Sharon Stephens has been the executive director of the Nebraska Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association since 2016. Sharon is also a member of the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging’s Advisory Council. Nick Schinker’s profile of Stephens begins on page 8.

Inspired by her mother, Omaha Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Logan is involved in a clinical trial at UNMC for a COVID-19 vaccine. See page 12.

What’s inside

- Homestead Exemption program ............... 3
- Pet licensing assistance ....................... 4
- Changes to AARP Tax-Aide .................. 6
- Aging conference on March 15 ............. 7
- Improving nose swabbing skills ............. 7
- COVID stimulus payments still available .. 11
- Meeting your long-term care needs ........ 14
- A historical look at Bennington ............. 14
- Learning to live with vision loss .......... 14
- High-speed internet, older adults .......... 15
Medicare covers the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost to you, so if anyone asks you to share your Medicare number or pay for access to the vaccine, you can bet it’s a scam.

Here’s what you need to know:
- You can’t pay to put your name on a list to get the vaccine.
- You can’t pay to get early access to a vaccine.
- Don’t share your personal or financial information if someone calls, texts, or emails you promising access to the vaccine for a fee.

Con artists may try to get your Medicare number or personal information so they can steal your identity and commit Medicare fraud. Medicare fraud results in higher health care costs and taxes for everyone. Protect yourself from Medicare fraud. Guard your Medicare card like it’s a credit card.

Remember:
- Medicare will never contact you for your Medicare number or other personal information unless you’ve given them permission in advance.
- Medicare will never call you to sell anything.
- You may get calls from people promising you things if you give them a Medicare number. Don’t do it.
- Medicare will never visit you at your home.
- Medicare can’t enroll you over the phone unless you called first.
- Check regularly for Medicare billing fraud. Review your Medicare claims and Medicare Summary Notices for any services billed to your Medicare Number you don’t recognize. Report anything suspicious to Medicare. If you suspect fraud, call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Be aware of COVID-19 vaccine scams

Time to make plans

Despite pandemic, cold temps brighter days will soon arrive

I received my first COVID vaccination shot recently. My response was more psychological than physical. It feels like there’s now a light at the end of the pandemic’s tunnel. This brought with it a joyful sense of anticipation. In a few weeks, I’ll be less vulnerable to this disease so I can start to resume some activities I’ve been missing.

Meanwhile, as I wrote this column, we were stuck in subzero temperatures. There was nothing to do but hunker down. But this, too, eventually lifted. In March, we’ll be witnessing shoots of new life and warmer temperatures. April and May will open the earth with beauty and the opportunity to get outdoors. Days will be longer. I can hardly wait.

It seems the pandemic with winter’s overlap are blending together with the good news that all of this will open up to new life. The challenge today is to live in the NOW. We must continue to live in the reality of masks, social distancing, warm clothing, and other sacrifices, trusting these actions will give way to the life we want.

We need not be passive in this time as we practice patient anticipation to find the joy in the NOW. Let’s approach this transitional time with three intentional elements—dreaming, planning, and executing.

Daydreams can be fun. For example, I’m starting to dream of visiting my family who live in Iowa. I picture us hugging, playing cards, eating good food, and telling stories. As I entertain these thoughts, I’m motivated to do some planning. I talk to my family to help decide on what would be a good time. We decide where to stay, we plan what we’ll bring to the reunion. We’ll overcome the obstacles that will inevitably crop up and, when the day arrives, we’ll bring the dream into physical reality. We’ll savor this time together even more because we had to wait for it and plan for the reunion.

In reality, all goals we set go through the phases of dreaming, planning, and executing. Since no one can deny us our dreams, this phase is an enjoyable time of light and energy. As we move into specific plans, we must invest more effort since there will typically be some pushback or hurdles to overcome.

Finally, we come to the effort of realizing this dream in physical reality. The greater the dream the greater the energy and effort that will be required—and the greater the satisfaction from the achievement.

Let’s embrace this time of dreaming and hoping. Some of our specific ideas will merge into planning. We can share our ideas with others who will be involved and together, enjoy the excitement of planning. Notice the pushback or obstacles that will inevitably arise but don’t be easily dissuaded. Delays need not mean dead-ends. We simply regroup and adapt to changing circumstances. The bigger the dream, the more effort it will take to bring it into reality.

Our lesson from COVID-19 is clear. Dream our dreams, make our plans, and carry them out.

(Hemesath is the owner of Encore Coaching in Omaha. She is dedicated to supporting people in the Third Chapter of Life. Contact her at nhemesath@cox.net.)
Return homestead exemption applications by June 30

Applicants whose names are on file in the assessor’s office in Douglas, Sarpy, Dodge, Cass, and Washington counties should have had a homestead exemption form mailed to them by early March. New applicants must contact their county assessor’s office to receive the application. The 2021 forms and a household income statement must be completed and returned to the county assessor’s office by June 30, 2021.

A homestead exemption provides property tax relief by exempting all or part of the homestead’s valuation from taxation. The state of Nebraska reimburses the counties and other government subdivisions for the lost tax revenues.

To qualify for a homestead exemption, a Nebraska homeowner must be age 65 by Jan. 1, 2021, the home’s owner/occupant through Aug. 15, 2021, and fall within the income guidelines shown below. Certain homeowners who have a disability, are developmentally disabled, are totally disabled war veterans, or the widow(er) of a totally disabled war veteran – including those who have remarried after age 57 – may also be eligible for this annual tax break.

When determining household income, applicants must include Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits plus any income for which they receive a Form 1099. The homestead exemption amount is based on the homeowner’s marital status and income level (see below). Maximum exemptions are based on the average assessed value for residential property in each Nebraska county.


Household income table

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<tr>
<th>Married income</th>
<th>Single income</th>
<th>Exemption %</th>
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<tr>
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<td>$0 to $29,800.99</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$42,301 - $43,800.99</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$52,001 and over</td>
<td>$43,801 and over</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To qualify, you must be 60+, own your home, live in Douglas or Sarpy county, and meet low-income guidelines.

Call Project Houseworks for more information at 402-965-9201.

New Horizons

New Horizons is the official publication of the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging. The paper is distributed free to people over age 60 in Douglas, Sarpy, Dodge, Washington, and Cass counties. Those living outside the 5-county region may subscribe for $5 annually. Address all correspondence to: Jeff Reinhardt, Editor, 4780 S. 131st Street, Omaha, NE 68137-1822. Phone 402-444-6654. FAX 402-444-3076. E-mail: jeff.reinhardt@enoa.org

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Editor…………………………………………………Jeff Reinhardt
Ad Mgr……………………………..Mitch Laudenback, 402-444-4148
Contributing Writers……..Nick Schinker & Leo Biga

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The New Horizons and the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging provide services without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, disability, or age.
Financial assistance is available for older adults licensing their pets

The Nebraska Humane Society has received a grant to help men and women over age 65 in Omaha, Gretna, and Ralston with the cost of licensing their pets. For more information, please call 402-905-3474 or send an email to cdoerr@nehumanesociety.org. Per city ordinances, men and women age 65 and older in Bellevue, La Vista, Papillion, Springfield, Unincorporated Sarpy County, and Waterloo may license their altered pets at no charge. For more information, please call 402-905-3474 or send an email to cdoerr@nehumanesociety.org.

Pet licenses are due by March 15 each year. The Nebraska Humane Society encourages pet owners to license their pets for 2021 as soon as possible.

Financial assistance is available for older adults licensing their pets

For more information on older adults’ pet licensing options, log on to nehumanesociety.org. For consumer health and safety as well as the welfare of Humane Society staff, pet owners are asked to license their pets by mail, at participating vet clinics, or online at nehumanesociety.org. A mail slot also will be available at the Nebraska Humane Society – 8929 Fort St. – for persons who want to drop off their pet license payments in person. Persons choosing this option will receive a receipt by mail.

Pet licenses are due by March 15 each year. The Nebraska Humane Society encourages pet owners to license their pets for 2021 as soon as possible.

License must be licensed every year. For more information on older adults’ pet licensing options, log on to nehumanesociety.org.

March brings warmer weather, green grass, spring cleaning

March brings a welcome change after a winter that feels like it took forever. It’s officially “over the hump” with cold and snow, hopefully. March brings the luck of the Irish, the first day of spring, maybe a few blades of green grass, and blooming flowers. If Mother Nature deems us worthy, Nebraska might even see an hour or two of open windows. When that time comes, and we’re embracing the extra sunshine in our days, it’s a great opportunity to declutter, donate, and spring clean.

Start spring cleaning by creating a list of todos. Is there a room that needs to be decluttered and its contents donated? Maybe your windows just need a good scrub. Succulents are the new craze in décor and picking up a couple of tiny flowering cacti could make you hip and happening with the “kids”.

Regardless of your ideas or to-dos, make a list and keep it visible so you stay on task this spring-cleaning season. When taking on the season of purge, it’s easy to get overwhelmed. Start with just one project or one room and try not to start anything else until you’re finished.

When you decide to tackle this project, start by getting rid of anything you won’t be using again or haven’t used in the last year. Old clothes and household items are great to get out of the house. Local donation sites are happy to take those off your hands and repurpose them for those looking to update. As the saying goes, “one man’s junk is another man’s treasure.”

This is your opportunity to create treasure for your neighbor. If you’re not in a place to make donations, work within your community to organize a garage sale and pocket some extra cash. Spring is the most popular time for a garage sale.

When the snow is gone, dig out your patio and outdoor furniture or grill and give them a good scrub. There’s nothing like the smell of grilling in the spring. Thankfully, it is also a great time to enjoy the “not too hot/not too cold” weather without any mosquitoes to ruin your evening.

When you finish up your inside projects, you’ll love a relaxing evening in the back yard while your chicken and veggies prepare themselves on your sparkling clean grill.

Lastly, now is a great time to switch out your winter boots and bring out your spring shoes and clothes. If you see a sale on storage bins, grab a couple of extra and organize your clothes so you’re ready to dig them back out when the snow flies. Pack away your snow boots and winter coats and make room for umbrellas and raincoats. You’ll always find something to fill up your organizational totes and baskets.

Tackle this spring, embrace the change in seasons, dust off the things you haven’t touched in ages, and remember your allergy pill.

Cleaning and organizing can be therapeutic, and your space can be functional and stylish. Take the time to dig in, you’ll undoubtedly discover some good memories amongst the clutter.

(By Beck is with Midwest Geriatrics in Omaha.)

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March brings warmer weather, green grass, spring cleaning

By Jen Beck

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chuck@massihlaw.com
www.dorwartlaw.com
The Douglas County Health Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention want to educate Nebraskans about COVID-19 (coronavirus).

The DCHD, working with colleagues at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Nebraska Medicine, has created a COVID-19 information line at 402-444-3400. The information line will be open seven days a week (until further notice) from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Callers will be able to have their questions answered in Spanish and English.

“Our website and social media platforms will continue to provide the best and most current information,” said Douglas County Health Director Dr. Adi Pour.

Dr. Pour said the best advice to avoid the COVID-19 is to practice good hygiene like you would with the seasonal flu. Good hygiene includes:

• Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer is a second option.
• Don’t touch your mouth, nose, or eyes, especially with unwashed hands.
• Avoid contact with people who are sick.
• Stay home while you’re sick.
• Wear a mask when around other people.
• Don’t cough or sneeze into your hands.
• Frequently clean and disinfect your home, car, and workplace.

A COVID-19 vaccine isn’t widely available yet. Most people have recovered by drinking lots of fluids, resting, and taking pain and fever medication. If symptoms worsen, medical care might be needed.

You’re invited to visit the Intercultural Senior Center (ISC), 5545 Center St., for the following:

• Masks, which are available upon request, are required.
• The ISC follows CDC and state guidelines for physical distancing, as well as indoor health and safety protocols. These classes are open to 14 older adults only.
• During bad weather, call to confirm if the class is available that day.

The ISC is offering online learning videos which can be accessed from the safety and comfort of your home at interculturalseniorcenter.org and on Facebook at ISC Class Connect.

A monthly food pantry is available at the ISC for persons age 50 or older. The ISC is looking for home-delivered meals volunteers on Wednesdays and Fridays @ 10:30 a.m. More information is available at interculturalseniorcenter.org.

The ISC is a site for ENOA’s Grab-n-Go meals Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Reserve your meal before 10 a.m. the day prior. Recipients must be age 60 or older. A contribution is suggested.

The ISC’s SAVE bus can bring case management services to your doorstep.

For more information, please call 402-444-6529.

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For more information, please call 402-444-6529.
While AARP is offering free income tax preparation for older and low-income taxpayers again in 2021, the program will be done differently this year due to COVID-19. The Tax-Aide program will be provided with no or little in-person contact.

Taxpayers need to leave a message at one of these telephone numbers:
- 402-577-0367
- 402-590-8140
- 402-913-0525
- 402-885-9951

AARP volunteers will return the calls to explain the virtual tax preparation process which began March 1.

Secure folders of scanned documents will allow clients to get assistance with their returns through email and phone contacts with certified volunteer tax preparers many of whom will work remotely.

The volunteers will provide instructions to the taxpayers on how to scan and upload their tax documents.

There will be limited opportunities for taxpayers without email access to make an appointment for AARP Tax Aide volunteers to scan and upload the tax documents for them.

Go to taxaide.aarpfoundation.org/request-help to learn more about how taxpayers may be able to prepare their own returns through email and phone conversations with certified volunteers.

It’s essential for taxpayers to complete the AARP Tax Aide Intake and Interview forms prior to their appointment. There will also be a new form authorizing electronic return preparation.

The virtual tax preparation process may involve multiple telephone conversations with the volunteers.

If COVID-19 allows, four Tax-Aide sites with low contact between taxpayers and volunteers may open in Omaha.

COVID-19 Disaster Relief Hotline offers legal advice during pandemic

Nebraskans who have questions or who are experiencing legal issues due to the coronavirus/COVID-19 public health emergency can get legal advice and help through the free COVID-19 Disaster Relief Hotline.

Hosted by Legal Aid of Nebraska, working closely with the Nebraska State Bar Association’s Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP), this hotline aims to make key legal assistance easy and accessible.

If you’re a Nebraskan facing legal issues related to the virus, or the owner of a small, locally-owned business (less than 50 employees, and not a franchise) that’s closed, in risk of permanent closure due to the virus, and where the payment of fees would significantly deplete your resources, the hotline may be reached at 1-844-268-5627.

Calls will be connected to the hotline’s voicemail. Callers should leave their name, phone number, brief details of the problem and the assistance needed, and in what county they’re located.

Callers will receive a call back from an experienced Legal Aid staff member. Individuals and businesses that don’t qualify for Legal Aid’s free services will be directly referred to the VLP. The VLP will work to place cases with Nebraska volunteer lawyers who will provide free legal assistance.

The types of legal issues associated with COVID-19, and focused on by the hotline include:

- Tenants with rent issues, including those facing eviction.
- Debt problems, including debtors with garnishments or who are ordered to appear at a debtor’s exam.
- Mortgage foreclosures, including advising on options for delinquent payments.
- Unemployment insurance denials.
- Employee rights, including sick leave and wage payment issues.
- Government benefits available to low-income persons such as ADC, SNAP, AABD, and SSI.
- Medicaid and medical insurance claims.
- Drafting wills, health care powers of attorney, and transfer on death deeds.
- Domestic abuse and safety issues.
- Elder abuse and exploitation.
- Access to education.
- Helping small, locally-owned businesses with business and employment related matters including human relations issues, unemployment benefits, and contracts.

More information on these legal issues, including ways you can directly help yourself are available at legalaidofnebraska.org.

Helping your plants battle insects

By Melinda Myers

A sticky substance on plant leaves, plant stands, and the floor are often the first clue alerting gardeners to a problem. If a closer look reveals bumps on the upper and lower surface of leaves and stems, it means scale insects have moved in to dine on your houseplants. Severe infestations can cause leaf yellowing, stunting, and dieback of the plant.

If you have battled these insects, you know they can be challenging to control. Arm yourself with an understanding of their lifecycle and be persistent to successfully manage these pests.

Scale insects have needle-like mouthparts that allow them to pierce the leaf and stem surfaces. They suck plant sap through a tube-like structure just as if they were drinking from a straw. These are one of several types of insects that secrete drops of a clear, sticky substance called honeydew, as they feed. A black fungus known as sooty mold may grow on the honeydew. It doesn’t directly harm the plant, but it looks bad. In severe cases, sooty mold can prevent sunlight from reaching the leaves causing them to yellow.

Adult scale insects form coverings that protect them from adverse environmental conditions and most chemical controls. Eggs hatch under these protective coverings. When the crawler continues to grow, shedding layers of skin, these layers of shed skin or waxy layers, form their protective covering.

Isolate infected plants as soon as you discover the problem. This will reduce the risk of this pest spreading to your other plants.

To control small populations but if you miss even one adult, the crawler stage is the most susceptible to chemical control. You’ll need a hand lens or magnifying glass to see these short-lived crawlers. Insecticides and washing small plants with a plant-safe soapy water solution can help manage small populations.

Insecticides and washing small plants with a plant-safe soapy water solution can help manage small populations.

You can remove the adult scales with a toothpick, tweezers, or an old toothbrush. Repeat every few weeks until you have this pest under control. This may be sufficient to control small populations but if you miss even one adult, the problem persists.

The crawler stage is the most susceptible to chemical control. You’ll need a hand lens or magnifying glass to see these short-lived crawlers. Insecticides and washing small plants with a plant-safe soapy water solution can help manage small populations. Cover the pot and soil to prevent any scale knocked off during the bath from crawling back onto the plant.

Increase your chance of success with the help of an organic insecticide like Summit Year-Round Spray Oil (SummitResponsibleSolutions.com). This lightweight oil suffocates and controls all stages of the scale insect including both the adult and eggs housed under the protective covering. Repeat applications are needed to get this insect under control.

This product is safe for people and pets while harmful to houseplant pests. As always read and follow label directions for the most effective results.

Clean the pot, saucers, plant stands, and the area around infected plants to remove any honeydew and unsanitary crawlers. This along with proper control will reduce the risk of these insects infesting treated and nearby plants.

Continue to monitor all your plants for scale and other insects each time you water. It’s much easier to manage small populations than larger infestations on more plants.

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megger@npdodge.com

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Unmasking COVID-19 conference scheduled for Monday, March 15

The eighth biennial Aging with Passion & Purpose Conference, titled Unmasking COVID-19 is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, March 15. To help ensure the safety and health of each presenter and participant, all conference activities will be held online.

Unmasking COVID-19 is being provided at no cost to participants. The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is hosting the event and 6.25 continuing education contact hours will be provided by Nebraska Methodist College Professional Development.

The conference will focus on the implications of COVID-19 on older adults from a biopsychosocial perspective including disparities across cultural groups and provide an overview of where the nation has been, the status of the pandemic, and offer an up-to-date view of where Americans are heading as they battle the coronavirus.

Conference participants will gain hope from lessons learned and insights into the future from healthcare and human services experts, as well as hearing personal experiences from men and women on the pandemic’s frontline.

Persons lost to COVID-19 will be honored with a planned memorial during the conference.

Featured speakers will include Dr. Jeffrey Gold, chancellor of UNO and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), Dr. Adi Pour, director of the Douglas County Health Department, and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Campus Wellness at UNO and UNMC Dr. Steven Wengel.

There will also be two panel presentations and discussions facilitated by Cathy Pacholski of the Art of Aging, Inc., Denise Hyde from Eden Alternative, and Lakelyn Hess of Home Instead Senior Care.

Some of the sessions will be live while others will be recorded by UNO-TV. Participants will have an opportunity to submit questions and comments.

Registration, which is due by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 8, can be made by online at gerontology.unomaha.edu/conference.

Planning partners for Unmasking COVID-19 are Nebraska Methodist College, Immanuel, the Nebraska Mental Health & Aging Coalition, UNO’s Department of Gerontology, and schools that train health professionals.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center’s iEXCEL team has created an advanced model to help improve the skills of those performing the swabs. Five Oral Nasal Pharyngeal Anatomy Clinical Education trainers – called ONPACE – are now available at the Davis Global Center at UNMC.

“When we were faced with this pandemic, we realized millions of frontline workers were having to learn a procedure they had never done before or were not as familiar with,” said Chris-tie Barnes, MD, assistant professor and rhinologist in the UNMC Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery.

“The key to a proper nasopharyngeal swab involves the direction and depth of the patient’s anatomy to be tested. The ONPACE trainer helps to solidify those key aspects. We are committed to ensuring our frontline swabbers are equipped to do the procedure well and are excited at the potential this will have on patients nationally and internationally.”

Dr. Barnes, colleague Jayme Dowdall, MD, and Ben Stobbe, iEXCEL assistant vice chancellor for clinical simulation, were part of a team to create ONPACE. They collaborated with other UNMC faculty members, Nebraska Medicine, UNEMed, and the Massachusetts-based Chamberlain Group.

The Chamberlain Group created the anatomically accurate model of epidermal tissue structures of the oral and nasal cavities from a CT scan. The group has been designing, developing, and manufacturing anatomical trainers for clinical training for more than two decades.

In early 2020, COVID-19 swab training was done on airway models already on hand. Stobbe said, but trainers wanted a more advanced teaching tool.

He said the one-of-a-kind, portable trainer is the most sophisticated and realistic available. It’s also designed to test for infections such as strep throat, flu, and to diagnose some ENT issues.

Like the classic game “Operation,” color-coded indicators provide feedback on whether learners are doing the procedure properly. Instructors can watch through the clear side of the model to teach anatomy and correct swab insertion.

UNMC’s ENT faculty soon will publish a study on how to teach proper swabbing.

The Chamberlain Group will market and distribute ONPACE, which can be used to train health professionals including in physician offices, hospitals, clinics, colleges, and schools that train health professionals.

“The model is packaged with education and clinical expertis, “said Dr. Dowdall, assistant professor and laryngologist in the UNMC Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery.

“This is a paradigm often used for medical devices but has not made it to educational simulation. With this model, we hope to get the most valid test results with the most comfort to patients while instilling confidence quickly to caring practitioners.

“We realized a simple procedure had a lot of chances for error. The trajectory of swabs we saw being performed on TV news, in addition to the reports from health professionals, told us we had an opportunity for education,” UNMC’s faculty began training health professionals early on when COVID-19 infections began and have trained Nebraska Medicine staff, Nebraska National Guard personnel, and staff at the Douglas County youth detention center. The iEXCEL team also has conducted Facebook Live training for health professionals in rural Nebraska.

UNMC provided this information.“
Experience with father motivates Alzheimer’s director Stephens

By Nick Schinker
Contributing Writer

Her enthusiasm and passion are clear when Sharon Stephens speaks about her role as executive director of the Alzheimer’s Association, Nebraska Chapter, because hers is the voice of experience.

There are an estimated 35,000 Nebraskans over age 65 diagnosed and living with Alzheimer’s – and Stephens’ father is one of them.

Her father, George, is a very smart man. He holds a Ph.D. and spent his life as a career counselor in higher education, moving the family to Omaha to help launch what was initially known as Metropolitan Technical Community College, now Metropolitan Community College.

That is one of the twists of Alzheimer’s that makes the disease so difficult to accept and currently impossible to cure, Stephens says. It doesn’t matter how smart you are, whether you’re rich or poor, or where you live.

“Alzheimer’s is a brain disease,” she says. “It doesn’t discriminate. Yes, it is more prevalent in some groups, and more women get it than men. But it really doesn’t care who it touches.”

And when it does, it always touches more than one person.

“Because of the nature of the disease, the diagnosis is never just for one person,” Stephens says. “It is a diagnosis for the spouse, or the partner, and the family. There are always at least two people affected, the person with Alzheimer’s and the caregiver.”

One of the overwhelming aspects of Alzheimer’s is the isolation, the feeling of being aware one moment and lost the next. It can be a lonely path, but it doesn’t have to be traveled alone.

“One of my primary messages to others who face this diagnosis, even those who just have a concern about a loved one or a friend, is that no matter how you feel, you are not alone,” Stephens says.

“The Alzheimer’s Association here in Nebraska is part of a network of resources available to help people with Alzheimer’s and other dementias and their caregivers. There are people ready to help right at this moment.”

Stephens is proud to be one of those people.

There is no cure for Alzheimer’s. But in Nebraska, there is plenty of care.

The Nebraska State Plan for Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) was introduced in June 2016. Created to serve Nebraskans living with dementia, as well as to serve their caregivers or care partners, the plan contains 31 recommended action items. These items are being implemented by a diverse group of stakeholders who represent a variety of health and not-for-profit organizations, state and local government agencies, and concerned citizens.

Stephens and the Alzheimer’s Association, Nebraska Chapter are leaders in this effort. “It is our role as stakeholders to steward the plan,” she says.

The plan is comprehensive in purpose and in its goals: “This state plan for ADRD has been developed to address both the needs of the person who has dementia and the needs of the person who is primarily responsible for their care,” the plan reads. “It is difficult to distinguish between the two. Supporting one and not the other would result in a flawed system of care.”

“The premise of this document is that those needs can be described by three overarching goals:

1: Nebraskans living with dementia and their caregivers have the information needed to manage their lives and to thrive.

2: Nebraskans living with dementia and their caregivers have the support needed to maintain their health and well-being.

3: Nebraskans living with dementia and their caregivers are safe.”

The plan was devised to provide the most benefit for Nebraskans as possible without the need for financial or legislative resources. This was done by researching, compiling, and utilizing existing resources that have been created by the federal government as well as other states and entities such as Dementia Friendly America and the Alzheimer’s Association.

A website (dfnebraska.org) was created in 2017 to serve as a communication vehicle for the public and as a resource depository for the Nebraska ADRD taskforce, renamed Dementia Friendly Nebraska.

The state Alzheimer’s Association also has a website (alz.org/nebraska) with a wealth of information about resources available. The association has offices in Omaha, Lincoln, and Kearney, and information is also available 24/7 on its Helpline, 1-800-272-3900.

Most recently, Nebraska LB 374, introduced in January by Sen. Wendy DeBoer of Bennington, if passed will adopt the Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementia Support Act and create an Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementia Advisory Council in Nebraska.

“No one organization, no one component is going to solve the Alzheimer’s issues facing our nation,” Stephens says. “We have to work together.”

As a primary stakeholder, the Alzheimer’s Association is actively working to support persons with the disease and their caregivers, while also furthering the effort to find a cure. Local chapters hold a variety of events to raise awareness and funds, including the largest event, the annual “Walk to Awareness.”

--Please turn to page 9.
We’ll help guide you in finding the help you want and need. And although you are doing this with great love, do you wish there could be opportunities for respite? If so, the Caregiver Support Program of the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging may be able to help!

Call us at: 402-444-6536
and ask for “Information and Assistance.”

We’ll help guide you in finding the help you want and need.

Sharon Stephens...
Healthy adults, caregivers needed for UNO gerontology research study

The University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Department of Gerontology is looking for healthy adults and caregivers for an older adult with a chronic disease (e.g., dementia, cancer, cardiovascular disease) to participate in a research study about the impact of aging on the neural and behavioral bases of social processing.

Participation will involve an online, at-home component (seven hours over four days) and one in-person visit (two hours and 30 minutes) which will take place at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC).

Compensation for study participation is available. Complementary parking is located a short walk from the lab.

For more information, please contact Janelle Beadle, Ph.D. at the Aging Brain and Emotion Lab (402-554-5961) or email at ABELabUNO@gmail.com.

To be eligible for the study, participants must be age 19 to 90, have a comprehension of written and spoken English, the mobility to travel to the UNMC campus, and have completed a minimum of two years of high school or higher.

Potential participants aren’t eligible for the study if they have a diagnosis of a neurological or psychiatric disease (e.g., stroke), a history of drug abuse, vision, hearing, cognitive, or motor difficulties, or if they’re pregnant, have a diagnosis of a neurological or psychiatric disease, or are going through therapy for an eating disorder.

To learn more about eligibility, please call 402-444-3560.

Call 402-554-5961 for more information

Healthy adults, caregivers needed for UNO gerontology research study

The Omaha Fire Department’s Public Education and Affairs Department will install free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors inside the residences of area homeowners.

To have a free smoke and/or carbon monoxide detector installed inside your home, send your name, address, and telephone number to:

Omaha Fire Department
Smoke/Carbon Monoxide Requests
1516 Jackson St.
Omaha, Neb. 68102
For more information, please call 402-444-3560.

Provide one-on-one counseling
Specialized pharmacists help patients navigate through fertility treatments

By Jake Siel, Pharm. D.

Do you know someone that could benefit from a specialized fertility healthcare professional? Patients undergo fertility treatments for a variety of reasons including preservation of eggs before chemotherapy treatment, surrogacy, and both male and female infertility. These treatments and procedures can be a stressful and expensive process for many patients.

It’s the pharmacist’s role to help navigate patients through this complex process by explaining and implementing programs to help pay for medications and providing detailed instructions on how to correctly use each medication.

Unfortunately for many Nebraskans and patients across the country, fertility treatments aren’t covered by insurance and require up-front cash payments. To combat this, drug manufacturers have created programs that help cash-paying patients pay for their medications.

Patients are able to apply for these programs and are awarded a discount based on a variety of factors such as income.

Pharmacies contract with drug manufacturers and are able to apply these discounts directly at the point of sale for drugs manufactured by Merck and Ferring Pharmaceuticals, two of the dominant manufacturers of fertility medications.

The pharmacist’s role in infertility treatments doesn’t end after the medications are sold. Fertility drugs are primarily self-injected medications that can be complicated to prepare, require specific storage, and are time sensitive.

A pharmacist’s primary role in this process is patient counseling. It’s common for a pharmacist to engage in one-on-one counseling for more than 15 minutes with patients who start taking these medications.

Also, as pharmacists remain among the most accessible healthcare professionals, staff members are available on call 24/7 to answer questions after the clinics are closed.

While pharmacies that dispense fertility drugs can ship them to patients, these drugs are also available to patients for pick-up at some locations. This can save patients hundreds of dollars as they’re pick up only what they need and can easily come back if additional medication is needed.

There are few things more frustrating for patients than completing infertility treatments and having unused, costly medication that cannot be returned.

Pharmacists can empower your grandchild, child, or loved one by helping them understand the purpose of medications they’re injecting and how to correctly use them.

While infertility treatment can be unpredictable and heartbreaking, pharmacists can be a steady source of information and compassion for men and women undergoing this type of therapy.

(Siel is a pharmacist in Kohll’s Rx’s fertility department.)
Physician: Pandemic can have a major health impact on your brain, gut health

By Dr. Chad Larson

This new year may look socially different than years past, and considering the added stress, limited sleep, and typical holiday overindulgence most of us experienced recently, it’s even more necessary than usual to let our bodies recover and regenerate.

During the pandemic, levels of anxiety, sadness, and depression have likely been heightened. These stressors can take a toll on our health, particularly our brain and gut health.

In fact, we seemingly don’t have a problem with one without it affecting the other. The brain and gut are intimately connected which means triggering factors that affect one will ultimately affect the other. An imbalanced intestine can send signals to the brain, just as an imbalanced brain can send signals to the gut. Therefore, a person’s stomach or intestinal distress can be the cause or the product of anxiety, stress, or depression.

Some signs of an unhealthy gut include irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhea, bloating, constipation, unexplained weight gain or loss, and fatigue.

Patients who suffer from autoimmune disorders can both have gut health issues those who suffer the greatest. Gut dysbiosis, or imbalance of the intestinal microorganisms, plays a major role in the development of autoimmune diseases. Conversely, good gut health is vital to the management of autoimmune-related symptoms.

With the connection between the gut and brain being so significant, you can see how there could be a vicious cycle between mental wellness, gut function, overall physical health, and how heightened emotions might exacerbate this cycle, especially for those who are autoimmune-compromised.

To remedy these issues, here are five tips to help restore balance and improve your brain and gut health this new year:

• Limit inflammatory foods: It’s so easy to overindulge. Alcohol, sugary foods, gluten, dairy, and processed meats are just a few inflammatory foods we should all try to avoid. It’s fine to treat yourself, but moderation is key.

If you have known sensitivities to foods, avoid those too, as they may cause added inflammation. Also, make sure to add in plenty of green veggies and whole foods that are rich in nutrients. Remember to eat for your health and pay special attention to appropriate portions.

• Get plenty of sleep: A lack of sleep can cause heightened emotions, sensitivity, and difficulty focusing. With the current climate making travel and family gatherings risky, many will struggle emotionally, and a lack of sleep can intensify that. If you’re having trouble sleeping, speak to your healthcare provider, as it could also be an indicator of gut imbalance.

• Seek counseling: Therapists and psychologists are here to help. Don’t let the COVID-19 blues take control of your life. Seeking therapy to learn to manage or cope with your feelings isn’t something to be embarrassed about. In fact, according to a recent poll, 53 percent of adult Americans reported their mental health had been significantly impacted due to worry and stress over the coronavirus.

• Spend extra time outdoors: Megan Riehl, PsyD, a gastrointestinal psychologist and clinical director of the gastrointestinal behavioral health program at Michigan Medicine recommends readjusting our mindsets about quality time outdoors.

“We can significantly benefit from being outside in the winter. The emotional benefits of fresh air and sunshine, coupled with the physical activity of walking, hiking, or cruising in a wheelchair are a win-win situation,” she said.

• Proactive health management: Routine physicals and testing are essential to health management. The “what I don’t know, won’t hurt me” adage isn’t conducive to living a long, healthy life. Rather than waiting for something to be wrong and then trying to fix it, maintain your health.

The same way we get oil changes and routine maintenance on our cars, we must do for optimal body health. A healthy gut will produce the mood-boosting brain chemical serotonin. A healthy brain will keep the gut happy. This gut-brain relationship is one that must be nurtured.

(”Dr. Larson is an advisor and a consultant on the clinical consulting team for Cyxus Laboratories.”)

Please see the ad on page 3

New Horizons Club membership increases

$25
Sharon Allen
Sherryl Lilley
Barbara Byers

$20
Tom Cody
Eula Nilius

$10
Kristie Gravelle

$5
Kathleen Koons
Patricia Fuller

Reflects donations through February 19, 2021.

Alzheimer’s webinars

The Alzheimer’s Association is offering a variety of free educational webinars. Topics include the warning signs of Alzheimer’s, dementia research, healthy living, legal and financial planning, early stage care partners, late stage caregivers, and understanding and responding to dementia-related behavior.

To register or for more information, please call 800-272-3900 or go to alz.org/crf.

Get help at IRS.gov or by calling 211

COVID stimulus payments still available by claiming the Recovery Rebate Credit on your 2020 income tax return

Last year, the IRS experienced a wide range of difficulties issuing COVID stimulus payments; both the initial $1,200 payments for adults and the accompanying $500 payment for minor children, and a more recent $600 payment for both adults and minor children.

While the agency did attempt to reach all qualified taxpayers and ensure correct payments throughout 2020, many taxpayers, including several older adults, are still waiting to receive one or more of their payments.

The IRS was required by law to issue the first payment by Dec. 31, 2020 and the second payment by Jan. 15, 2021. The timeframe for processing all direct payments, including direct deposits or paper checks, has ended.

This doesn’t mean the payments can no longer be claimed and received by qualified taxpayers, but that taxpayers will instead need to file a 2020 personal income tax return and claim the Recovery Rebate Credit on Form 7200 (or Form 7200-T if you qualify for the special extended deadline for 7200T returns).

This Recovery Rebate credit covers all Economic Impact Payments not received, both the $1,200 and $600, and can be done for free online. This also applies to older adults and retirees that normally don’t file personal income tax returns.

You can find free filing tools by visiting IRS.gov. The other option is to call the 211 Helpline operated locally by the United Way of the Midlands and ask for tax preparation assistance to claim your COVID payment. While this also is a free service, it may involve a wait period.

The IRS strongly encourages taxpayers to file electronically when possible, as this will avoid the congestion of the U.S. Postal Service that paper returns suffer from and allow the payments to reach taxpayers much quicker.

(”This information was submitted from the office of U.S Representative Don Bacon.”)

Zoom meetings on March 6, 13

VITA offering free virtual help filing federal, state tax returns

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program at Creighton University is offering free virtual assistance filing federal and state income tax returns for persons with annual incomes of less than $57,000. Participants will need access to a computer or other device that will allow them to participate in a Zoom (a video teleconference using a computer) meeting while their return is being prepared and reviewed.

VITA participants must upload their tax documents before joining the Zoom meeting. Zoom meetings are scheduled for March 6 and 13 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. No appointments are necessary. Calls will be taken in the order they’re received. For more information including instructions on how to upload the tax documents needed, please send an email to creightonvita2021@gmail.com.
We’re here to help you stay healthy!

The men and women of Midwest Geriatrics are dedicated to keeping you happy, healthy, and living life to the fullest.

Call 402-827-6000 to learn more about:
• Florence Home Healthcare
• Royale Oaks Assisted Living
• House of Hope Assisted Living
• House of Hope Memory Care
• Gerimed & Unimed Pharmacies

Volunteers needed

The Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging is looking for volunteer drivers for its Meals on Wheels Program.

Flexible weekday schedule delivering midday meals to homebound older adults in the greater Omaha area.

Call Arlis at 402-444-6766 for more information.

Outlook Enrichment

I f you or a loved one with vision loss have found challenges in accessing critical services during the pandemic, Outlook Enrichment can help through its adaptive technology training program.

For individuals who are blind or have low vision, assistive technology includes assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitation devices for people with vision loss/disabilities and also includes the process used in the evaluation and selection of adaptive technology.

Outlook Enrichment offers computer and smartphone training remotely. This helps clients learn how to use smartphone apps and other technology tools that are increasingly important for working remotely, learning online, shopping, banking, and engaging with others.

Outlook Enrichment also established a technology help line for people with visual impairment at 531-365-5334. The organization’s adaptive technology trainers respond to messages within 24 hours with technology solutions to help their blind neighbors stay connected and conduct business.

Outlook’s trainers can help consumers find adaptive techniques, software, or devices to overcome the barriers presented by vision loss. They’ll demonstrate options and give tips on using the devices that work best.

Through this program, you or a family member with a vision condition can learn how to:
• Visit with family via Zoom, Facebook messenger, or other videoconferencing apps.
• Order groceries, prescriptions, and other items to be delivered to your home through platforms like Instacart and Amazon.
• Enjoy home entertainment through movie streaming and audio books.
• Read the mail, the newspaper, or recipe cards with digital magnifiers.

As we’re all spending more time at home and adapting to the new normal, technology is now more important than ever. Outlook Enrichment’s adaptive technology trainers are ready to help with your technology needs.

Call 531-365-5314 to schedule a phone appointment.

OPS Superintendent involved in COVID-19 vaccination trial

Dr. Cheryl Logan rolls up her sleeve during a COVID-19 vaccine trial at UNMC.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center and its primary hospital partner, Nebraska Medicine, are involved in the trial to test an investigational protein-based vaccine created from the coronavirus spike protein and an added component that boosts a person’s immune response to stimulate higher levels of antibodies.

UNMC and Nebraska Medicine are working with the COVID-19 Prevention Network formed by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Logan’s mother took part in a clinical trial 20 years ago after having been diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

“My commitment to medical research is more about who else it is going to help,” Dr. Logan said. “And it was modeled by my own mother.”

The vaccine candidate was developed by Novavax, Inc., a U.S. biotechnology company which plans to enroll 30,000 adults in the study from the United States and Mexico.

The investigational vaccine requires two shots given three weeks apart. Four additional follow-up visits are required during the first year and two during the second year.

“This vaccine does not contain live or inactivated virus, so it does not cause infection,” said Diana Florescu, MD, professor and infectious diseases specialist in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine, who is leading the trial at UNMC.

“The first shot felt like a flu shot,” Dr. Logan said.

“I’m a little stiff but that’s normal. I’ll be back lifting weights tomorrow and working out. I don’t have any worries about the side effects or anything like that.”

For more information, go online to unmc.edu/cctr/clinical-trials/covidvaccine.html. (UNMC provided this information.)

Are you 60 years of age or older?

Do you have a problem with:
• debt collections
• Medicare/Medicaid
• being a tenant
• homestead exemptions
• reverse mortgages
• POAs

Legal Aid of Nebraska is here to help!

Legal Aid provides free legal advice and assistance to Nebraska residents 60 years of age and older through our ElderAccessLine.

Reach our ElderAccessLine toll-free at: 1-800-527-7249

Monday-Friday: 9 a.m. - Noon
Monday-Thursday: 1 p.m.-3 p.m.

“Central time zone”

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“The first shot felt like a flu shot,” Dr. Logan said.

“Arm’s a little stiff but that’s normal. I’ll be back lifting weights tomorrow and working out. I don’t have any worries about the side effects or anything like that.”

Dr. Logan said OPS students have two choices in life when faced with something difficult.

“You can throw up your hands or you can roll up your sleeves.”

Researchers are looking for people age 19 and older, who haven’t had COVID-19, who aren’t pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning to become pregnant over the next four months, and who may be at an increased risk for exposure to SARS-CoV-2 infection including people who work in essential jobs and those who have other medical conditions and co-morbidities.

For more information, go online to unmc.edu/cecr/clinical-trials/covidvaccine.html. (UNMC provided this information.)
Older men, women are needed to become Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions

Men and women age 55 and older who want to earn a tax-free stipend while making an impact in their community are encouraged to join the Senior Companion Program and the Foster Grandparent Program.

Sponsored locally by the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging, the SCP and FGP are national programs of AmeriCorps Seniors, formerly the Senior Service Corps.

Senior Companions help other older adults maintain their independence by visiting them at home to discuss the news, read mail, play cards, run errands, etc.

Foster Grandparents serve as positive role models for children who need special attention with education, health care, and social development in schools, Head Start programs, and child development centers.

SCP and FGP volunteers must meet income guidelines and complete an enrollment process that includes references and background checks.

In exchange for volunteering 10 hours or more per week, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions receive a $3 an hour tax-free stipend, mileage reimbursement, an annual physical examination, supplemental accident insurance coverage, and other benefits including an annual recognition luncheon.

The stipend does not interfere with rent, disability, Medicaid, or other benefits.

For more information on the FGP and SCP, please call 402-444-6536.

Alzheimer’s Association...

Sharon wants people who have Alzheimer’s and their caregivers to know they are never alone.

“...Continued from page 9. Foundation based in Chicago which required extensive travel. While Stephens loved the job, she wanted to spend less time on the road and more time at home in Omaha, so she left the position once her father was diagnosed in November 2015.

“I really think it was divine intervention that helped me find a job in Omaha,” she says. “I wanted to be near my parents, and then three people told me the Alzheimer’s Association was looking for an executive director.”

She has come to love the job. “Despite the pressures, it’s amazing,” she says. “It lets me work through my passion.”

It also keeps her close to her two daughters, who live in Omaha, and her “2.5 grandchildren,” the next due in May.

Together, they work to support her father and her mother, Carole. “My father is beloved,” Stephens says, “and we are blessed to have family and friends who rally around us when he is struggling.”

The key is to understand no one has to go through Alzheimer’s or other dementias on their own.

“There is support available for families and for caregivers,” she says. “There are ways to help the Association. Volunteering is a wonderful way to give back. If Alzheimer’s has touched you in some way, we have a job for you.

“Whether it’s fundraising, advocacy, or education,” she says, “we welcome all the help we can get.”

Stephens speaks from experience, and she isn’t alone.

Living With Vision Loss?
Outlook Enrichment Can Help!

- Connect with local resources
- Build skills to live independently
- Find encouragement and support
- Stay active with recreation, art and cultural activities
- Learn new ways to keep doing what you love

outlook ENRICHMENT
Journey Beyond Vision
Call 531.365.5051 for more info
Support our services at outlooken.org
Are you prepared for long-term care?

Research suggests most Americans turning age 65 will need some form of assistance with everyday activities known as long-term care, as they grow older. The amount of care needed will depend on many variables including overall health, cognitive functioning, and home environment.

Age is a strong predictor of the need for help, and because women live longer on average, they’re more likely than men to require long-term care.

Regardless of gender, factors such as a disability, injury, or chronic illness also increase the chance long-term care will be needed. For some people, the need for long-term care may occur suddenly as the result of an illness or accident. For others, the need may grow slowly.

Make your decisions about long-term care before you have the need. These three simple steps can help you with everyday tasks such as bathing, dressing, or eating. While most of this care is provided by family members and friends, sometimes older adults and their families get these services from providers like home health agencies or Area Agencies on Aging like the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging.

Long-term care insurance can help cover the cost of professional services provided in the home.

Understanding long-term care is the first step in creating a plan. Key things to know include:

- Most people prefer to receive long-term care at home.
- Their odds of doing so may be improved by making home modifications to reduce the risk of falls.
- A person who lives alone is more likely to require long-term care than one who can rely on a spouse or a partner for help with daily tasks.
- Long-term care is expensive and represents a major risk to your retirement savings.
- Medicare doesn’t pay for long-term care services or support (with some minor exceptions) and neither does employer-based health insurance or Medigap.

Many Americans say they don’t want to rely on their children for care, but a lack of planning for paid care often leads to that result.

- Make your preferences known. A choice to plan or not plan will likely have a big impact on family and friends who may also be informal caregivers. Statistics show most long-term care is provided by family members or other loved ones. Research has also shown caregivers can experience significant stress when they have caregiving responsibilities.
- Make your decisions about long-term care before you have the need. These three simple steps can help you start your planning.

- Know what to expect. Most people know they should save for retirement, but many don’t know what expenses to expect for help with everyday tasks such as bathing, dressing, or eating.

Support the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging during Good Week April 19 – 24, 2021

Share the Omaha

April 19: Mission Monday
April 20: New Giving Tuesday
April 21: Wish List Wednesday
April 22: Volun-Thursday
April 23: Fund It Friday
April 24: Celebration Saturday

Go to SHAREomaha.org for more information!

Book examines the history of Bennington, Nebraska

Images of America: Around Bennington, a book written by Gordon A Mueller, with a foreword by Jeffrey S. Spencer, is now available from Arcadia Publishing and The History Press.

The area around Bennington, Neb. – founded in 1887 – played an important role in the United States’ western expansion. The Missouri and Platte Rivers provided travel corridors for indigenous people, early explorers, trappers, and pioneers.

Railroads revolutionized travel and led to the creation of villages along those lines. By 1975, the rail lines around Bennington were abandoned. Upgraded roads from suburban sprawl, however, have benefitted the Douglas County community.

Mueller grew up on a farm near Bennington and received two degrees from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

He’s the president of the Bennington Historical Society and has served as Bennington’s mayor and on its city council.

Arcadia is the nation’s leading publisher of books about local history with more than 15,000 titles. Its mission is to connect people with their past, their communities, and with one another.

The Images of America series celebrates the history of neighborhoods, towns, and cities across the country using archival photos. Each title presents distinctive stories from the past that shape the character of those communities today.

Images of America: Around Bennington, a 128-page paperback, is available for $21.99.

For more information, go online to arcadiapublishing.com or historypress.net.

Ombudsman Advocates

The Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging is looking for men and women age 21 and older to join its Long-term Care Ombudsman Program which is co-sponsored by the Nebraska State Ombudsman Program.

ENOAs Long-term Care Ombudsman volunteer in local long-term care facilities and assisted living communities to protect the residents’ rights, well-being, and quality of life.

Long-term Care Ombudsmen must complete 20 hours of initial classroom training and 12 hours of additional training every two years.

During the training, the volunteers learn about the residents’ rights, aging issues, Medicare, Medicaid, communication skills, how to investigate the residents’ complaints, the importance of confidentiality, and about the federal and state rules, regulations, and laws regarding Nebraska’s long-term care facilities and assisted living communities.

Before being assigned to a long-term care facility or an assisted living community, new volunteers will make four visits to a site with an experienced Ombudsman Advocate to learn more about what the program entails. After a three-month probationary period, the new volunteers are certified as Ombudsman Advocates.

Certified Ombudsman Advocates will be assigned to a long-term care facility or an assisted living community where they’ll visit for two hours a week to meet with administrators, residents, and the residents’ family members to address concerns.

For more information about ENOAs Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, please call Beth Nodes at 402-444-6536.
The data is clear: older adults have been falling increasingly behind in digital connectivity, which negatively affects their overall health and well-being,” said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) in a statement released recently.

To combat this, Older Adults Technology Services, Inc. (OATS) and the Humana Foundation are launching a national campaign called Aging Connected, an unprecedented effort aiming to connect at least one million older Americans to high-speed internet by 2022.

“America’s older population is facing a public health crisis as the digital divide restricts their ability to stay healthy, meaningfully engaged, and financially secure amid the pandemic and beyond,” said Thomas Kamber, executive director of OATS.

The Humana Foundation, in partnership with OATS, released a report finding nearly 22 million older Americans still lack wireline broadband access at home, representing 42% of the nation’s over-65 population.

The report estimates 40% of COVID-19 deaths among older Americans were a result of being unable to access needed online resources from home during the pandemic. Access to broadband not only limits access to essential public health information, social services, and digital health care services like telehealth and apps that manage chronic conditions, but it can also lead to risk of social isolation, which has been linked to negative health outcomes, reduced quality of life, and premature death.

The report finds technology is exacerbating social divisions and inequalities, creating “disturbing correlations” between digital disengagement and race, disability, health status, educational attainment, immigration, rural residence, and income.

To address these concerns, OATS and the Humana Foundation will utilize a four-pronged approach: publicize and prioritize social equity and inclusion, expand access to low-cost offers, and develop content, communities, and experiences for older adults to increase utilization of broadband services.

(Broadband Breakfast provided this information.)

**CLASSIFIEDS**

**Support groups for persons with vision loss**

Living with vision loss can be overwhelming without support. It can be helpful to have someone to talk to about the unique challenges you face. Others with vision loss understand your situation and can help you come up with solutions.

Outlook Enrichment, a local nonprofit helping people with vision loss live an inclusive and fulfilled life, hosts ongoing virtual peer support groups led by a trained facilitator. You can participate from the comforts of home via phone or videoconference. Its team can walk you through the registration process and show you how to use the technology for the sessions.

People living with vision loss often feel alone and isolated, which leads to depression over time. Support groups give you an opportunity to surround yourself with people sharing similar experiences. Stories from other group members let you know you’re not alone in your journey and give you the confidence you need to create your own success story.

Support group members provide practical tips, advice, encouragement, information and resources to help you live independently, work, and navigate the world around you.

You’ll learn how to adjust the contrast of your lighting and/or add decor with lighter colors to a room to help you navigate while using your residual vision. Group leaders can connect you with resources to help with skills such as adaptive technology and daily living.

Becoming a member of a support group can increase your confidence and independence. You’ll become part of a community of like-minded people and create lasting friendships.

“The support group opened up my thought process with my vision loss and allowed me to see I am not the only one. You are allowed to be afraid, and to ask questions and not get negative responses. The support pushed me in the right direction and away from depression,” said a peer support group participant.

Join a support group today. Find more information at outlooken.org or call 531-365-5051.

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- **March 2021**
- **New Horizons**
- **Page 15**

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March 2021 • New Horizons • Page 15
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Just visit our website and select your state to get the most up-to-date information available about your vaccine options.

Learn more about COVID-19 vaccine availability and distribution in your state at aarp.org/VaccineInfo