4WD, 118K

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Crossword Puzzle

Solution on page 6

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	
9				10		11			12
13				14		15			
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53					54		55		
56					57				
58						59			

CLUES ACROSS

1. Difficult

5. Coarsely ground corn

9. There's one for the "world"

11. Loved Romeo

13. Sticky situation

15. Pelvic areas

16. An informal debt instrument

17. Cannot be repaired surgically

19. A device attached to a workbench

21. Related on the mother's side

22. Sound unit

23. ___ Sagan, astronomer

25. Utah city

26. A disappointing effort

27. Steal goods during a riot

29. Wakes up

31. Hair salon service

33. Serenaded

34. Looked intensely

36. U.S. Air Force expert Robert F.

38. A type of cast

39. One's duty

41. Where golfers begin

43. Make a mistake

44. Semitic sun god

46. Ancient Greek City

48. Having had the head cut off

52. A place to stay

53. Unwise

54. Most unnatural

56. Dennis is a notable one

57. Ointments

58. Students' exam

59. Leaked blood

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Paws & Claws

Pet-Friendly Holiday Decorating

Decorating is one of the great joys of the
holiday season. Stores adorn their front-
facing windows with amazing displays and
homeowners often deck out residences
from top to bottom with all measures of
holiday wonderment.
Approximately 94 million households
in the United States feature a pet,
according to the American Pet Products
Association. Many of those households
will be decorating for the holidays and
must figure out ways to keep homes safe
for all residents including those covered
in fur. These tips can ensure a pet-friendly
season with lots of holiday decor.

• Choose shatterproof decorations.
Select shatterproof ornaments and other
decorative items that are durable and non
toxic. Items made from felt, fabric or wood
tend to be safer than items that can break.
• Pick pet-friendly plants. Poinsettias
and mistletoe may be traditional, but they
can be toxic to pets. Additional options
like Christmas cactus can be safer.
Artificial plants are another alternative to
consider.
• Opt out of open flames. It is best to
avoid traditional candles when pets are
around. Instead, there are plenty of those
powered by LED lights that even mimic

the flicker of real candles.
• Avoid tinsel and ribbons. Digestive
issues or blockages can affect pets who
ingest tinsel or ribbons. Select pet-safe
ribbons or garlands, and skip the tinsel
entirely.
• Avoid edible decor. Candy canes on
trees or popcorn garlands are festive,
but they may prove too tempting for pets
to resist. Animals can get sick and may
knock over the Christmas tree or other
items to access the food.
• Secure decorative items. Position the
Christmas tree in an area that is not easily
accessible. Avoid putting it near furniture
that can be used as a jumping-off point.
Make sure the tree stand is sturdy enough
to prevent tipping, and consider using

wire or string to tie the tree to a ceiling or
wall anchor for further stability.
• Mind the scents. Some fragrances
can be overwhelming or irritating for
pets, so use scented diffusers or plug-ins
sparingly. A simmering pot of cloves,
cinnamon sticks and orange rinds can
create a welcoming, all-natural aroma.
• Create a sanctuary. Try not to move
too many of the pet's creature comforts,
such as favorite toys or bedding. If you
must move these items out of the way,
gradually introduce the pet to his or her
new area, which can be set away from the
hustle of the main entertaining area.
A pet-friendly holiday season involves
being mindful of pet's safety while
decorating.

Medicare open enrollment closes Dec. 7

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging is reminding older adults that the annual Medicare Open Enrollment Period began Oct. 15 and will end Dec. 7. Any new coverage selected or changes to existing benefits will take effect Jan. 1, 2026.

During open enrollment, new Medicare beneficiaries can sign up for Medicare Prescription Drug coverage and health plans to complement Medicare, and current Medicare beneficiaries can review and join, switch or drop Medicare Advantage or Prescription Drug Coverage so that it better meets their needs.

To help Medicare beneficiaries understand their options, PDA offers free, objective health benefits counseling through Pennsylvania Medicare Education and Decision Insight, also known as PA MEDI.

Changes to Medicare in 2026 include a \$2,100 out-of-pocket cap for prescription drugs, an optional prescription payment plan to spread out drug costs, and price reductions for 10 medications based on negotiations and agreements between the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and participating drug companies.

Pennsylvanians can learn more about PA MEDI, events and programs, or becoming a volunteer on the Department of Aging's website or by calling the PA MEDI Helpline at 1-800-783-7067, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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Obituaries

Iva L. Goss

Iva L. Goss, 61, of Clearfield, PA, died on Sunday, November 2, 2025 at Ridgeview Healthcare & Rehab. Ctr. in Curwensville, PA.

Born on January 21, 1964, in Frenchville, PA, Iva was the daughter of the late Fred Martell & Marie (Houdeshell) Martell. She married Carl Goss who survives in Clearfield, PA. Iva was a homemaker and she had received her GED. In addition to her parents, Iva was preceded in death by a sister, Sheryl Doughty; and two brothers, Allan Martell and Kevin Martell. In addition to her husband, Iva is survived by a daughter, Melissa D. Deluccia & her husband Brandon of Curwensville, PA; three sons, Terry Spencer & his wife Brandy of Clearfield, PA, Lance Spencer & his partner Crystal of Clearfield, PA, and Jesse Spencer of Altoona, PA; a sister, Christine Detrick of Jacksonville, FL; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. There was no funeral services or visitation.

Frances “Frankie” E. (Taylor) Coon

Frances “Frankie” E. (Taylor) Coon, 104, of Clearfield and a guest of Cedarwood Rehabilitation & Healthcare Center, Tyrone, went to be with the Lord on Wednesday, October 22, 2025.

Born April 16, 1921, in Clearfield, she was the daughter of Curtis and Winifred “Winnie” (Shaw) Taylor. On January 1, 1939, she wed Kenneth L. Coon at the family residence in Goshen. They celebrated 75 years of marriage together. They raised three children, Marjorie J. Coyle of Kernersville, NC, Kenneth E. Coon of Fort Wayne, IN, and Deborah K. Irwin (Roger) of Clearfield, PA. Her family grew with the addition of eight grandchildren, 18 great grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren. She is also survived by numerous nieces and nephews. Frances was a former member of Goshen United Methodist Church and had attended Christian Missionary Alliance Church, Clearfield. She worked making aircraft radios for Airplane & Marine Instruments, Inc of Clearfield for a brief period. Frances retired from the Clearfield Area School District after 13 years of service where she had been employed as a cook and cafeteria worker at the Plymptonville school. In her heart, she was always a homemaker. Frances enjoyed canning. Her hobbies included crocheting, sewing, painting, and quilting. Frances loved spending time with her family and working in her garden. A favorite family memory was signing the tablecloth that Frances used during every family meal, after which she would embroider the names to preserve for years to come. As the years went by, and walking became harder, Frances would still do whatever she could to be helpful to her family. Frances is preceded in death by her parents, husband, Kenneth who died in 2014, grandson, Stacey Allen Coon, great grandson, Anthony M Campolo, daughter-in-law, Marcia Coon, son-in-law, John “Jack” Coyle, and her brothers and sisters, Amos Taylor, Olive Taylor, Orpha Wilson, Elva Palmer, Helen Egan, Harmon Taylor, Jess Taylor, Inez Kyler, Nyla Dottie Michaels, Iva Clark, Earl Taylor, and Thomas Taylor. Frances was the last of her generation. Funeral Services were held at Bennett & Houser Funeral Home, Inc., Clearfield with Pastor Joel Daku officiating. Interment: Historic Crown Crest Cemetery, Clearfield.

Janet M. Shade

Janet M. Shade, 85 of Clearfield passed away at Penn Highlands – DuBois on Thursday, October 30, 2025.

Born January 29, 1940, in Clearfield, she was the daughter of William Ernest and Cora E. (Price) Keith. She attended Clearfield Area High School. Janet was Baptist by faith. Janet used her artistic ability as a cake decorator for Riverside Markets. In her spare time, she enjoyed attending to her flowers and making various crafts. She is survived by her four children, Bonnie Caldwell (Kent), of Curwensville, Brenda Peterson (Russ), of Morrisdale, Bill Haney (Cary), of Clearfield, Barbara Haney of Clearfield; four grandchildren, Chris Peterson (Becky) of Curwensville, Dustin Caldwell (Taylor) of Queen, PA, Ryan Caldwell of Clearfield, Kenndra McKendrick of Clearfield; and four great-grandchildren Livia Peterson, Skyla Peterson, Briah Bickel, and Avah Caldwell. Janet is also survived by three brothers and two sisters, Robert Keith (Linda) of Morrisdale, David Keith (Deb) of Curwensville, Shirley Pyle of Clearfield, Connie Mallin (Dan) of Houtzdale, Ron Keith (Cindy) of Wellsboro, PA; and numerous nieces and nephews. Janet is also survived by her longtime companion, Willie Clark of Olean, NY. She was preceded in death by her parents, William and Cora Keith, her husband, four brothers, Ernest Keith, Clifford Keith, Kenneth Keith, Don Keith, and one sister, Mary Ann Knepp. Funeral services were held at Bennett & Houser Funeral Home, Inc., with Rev. Robert Way officiating. Interment: Logan Valley Cemetery, Bellwood, PA.

Linda A. Owens

Linda A. Owens, 73, of Clearfield, passed away Tuesday, October 28, 2025, at her home.

Born February 15, 1952, in Philipsburg, the daughter of Kenneth V. Smeal and Frances (Dixon) Oberheim. She was a graduate of Clearfield Area High School, Class of 1970. Linda had served as Secretary for Treasure Lake when it was first under construction. She also served as Secretary for Goshen Township and Clearfield Bank and Trust in the offices of President and Vice President. Linda was co-owner of the Lighthouse Fish and Chips and was a consultant for Mary Kay Cosmetics. Mrs. Owens was a member of the Glad Tidings Assembly of God. She was a director for the North Central West Missionettes, enjoyed shopping and planning trips to the point of being someone the family referred to as a professional traveler. Linda is survived by her husband, Michael W. Owens, Sr., whom she married March 24, 1970, three children: Lisa Owens Heberling (Rich) of Woodland, Michael Owens, Jr., (Crystal) of Morrisdale and Brian Owens (Brandy) of Clearfield, six grandchildren: Kyle Heberling (Vanessa), Owen Heberling, Michael Owens III (Ashley), Brandi Spackman (Eli) and O'Brian and Brodee Owens and seven great-grandchildren: Elijah, Bristol, James, John, Ryleigh, Kinsleigh and Mayleigh. She was preceded in death by her parents, a granddaughter, Britani Owens and a brother, Kenny Smeal. Funeral Services were held at the Bennett and Houser Funeral Home, Inc., Clearfield, with her son, Pastor Michael Owens, Jr., officiating. Interment: Goshen Cemetery.

Obituaries Courtesy of:

Heath’s Funeral Home, Bennett & Houser Funeral Home, Inc,
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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2025

UPMC’s Sweeney named Family Physician of the Year

Residency program faculty member has trained nearly 300 people

By MATT CHURELLA
mchurella@altoonamirror.com

Over 35 years as a UMPC Altoona Family Medicine Residency faculty member, Dr. Kathleen Sweeney has trained nearly 300 family medicine, rotating interns and transitional year residents.

At the Pennsylvania Osteopathic Family Physicians Society Symposium this past July in Hershey, Sweeney received the society’s Family Physician of the Year award, for which she was nominated by three current residents in the family medicine program.

Sweeney said she was made aware that she had been selected for an award. But she did not know what award she would be receiving until she attended the annual meeting this summer.

“To be honest, I cried,” Sweeney said of her reaction upon hearing that she received the Family Physician of the Year award, adding she’s been to previous ceremonies where the award was given out to other recipients and she was always “wowed” by their achievements.

Sweeney said being nominated by her res-

idents — Dr. Jefferson Adams, Dr. Clayton Vasey and Dr. Megan Thompson — made the honor that much more special for her because they know her flaws and strong points better than anyone.

The residents recognized Sweeney’s “unwavering commitment” to advancing osteopathic medicine, her ability to provide “exceptional” education and deliver patient-centered care by nominating her, according to a press release.

Dr. David Burwell, chief medical information officer and vice president of clinical quality and compliance at UPMC West Central Pennsylvania and Maryland, said the recognition reflects the “deep respect” Sweeney has earned across her profession.

“Her dedication to osteopathic education has not only strengthened our residency program but also inspired a culture of excellence that continues to shape the future of family medicine,” Burwell said.

Sweeney said she believes the award is more reflective of the residency program’s overall

success than it is of her personal accomplishments.

The family medicine residency trains medical students — medical doctors and doctors of osteopathic medicine — to become full-scope family physicians.

It’s a three-year program that trains residents to provide office procedures in dermatology, gynecology, musculoskeletal ultrasound, joint injections and osteopathic manual medicine, she said.

Residents have seen patients of all ages while practicing in local emergency rooms, their own private practices and group practices, Sweeney said.

“Our residents are equipped to take care of extremely sick patients with complex medical conditions in the hospital and outpatient settings. They are able to care for patients with both straightforward and complicated psychiatric issues,” she said.

According to Sweeney, more than 70% of UMPC Altoona’s family medicine department are graduates of the residency program.

“Our program has been key to supplying primary care for this region,” Sweeney said. “Without it, I don’t know where we would be because it’s sometimes hard to recruit to rural areas, and we’ve been able to supply over 70% (of family physicians in the area).”

Sweeney moved to the area after graduating from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and had completed a rotating internship at Grandview Hospital in Dayton, Ohio.

Sweeney said a friend who was a graduate of Temple Medical School told her there were many family medicine residencies in Pennsylvania who were looking for post-graduate year two osteopathic residents.

At that time, Sweeney’s parents lived in Canfield, Ohio, and she was looking for a location that would be within driving distance of their home. She interviewed at Altoona Family Physicians, where she completed the residency.

Sweeney worked in State College for 2.5 years before she was recruited to join UPMC Altoona Family Physicians in 1990. She’s served in a variety of leadership roles within osteopathic education since then.

Sweeney is the UPMC Altoona Family Medicine Residency’s associate director. She is also the director of the Transitional Year Residency program and the Osteopathic Education for Graduate

“Her passion is ensuring that the next generation of osteopathic providers are prepared to advance the profession. We are so fortunate to have her on our team and caring for our community.”

Mike Corso,
UPMC Altoona
and UPMC Bedford
president



Mirror photo by Matt Churella

Dr. Kathleen Sweeney, associate director of the UMPC Altoona Family Medicine Residency, stands outside the Altoona Family Physicians office along Howard Avenue.

Medical Education at UPMC Altoona.

She is a fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians.

According to Sweeney, the opportunities she has to grow as a physician and serve patients throughout the region have been made possible because of her clinical and administrative staff.

“My team is the greatest. I would never have

gotten this award without them,” Sweeney said, noting her staff helps her pull off amazing projects that she wouldn’t be able to do without their support, help and guidance.

“Our staff have created a care team that my patients love and trust,” she said. “Without them I could never provide the level of personalized clinical care that I am able to offer my long-standing patients.”

Throughout her career, Sweeney has touched the

lives of countless residents and patients, said Mike Corso, president of UPMC Altoona and UPMC Bedford.

“Her passion is ensuring that the next generation of osteopathic providers are prepared to advance the profession, while delivering outstanding care to their patients,” Corso said. “We are so fortunate to have her on our team and caring for our community.”

Mirror Staff Writer Matt Churella is at 814-946-7520.

The Sweeney file

Name: Kathleen Sweeney
Age: 67
Residence: Hollidaysburg
Family: Husband, Tom Reese; children, Patrick and Michael Reese; stepchildren: Evan Reese, Meridith Guffey, Justin Reese and Alex Reese; grandchildren: Lilly, Aaron and Theo Reese and Grace and George Guffey
Education: Villa Joseph Marie High School, Bucks County; LaSalle College, Philadelphia; Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Philadelphia; residency at Grandview Hospital, Dayton, Ohio; family medicine residency at Altoona Hospital
Work: Was in State College for 2.5 years before being recruited in 1990 to work at UMPC Altoona to start the osteopathic internship and teach in the family medicine residency.
Hobbies: Swimming, hiking, cross country skiing and anything outdoors



Mirror photo by Matt Churella

Dr. Kathleen Sweeney, associate director of the UMPC Altoona Family Medicine Residency, received the Family Physician of the Year award in July at the Pennsylvania Osteopathic Family Physicians Society Symposium in Hershey.

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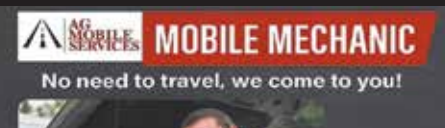
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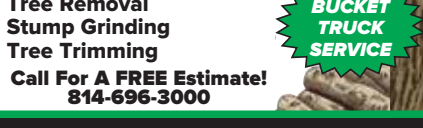
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The Associated Press

June West Brandt, 93, holds a photo on Aug. 27 displaying her brother, William Durham West Jr., who was killed in World War II, in Richmond, Texas.

Adopted family

Program connects Americans to Dutch WWII caretakers

BY JAMIE STENGLE

The Associated Press

DALLAS — In the decades since June West Brandt's older brother was killed in World War II, her kind and artistic sibling who loved to play boogie-woogie on the piano has never been far from her mind. So she was delighted to discover he's also being remembered by a Dutch couple who regularly visit a marker for him at a Netherlands cemetery.

"It's wonderful for me to know that someone is there," said Brandt, 93, who lives near Houston.

Her introduction over the summer to Lisa and Guido Meijers came by way of a new initiative aiming to increase the number of connections between the family members of those buried and remembered on the walls of the missing at the World War II cemetery and the Dutch people who have adopted each one.

The project was spurred on by "The Monuments Men" author Robert Edsel, whose newest book, "Remember Us," tells the story of the adoption program at the Netherlands American Cemetery. His Dallas-based Monuments Men and Women Foundation teamed with the Dutch foundation responsible for the adoptions to create the Forever Promise Project, which has a searchable database of the names of U.S. service members buried and remembered at the cemetery.

"I'd like us to find and connect as many American families to their Dutch adopters as is possible," Edsel said.

Ton Hermes, chairman of the Foundation for Adopting Graves American Cemetery Margraten, said that while each of the about 8,300 graves and 1,700 markers for the missing at the cemetery near the village of Margraten have adopters, only about 20% to 30% of them are in contact with the service member's relatives.

"It's wonderful for me to know that someone is there."

June West Brandt, whose brother's grave is visited by a couple in the Netherlands after he was killed in World War II

When the Meijerses adopted the marker for Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. William Durham "W.D." West Jr. several years ago, they knew only basic information about the 20-year-old whose body was never recovered after his B-24 bomber was shot down over the North Sea on a mission into Nazi Germany.

Through talking with Brandt, they've learned that West was "quite a creative soul," Lisa Meijers said.

"That obviously makes a huge change in how to remember someone," she said.

Brandt said her brother loved to paint and played the piano by ear, and even though she was six years younger, they were "big buddies" growing up in the small western Louisiana city of DeRidder.

"We loved being together, so it was

very hard when he left," Brandt said.

Brandt's daughter, Allison Brandt Woods, said it's heartwarming knowing Meijerses are watching over the marker. Woods met up with them on a recent trip and hopes the connection between their families will continue with future generations.

The cemetery, Lisa Meijers said, is among many reminders of World War II in the southern Netherlands, which was liberated by Allied forces in September 1944 after over four years of Nazi occupation.

"We just really feel how extremely important it is to remember these things and to honor the sacrifices these people made for us," she said.

The Meijerses, who have a 1-year-old son, visit West's marker about once a month, bringing flowers.

Hermes said the program is so popular that there's a waiting list to adopt a grave or marker.

Names on the walls for the missing were opened up for adoption in 2008, said Frans Roebroeks, secretary for the Dutch adoption foundation. The formal adoption process for graves began to take shape during a 1945 meeting of the Margraten town council.

"They were meeting to figure out the answer to the question: How do you thank your liberators when they are no longer alive to thank?" Edsel said.

Many initial adopters took on the grave of someone they had gotten to know.

See **WWII**/Page 3

Walking backward beneficial for health

BY STEPHEN WADE

The Associated Press

Here's a simple way to switch up your walking routine, according to experts: try going backward.

Taking a brisk walk is an exercise rich in simplicity, and it can have impressive mental and physical benefits: stronger bones and muscles, cardiovascular fitness and stress relief, to name a few. But like any workout, hoofing it for your health may feel repetitive and even boring after a while.

Backward walking, also known as retro walking or reverse walking, could add variety and value to an exercise routine, when done safely. Turning around not only provides a change of view, but also puts different demands on your body.

Janet Dufek, a biomechanist and faculty member at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has researched the mechanics of both walking and landing from jumps to identify ways of preventing injuries and improving physical performance. And as a former college basketball player and a regular exerciser, she's also done her fair share of backward walking.

In humans, reverse locomotion can increase hamstring flexibility, strengthen underused muscles and challenges the mind as the body adjusts to a new movement and posture.

"I see a lot of people in my neighborhood and they walk, and that's good," she said. "But they are still stressing the same elements of their structure over and over again. Walking backward introduces an element of cross-training, a subtly different activity."

On the treadmill

Kevin Patterson, a personal trainer in Nashville, Tennessee, recommends the treadmill as the safest place to retro walk. You can adjust it to a slow speed. However, Patterson likes to turn off the treadmill — termed the "dead mill" — and have clients propel the belt on their own.

"It can take a while to get the treadmill going, but from there we have them be the horsepower for the treadmill," he said.

See **Walking**/Page 4

How to cook, pickle plant scraps rather than tossing them

BY JESSICA DAMIANO

The Associated Press

My beets were slow to grow this year, so I bought a bunch at the farmers' market. I was taken aback when the seller chopped off the vegetable's foliage and attempted to discard it after handing me a sad sack of leafless roots.

"Wait! I'll take those, please," I blurted, catching him just before they hit the trash bin, and explaining that they're edible. He knew, of course, but said that most customers don't want them. There are a lot of tasty and

nutritious uses for secondary plant parts that would otherwise be discarded or, at best, added to compost. Waste not, want not!

A zipper bag of 'scraps'

When I roast beets — home-grown or otherwise — I sauté their greens with olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic for a tasty and nutritious second side dish from the same plant.

Likewise, I have a gallon-size, zipper-top "scraps" bag in the freezer to which I add (washed) carrot nubs and peels, onion skins, celery leaves and parsley stems. When the bag is full, I

empty its contents into a stockpot with chicken and water, simmer it for a couple of hours, and then strain it for a flavorful and nutrient-rich soup base or broth.

Young zucchini leaves are also edible. It's OK to take a few from each plant (cut stems at their base), but take care not to remove too many, as they're needed to produce energy for the growing crop. Scrape each leaf's surface with a sharp knife to remove any bristles, then rinse, slice and sauté with the peeled, chopped stems. Mature leaves are too thick and prickly for this treat-

ment, but can be used to flavor soups and stews, then removed before serving.

You can also stuff the zucchini leaves with rice and Mediterranean seasonings in place of grape leaves. Go ahead and add chopped meat, too, if you like.

Figs, flowers and watermelon

Fig leaves make a delicious tea-like beverage. Harvest them at the end of the season, just before they turn yellow. Rinse, pat dry, then place them in a food dehydrator, air fryer or oven set to 200 degrees Fahrenheit for several

hours, until crispy. Crumble them up, then store them in a glass jar.

Steep a heaping tablespoon in boiling water for 10 minutes, then strain. You'll swear you're drinking a sweetened coconut-vanilla infusion.

And if you're growing untreated, chemical-free nasturtiums, pansies, violets, roses or borage, elevate your beverages with floral ice cubes! Add a single flower to each compartment of an ice cube tray and fill with water before freezing.

See **Scraps**/Page 5

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Newest prescription is to go outside

By **TODD RICHMOND**
The Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Find a shady spot under a tree, take a breath of fresh air and call me in the morning.

Health care providers have long suggested stressed-out patients spend time outdoors. Now hundreds of providers are going a step further and issuing formal prescriptions to get outside. The tactic is gaining momentum as social media, political strife and wars abroad weigh on the American psyche.

Of course, no one needs a prescription to get outside, but some doctors think that issuing the advice that way helps people take it seriously.

“When I bring it up, it is almost like granting permission to do something they may see as frivolous when things seem so otherwise serious and stressful,” said Dr. Suzanne Hackenmiller, a Waterloo, Iowa, gynecologist who started issuing nature prescriptions after discovering time outdoors soothed her following her husband’s death.

Getting outdoors can improve your health

Spending time in natural areas can lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormones and boost immunity, multiple studies have found.

“Study after study says we’re wired to be out in nature,” said Dr. Brent Bauer, who serves as director of the complementary and integrative medicine program at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The program focuses on practices that usually aren’t part of conventional medicine, such as meditation, acupuncture, massage and nutrition. “That’s more than just ‘Woo-woo, I think nature is cool.’ There’s actually science.”

Telling someone to go outside is one thing. The follow-through is something else. Starting about a decade ago, health care providers began formalizing suggestions to get outside through prescriptions.

Dr. Robert Zarr, who doubles as a nature guide,



Associated Press file photo

Virginia Davidson of Bridgton, Maine, paddles her kayak on Moose Pond, Oct. 13, 2021, in Bridgton, Maine.

launched an organization called Park Rx America around 2016, offering providers protocols for prescribing nature outings. The guidelines call for talking with patients about what they like to do outside — walking, sitting under a tree, maybe just watching leaves fall — how often to do it and where to go. That all then gets included in a prescription, and Park Rx America sends patients reminders.

Nearly 2,000 providers have registered with the organization across the U.S. and a number of other countries, including Australia, Brazil, Cameroon and Spain. They’ve issued more than 7,000 nature prescriptions since 2019, said Dr. Stacy Beller Stryer, Park Rx America’s associate medical director. About 100 other organizations similar to Park Rx America have sprung up around the U.S., she said.

A nature prescription can motivate

Bauer specializes in treating CEOs and other business leaders. He said he issues about 30 nature prescriptions every year. The chief executives he treats sometimes don’t even know where to begin and a prescription can give them a jump start, he said.

“I recommend a lot of things to a lot of patients,”

he said. “I’m not under the illusion all of them get enacted. When I get a prescription, someone hands me a piece of paper and says you must take this medication ... I’m a lot more likely to activate that.”

Hackenmiller, the Iowa gynecologist, said she’s having more discussions with patients about getting outside as a means of escaping a world locked in perpetual conflict.

“When so many things are out of our control, it can be helpful to step away from the media and immerse ourselves in nature,” she said. “I think time in nature often resonates with people as something they have found solace in and have gravitated to in other times in their life.”

Getting outside is the important part

The effectiveness of nature prescriptions is unclear. A 2020 joint study by the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Pennsylvania and North Carolina State University concluded that more work was needed to gauge follow-through and long-term health outcomes.

But unless you’re choking on wildfire smoke or swatting swarms of mosquitoes, getting outside — no matter what motivates you — can be helpful.

Medicare open enrollment period closes Dec. 7

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging is reminding older adults that the annual Medicare Open Enrollment Period began Oct. 15 and will end Dec. 7. Any new coverage selected or changes to existing benefits will take effect Jan. 1, 2026.

During open enrollment, new Medicare beneficiaries can sign up for Medicare Prescription Drug coverage and health plans to complement Medicare, and current Medicare beneficiaries can review and join, switch or drop Medicare Advantage or Prescription Drug Coverage so that it better meets their needs.

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Changes to Medicare in 2026 include a \$2,100 out-of-pocket cap for prescription drugs, an optional prescription payment plan to spread out drug costs, and price reductions for 10 medications based on negotiations and agreements between the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and participating drug companies.

Pennsylvanians can learn more about PA MEDI, events and programs, or becoming a volunteer on the Department of Aging’s website or by calling the PA MEDI Helpline at 1-800-783-7067, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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Understanding complexity of social security spousal benefits

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

— Primary Breadwinner

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

What are spousal benefits? Social Security spousal benefits are designed to provide retirement income to spouses who either didn't work or worked sporadically/part time and earned significantly less than their spouses over their working lifetime. A stay-at-home parent is a good example of a spousal benefit recipient.

Who qualifies? To qualify for spousal benefits, you and your wife must meet three conditions: Your wife must be at least age 62; you must be married for a year or more; and you must already be collecting your retirement benefits. Different rules apply for ex-spouses. Ex-spouses (if you were married for at least 10 years and are not remarried) can receive a spousal benefit based on an ex-spouse's record even if your ex has not yet filed for



Jim Miller
Savvy Senior

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

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

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

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

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

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

You should also note that if your wife worked and is entitled to benefits on her own work record, but it's

less than what she's entitled to as a spouse, Social Security will pay her the higher of the two amounts, but not both.

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

So, if your wife outlives you, she'll be able to switch from her spousal benefits to survivor benefits and receive a higher payment. Survivor benefits range between 71.5% and 100% of the deceased's benefit, based on your wife's age when she claims.

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

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

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

Sushi legend turns 100, not retiring

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese sushi legend Jiro Ono won three Michelin stars for more than a decade, the world's oldest head chef to do so. He has served the world's dignitaries and his art of sushi was featured in an award-winning film.

After all these achievements and at the age of 100, he is not ready to fully retire.

"I plan to keep going for about five more years," Ono said last month as he marked Japan's "Respect for the Aged Day" with a gift and a certificate ahead of his birthday.

What's the secret of his health? "To work," Ono replied to the question by Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike, who congratulated him.

"I can no longer come to the restaurant every day ... but even at 100, I try to



Ono

work if possible. I believe the best medicine is to work."

Ono, the founder of Sukiyabashi Jiro, a tiny, 10-seat sushi bar in the basement of a building in Tokyo's posh Ginza district, turned 100 Monday.

In one of the world's fastest-aging countries, he is now among Japan's nearly 100,000 centenarians, according to government statistics.

Born in the central Japanese city of Hamamatsu in 1925, Ono began his apprenticeship at age 7 at the Japanese restaurant of a local inn. He moved to Tokyo and became a sushi chef at 25 and opened his

own restaurant — Sukiyabashi Jiro — 15 years later in 1965.

He has devoted his life seeking perfection in making sushi.

"I haven't reached perfection yet," Ono, then 85, said in "Jiro Dreams of Sushi," a film released in 2012. "I'll continue to climb trying to reach the top but nobody knows where the top is."

Director David Gelb said his impression of Ono was "of a teacher and a fatherly figure to all who were in his restaurant."

At the beginning, Gelb felt intimidated by the "gravitas" of the legend but was soon disarmed by Ono's sense of humor and kindness, he told the Associated Press in an interview from New Orleans. "He's very funny and very sweet."



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WWII: Graves stay in the same family line

(Continued from Page 1)

"Once they heard their soldier was killed in action, the Dutch people decided to adopt his grave, to bring flowers and to correspond with the wives or mothers in the United States," Hermes said.

Roebroeks said many of the graves have been cared for by the same family since the end of the war, including one that's been passed down through his family. He said Army Pfc. Henry Wolf had stayed at his grandfather's farm and became "like a son" to him.

Wolf's grave has passed from Roebroeks' grandfather to his mother and now to his sister, who will pass it to her daughter, he said.

"That grave stays in the family," he said.

Edsel said that so far, over 300 families have asked to be put in touch with their adopters.

"And we're just starting," he said.

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The Associated Press

Blanca Guerrero, 67, (left) and Gloria Sanabria, 67, (right) ride in a limousine Friday to a quinceañera celebration for women who never had a traditional 15th birthday party, organized by the Sueños Hechos foundation in Bogota, Colombia.

Colombian abuelas celebrate quinceañeras

By **ASTRID SUÁREZ**
The Associated Press

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — At age 72, Rosalba Casas finally celebrated her 15th birthday on Friday, donning a flowing pink dress and a tiara for the quinceañera she dreamed of as a teenager. “This is the happiest day because I’m celebrating my 15th birthday,” Casas said, adding that she’d stayed up all night thinking about the big day. It was the first time she wore professional makeup or a formal gown, or rode in a limousine, where she joined 28 other older women chosen by the Sueños Hechos (Dreams Come True) Foundation for belated birthday celebrations. Quinceañeras are a time-honored tradition in Latin America, a often lavish celebration that marks a girl’s passage into adulthood when she turns 15. But for the 29 women — mostly grandmothers — honored at this party, childhood hardships put any kind of celebration out of reach. They rode in a limousine through the streets of northwestern Bogotá in to lively

music, leaning out the car’s open roof to wave excitedly at passersby who recorded them on their phones. “I never rode in anything like that. I’d only seen them in pictures, but I never imagined I’d be in one,” Casas said. “I blew kisses to everyone,” she added with a laugh. **Many Colombians miss a rite of passage** Casas said that on her 15th birthday, she didn’t receive a single greeting. It was just another workday for her as a domestic employee in a wealthy Bogotá home, where her mother also worked. Maria Isabel Carmona, 71, had a similar story. She recalled her 15th birthday party as a special breakfast of hot chocolate and fried eggs. “My mother was very poor. There were a lot of us kids, and we lived in a small town. There was no way to celebrate,” Carmona said while getting her makeup done at a beauty academy that donated its services to the belated quinceañeras. Even though it’s a very

common tradition in Colombia, not all households can afford such a party in a country where the government estimates 31% of the population lives in poverty. The World Bank ranks the country as one of the most unequal in Latin America. The 29 women stepped out of the limousine onto a red carpet leading into a community hall, where uniformed police officers raised their sabers to form an honor guard for the quinceañeras. An emotional quinceañera song played in the background: “So fast — already 15 years, it can’t be ... please, don’t grow up anymore.” The women then swapped their shoes for sneakers — a bit more comfortable at their age — and were invited to dance the waltz, first with police officers, then with their husbands, sons and grandsons. **Project began with underprivileged girls** Freddy Alfonso Paez, director of the Sueños Hechos Foundation and a retired police officer, founded the organization

five years ago with his two brothers, though they had started offering 15th birthday parties to underprivileged girls a couple of years earlier. The project expanded to older women when organizers thought of others — like Paez’s own mother — who never had the traditional celebration in their youth. Paez said the group has held quinceañera parties for older women for the past five years, providing the celebrations to 128 so far. The Sueños Hechos Foundation holds the annual event with help from sponsors who donate the limousine, food and dresses. The police also lend support, with officers serving as escorts for the guests of honor. The 29 women at Friday’s celebration, ages 60 to 85, were selected through an open call on social media. “Many have different health conditions — diabetes, heart issues, leg or hip pain — but when the party begins, they forget all that and just enjoy themselves,” Paez said.



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WALKING: Habit for athletes

(Continued from Page 1) Patterson said he uses backward walking with all his clients as an “accessory exercise” — a weight-training term for add-on movements designed to work a specific muscle group — or during warm-ups. The activity typically makes up a small part of the workouts, he said. “The treadmill is great for older clients because you have the handles on the side and you reduce that risk of falling,” he said. **Off the treadmill** Dufek suggests working a one-minute segment of backward walking into a 10-minute walk and adding time and distance as you get comfortable. You can also do it with a partner; face each other, perhaps clasp hands. One person walks backward, and the other strolls forward and watches for problems. Then switch positions. “At first, you start really, really slowly because there’s a balance accommodation and there is brain retraining. You are learning a new skill,” Dufek said. “You’re using muscles in different ways.” If you work your way up to running and get really good at it, you can try running a marathon backward — 26.2 miles or 42.2 kilometers. Yes, people have done that.

Backward walking as cross-training Dufek classifies backward walking as a form of cross-training, or incorporating a mix of moves into a fitness program. Doing a range of exercises can help prevent overuse injuries, which can occur after repeatedly using the same muscle groups. For many people, cross-training involves different activities and types of exercise: for example, running one day, swimming the next, and strength training on a third day. But the modifications required to walk backward work in the same way, but on a micro level. Do small tweaks make much of a difference? Once an avid runner, Dufek said she had several pairs of running shoes and did not wear the same pair two days in a row. “The shoes had a different level of wear, a different design,” she said. “Just by changing that one element, in this case footwear, it would provide a slightly different stress to the system.” **Retro walking as rehabilitation** Physical therapists instruct some of their clients to reverse walk, which can be useful after knee injuries or for people in rehabilitation or recovering

from surgery. “Backward walking is very different than forward walking from a force perspective, from a movement pattern perspective,” Dufek explained. Instead of landing heel first, “you strike the forefoot first, often quite gently, and often the heel does not contact the ground.” “This reduces of the range of motion in the knee joint, which allows for activity without stressing the (knee) joint,” Dufek said. Backward walking also stretches the hamstring muscles, the group of muscles at the back of the thigh. Dufek is interested in finding out if it improves balance and reduces fall risks in older adults by activating more senses of the body. **Athletes do it naturally** There is nothing unnatural about backward walking. In fact, backward running is a key skill for top athletes. Basketball players do it. So do soccer players. American football players — particularly the defensive backs — do it continually. “I played basketball and I probably spent 40% of my time playing defense and running backwards,” Dufek said.

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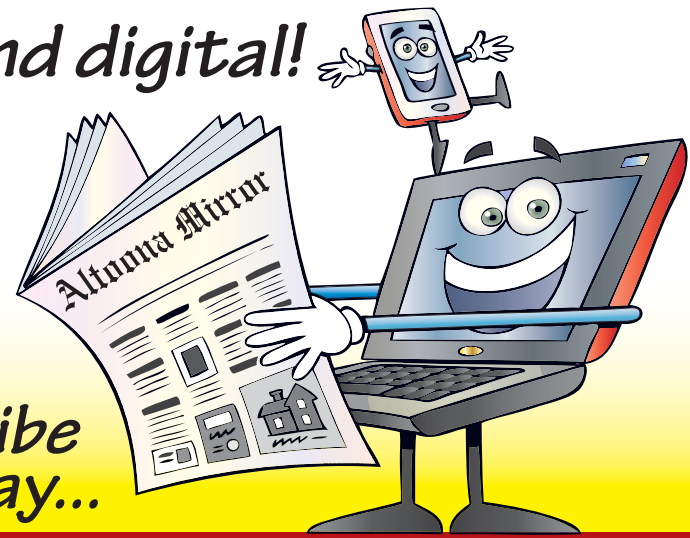


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Man joins college football squad at 58

By **GEORGE THOMAS KATTOUF**
For the Mirror

As a young student in a philosophy class, I vividly remember something the instructor said: “The day will come when you look back at your life and realize you have reached all your goals and have nothing more to experience.” The old professor did not paint a very positive picture of his current stage of life. At that time, I could not grasp his experiential viewpoint, and thankfully still can’t.

With the right mindset there is always a challenge that will take the participant out of his or her comfort zone. Life would seem extremely mundane and purposeless if we concurred with that professor’s premise. This month’s Fitness Track athlete, at the age of 58, has embraced a path that has pushed him both physically and mentally.

Tom Cillo grew up in Williamsport. He played junior high school basketball and was in baseball leagues well into his teen years. He signed up for football in his first year of high school but quit after a few days. His dedication to sports was replaced by other recreational ventures.

“I started experimenting with marijuana and I also started to drink. I was probably 15 years old, and though I had a passion for sports and athletics, it pushed me to a point where I didn’t take it as seriously,” he said.

His use of marijuana and alcohol persisted until he sought employment.

“I had an opportunity to get hired by the City of Williamsport at 24 and had to pass a drug test, so I quit. We were under the threat of random drug tests, which doesn’t deter some people, but it did me. I gave up the drug part of it, but I still drank very heavily into my 30s.”

An ultimatum led Cillo to end his abuse of alcohol.

“My wife got to the point where she became frustrated and said, ‘Look, you have to make a choice. It is either your family or alcohol use.’ So, I chose the family,” said Cillo.

Cillo did not live a sedentary life. His 33 years of employment with the City of Williamsport Street Department required manual labor. In addition, he has refereed basketball for the past 20 years and participated in powerlifting events.

“I’ve always had a passion for working out and the health benefits. When I was in my mid-30s, I met a guy who’s still a good friend of mine and helps train me, Dave Bellomo, and he got me into powerlifting. Recently, I set the International Powerlifting Association record for my age group, 55-59, by deadlifting 580 pounds,” said Cillo.

Cillo enjoys sprinting and has a rather unorthodox means to get in shape.

I’ve always loved to do

THE FITNESS TRACK



Courtesy photo

Tom Cillo deadlifts at the Lycoming College gym with his teammates on the football team.

sprint work and specifically hill sprints. Now, I haven’t done this in some years, but I used to keep a 100-pound rock in my garage. I’d cradle the rock and run sprints up the hill and roll it back down and do it again till I figured I had enough,” said Cillo, who did this feat with cleats on.

Perhaps this extensive training was the precursor to what would become his most surprising endeavor.

“I absolutely love the Raiders and I’ve been a Raiders fan since I was a little boy in the 1970s. The years went by and I thought, ‘I can still physically pull this off.’ I was telling Dave Bellomo about my dream, and I think Dave got more excited than I did. He said, ‘Tom, just go ahead and give it a shot,’” explained Cillo, who believed he could play college football.

Through some contacts he had, Cillo was able to convince Lycoming College head coach Mike Clark that he was able and willing to go through the grueling football practice sessions. He had never played football, other than sandlot, but his years of conditioning and sincerity opened the doors for a tryout.

“Camp started before school, and for nearly two weeks of 12- to 14-hour days, football consumed me. We’d have a mandatory breakfast at 7 a.m. to start the day off, and then meetings, walk-throughs, lunch, practice, dinner, more meetings, often getting done at 9:30 at night. Stack those days, one on top of the other for almost two weeks, that was pretty tough. Honestly, there were a couple times I thought about throwing in

the towel. But before camp started, another good friend of mine sent me a text, and it just said two words: ‘Be Unbreakable.’ When it’s 95 degrees out and you’re tired and sore and sweaty, I had to reference that text to get me through,” Cillo said.

He knew the guys would be skeptical of someone his age becoming a viable teammate. The first day of practice was primarily meetings in addition to fitness, strength and skill measurements. This provided Cillo the opportunity to make his mark and gain the respect from his much younger competitors. They tested his clean (the ability to lift a barbell from the floor to an upright position), squat, vertical and broad jumps, and the most grueling anaerobic challenge.

“We had to start at the goal line, sprint to the 15 and back to the goal line in six seconds. We had to do it 16 times, and I was 16 for 16. I was ahead of several guys. So, after the weights and the conditioning I had the respect on the field,” said Cillo.

Cillo has yet to be on defense during the varsity games, but he did get playing time during junior varsity games.

“They have three JV games a year. That’s more for freshmen and sophomores and guys that don’t play much. I did see five snaps, and it was really a rush. It was great to be out there and to be able to compete,” said Cillo, who plays nose tackle on defense.

This venture has not been without injury. Cillo weighs 220 pounds and plays against much bigger opponents. He has experi-

enced bruised ribs and feels he fractured a couple of fingers. Tape and ice packs have been his close friends during this experience. His energy levels have been impacted by the practices, meetings and classroom requirements for a freshman majoring in criminal justice.

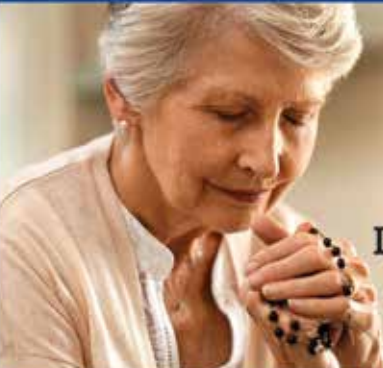
Cillo’s story has had a worldwide impact. He has received a great deal of television and print notoriety. Though this was not his motivation, he is grateful for the positive impact it has elicited. He had a single mother contact him. She wanted to go back to school but was embarrassed since she was 49. After seeing his story, she was inspired to enroll. A 73-year-old woman loved to sing but was apprehensive to join her church choir. She did not want to be the oldest member. Cillo’s example encouraged her to put age aside and join. His unintended role as a mentor for others is extensive but has also entered his locker room.

A fellow teammate expressed these sentiments to Cillo, “My father is 58 years old, just like you, and he’s incarcerated. I recently went to visit him. I told him about your story and this journey that you’re on. He said he couldn’t believe it. He was so inspired, he can’t wait for a second chance in life when he is released.”

If you think Cillo surely has nothing more to prove, you would be wrong.


“Basketball is still a passion of mine so I won’t rule out playing for Lycoming. That is a possibility. I tell you I can still shoot,” he said.

George Thomas Kattouf of Altoona is the developer of the website AgelessTimeless.com. He has been instructing martial arts for over four decades in the Altoona Area at the Academy of Martial Arts and encourages seniors to stay fit through martial arts training. If you or someone you know in Blair County is age 50 or older and would be a good candidate for the Fitness Track, email Kattouf at george@agelesstimeless.com. Tune in to the YouTube channel AgelessTimeless to learn more.




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SCRAPS: Garnish for salads

(Continued from Page 1)

You can also garnish salads with these edible flowers (nasturtiums have a peppery bite; borage is reminiscent of cucumber) or use them to decorate desserts.

And don’t toss those watermelon rinds. They can be pickled. Slice them up, then boil for 5 minutes, drain and set aside. When they’ve cooled, add them to a jar with a boiled (but cooled) solution of water,

cider or white vinegar, kosher salt, sugar and all-spice (or pickling spices for a savory snack). They’ll be ready to enjoy in a couple of hours and will keep in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks.



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