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KEVIN GROENHAGEN PHOTO



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John Nodar: From the flight deck to a message of hope

By Kevin Groenhagen

In August 1989, John Nodar was standing on the deck of the USS *Midway*. Launched on March 20, 1945, the *Midway* was the world's largest aircraft carrier when commissioned and the first too large to transit the Panama Canal.

A Night That Changed Everything

According to Nodar, he was bullied as a child, and he had carried that pain with him into adulthood. The homesick sailor was also exhausted—physically and spiritually—from working 12 to 14 hours a day on some cruises that lasted up to six months.

"The voices, I heard, like, you're a mistake, you should have never been born, all that stuff," Nodar said.

After working a 14-hour shift, he

stood alone on the edge of the bow of the ship, dropped to his knees, and was going to fall forward and end his life.

"And I felt a cool breeze coming across the bow," he said. "In my heart and my mind, I knew that it was God."

In that moment, he said he believed he would get through it.

"I believed that everything was going to be okay," he said.

Nodar made it through that night, and decades later he uses that experience to help others find hope.

From New York to the Navy

Nodar was born in New York. When he was three, his family moved to Miramar, Florida.

"And then one day my mom had a dream," he said. "She wanted to move to God's country. So, we moved to Boise, Idaho, in October 1978."

In his junior year of high school, Nodar wanted to drop out to become

a truck driver.

"My dad wasn't having any of that under his roof, under his rules," Nodar said.

On May 16, 1986, Nodar went to see the movie *Top Gun* with his

friends. That movie changed the direction of his life. He decided he would join the Navy. He graduated from high school in May 1987 and went to Navy boot camp in San Diego three months later.

"A month before you graduate from boot camp, they give you a dream sheet of where you want to go," Nodar said. "I put anywhere but the States. So, I was undesignated. My first job was working on the flight deck of the *Midway* as a plane captain. Then I started working also with the aviation electronics department."

Nodar noted that the opening scene of the first *Top Gun* says, "Indian Ocean, Present Day." When Nodar arrived and landed on the *Midway*, it was in the middle of the Indian Ocean. In that opening scene,

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John Nodar as a young sailor



Kevin L. Groenhagen

Editor and Publisher

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John Nodar

CONTINUED FROM PAGE THREE

people run around on the flight deck. Nodar was on the flight deck, too, working as a plane captain, running around in a brown shirt and a brown vest.

“Being in the Navy was a good experience,” he said. “Traveling the world, obviously, on their dime, and being able to experience the different cultures, the people, and the food.”

Finding a New Direction

Nodar left the Navy in 1993. He tried to apply his military skills to civilian work. Unfortunately, Boeing had announced a hiring freeze just before Nodar separated from the Navy. Other companies in the aerospace and defense sectors followed suit.

Nodar realized he would have to redefine himself.

“I got into management, hospi-

tality, and restaurants,” he said.

He then decided to go to college. He earned an associate of arts degree and then enrolled in the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa in 2000. He joined the staff of *The Oracle*, the university’s newspaper, in 2001, and wrote weekly opinion columns about faith, sports, and life. He graduated from USF with a bachelor’s degree in communications in 2006.

From 2008 to 2024, Nodar worked with Medicare and Medicaid. During those years, he also earned a Master of Divinity from Liberty University and nearly completed a second master’s degree in theology at Saint Leo University before taking a break to pursue his podcast, *On the Edge 1989*, and his documentary, *Serving God and Country, The End*. Both the podcast and documentary are about his experience on the flight deck of the *Midway* in 1989. The podcast is available at podbean.com.

CONTINUED ON PAGE FIVE

COURTESY PHOTO



John Nodar and his son on the deck of the USS *Midway*

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John Nodar

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involved with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and veterans' organizations, including the American Legion. He completed Mental Health First Aid training in Kansas with Johnson County this past May. In November 2025, he began speaking to veterans and other groups in both Kansas and Tampa, Florida.

Borrowing a line from his Navy days, Nodar said, "We are all on this ship called life together—that's S-H-I-P as in Paul, not T as in Tom." "People laugh," he continued, "because they understand. Life gets hard."

He has learned that people carry more than they show. Many veterans, he points out, live with lasting struggles after service. A suicide-

prevention message that people can hear is one thing, but the harder part is getting people to talk about it at all.

A Family Connection Brings Him to Kansas

Shortly before Nodar separated from the Navy, his parents moved to Naples, Florida. People often move to Florida after they retire. However, his parents moved from Florida to Olathe, Kansas, when they retired.

"So, my family lives up here now," Nodar said. "Over the years, I've come and visited and spent time. My parents, they're elderly now. In May I came up here with my little car, and I've been up here since. I still have

family and kids in Tampa, but I'm taking care of my parents and doing what I can."

In addition to caring for his parents, he has participated in NAMI and AFSP events in Kansas and Missouri, leading workshops and sharing his story of hope. On Saturday, September 19, he visited Leavenworth, where he shared his story with veterans and the Buffalo Soldiers.

The Top Gun Connections

The week before, September 14, on Monday Night Football, the Kansas City Chiefs played their season opener against the Denver Broncos. Retired Navy Petty Officer

First Class Generald Wilson performed the National Anthem. And who was sitting with Taylor Swift at Arrowhead Stadium? None other than Tom Cruise, the star of *Top Gun*.

Nodar cites another *Top Gun* coincidence about his stay at his parents' home in Kansas. In the final scene of the first *Top Gun*, Maverick (Cruise) reunites with Charlie (Kelly McGillis) in a bar, which was filmed at Kansas City Barbeque in San Diego. A framed "Kansas City" poster appears on the wall, and there's a "Kansas" wooden plaque above the window as the couple moves in to kiss.

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John Nodar

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The coincidences keep piling up. The red-carpet event for *Top Gun: Maverick* was held on the flight deck of the *Midway*, a museum in San Diego for more than 20 years.

Another coincidence: in *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), Glen Powell's character, who is part of VFA-151, wears a "Skull and Atoms" patch. That was Nodar's squadron when he served on the *Midway*.

One final coincidence: Nodar was 17 and living in Boise, Idaho, when *Top Gun* came out on May 16, 1986. So here he was, 40 years later and now living in Kansas, on May 15, 2026, watching the same movie at the AMC Prairie Fire movie theater.

Nodar noted that his squadron was 151, he belongs to American Legion Post 152 in Tampa, and he is now involved with American Legion

Post 153 in Olathe.

Cruise and *Top Gun* have played such an important role in Nodar's life that he dreams of someday meeting Cruise to thank him.

"Tom Cruise and *Top Gun* have played such an important and powerful role in my life," Nodar said. "That movie was the reason I joined the Navy. I have always wanted to meet Tom Cruise and thank Lt. Pete Mitchell for changing the course of my life all those years ago. Maybe one day."

Returning to the *Midway*

In June 2023, Nodar and his younger son boarded the *Midway*, now a museum at Navy Pier in San Diego.

"They have a fence now around the edge because, obviously, they don't want people falling off," Nodar said. "It was amazing. When I was 18, I lived on that ship. When he was 18, he walked it with me. Such a powerful moment."

Father and son stood on the ship



where, 34 years earlier, Nodar had reached the lowest point of his life.

"Standing on the edge with him, it was like a sacred space," Nodar said.

If you would like Nodar to speak before your group, school, or organization, you can reach him at 813-509-0509.

If You or Someone You Know Needs Help

Call or text 988 (the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time, day or night. It is free and open to everyone.

Nodar won two awards, one for Facilitator and the other for Educator, at NAMI Missouri's National Arts Competition on October 16 in Jefferson City. The following day at the NAMI conference, he received a MO Veteran Connect Partner Award in recognition of outstanding leadership and service in supporting veterans and military families.

Veterans and service members can dial 988, then press 1, to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.

To learn more or find local support:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): NAMI.org. Choose your state to find Kansas and Missouri chapters, classes and events.

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): AFSP.org. Choose your state to find chapters and upcoming walks

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HEALTH & WELLNESS



Everyone can help: Recognizing the signs and preventing suicide

By Autumn Bishop
LMH Health

Mental health challenges affect people of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life. Yet conversations about these concerns aren't always easy to discuss. That's especially true when it comes to a topic like suicide, which remains a leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for more than 48,000 deaths each year.

The impact is also felt locally. In 2025, more than 1,000 visits to LMH Health's Emergency Department and primary care clinics involved care for individuals considering suicide. Behind every number is someone hurting. And connected to every person hurting are family, friends and LMH care teams trying to help.

Know the potential signs

No one thing results in suicidal thoughts. Risk factors can be a combination of things, including:

- Depression or other mental health condition
- Chronic pain
- A new or difficult medical diagnosis
- Alcohol or substance use
- Significant life changes
- Financial stress
- Previous suicide attempts
- Suicide attempts among family and friends

"We hear comments like, 'I don't think I can handle this anymore,' 'I'm tired of dealing with this,' 'I am such a failure,' 'It would be easier if I wasn't here,' or 'There is no hope that this will get better,'" said Sandra Dixon, LMH Health director of behavioral health integration. "All of these may suggest someone is at risk of suicide."

Feeling connected and having support from family, friends and co-workers are two key factors that can help prevent suicide. Dixon said those can help you to recognize the

subtle messages and provide an opportunity to help.

"Asking the question opens the door to a conversation, and it isn't complicated. Just saying, 'I'm concerned about you and I'm here to listen. Are you thinking about suicide?' It's hard, but it can make all the difference," she said.

Community awareness and support

A 2025 study led by researchers in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that nearly 1 in 10 adults reported a mental health crisis over the past year. Nearly three quarters of those experiencing a mental health crisis sought help, some through the 988 hotline or using a mobile crisis team, but most relied on healthcare providers or family and friends for help.

Knowing where to turn can make

all the difference during a mental health crisis. Fortunately, there's help available 24/7.

Call or text 988, or visit 988life-line.org/chat to reach a caring, trained counselor who can help. 988 counselors are trained to listen and support the caller, identify next steps including service referrals, and engage the caller in safety planning. If the caller is in immediate danger, 988 staff can connect them to emergency first responders.

If you are with someone who says they are thinking about suicide, ask "Can we call the 988 crisis line to talk to someone?"

The Treatment and Recovery Center of Douglas County is a local crisis center providing 24/7 walk-in urgent care for individuals experiencing a substance use, mental

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Preventing suicide

CONTINUED FROM PAGE EIGHT

health or suicide crisis. Located at 1000 W. 2nd, one block northeast of LMH Health at the corner of Second and Maine streets, the TRC offers in person, licensed behavioral health clinicians that help individuals assess their needs, connect to resources, and if needed, a few days of stabilization for those 18 and over.

If you are with someone who says they are thinking about suicide or experiencing a behavioral health crisis, ask “Can I help you go to our local crisis center to talk to a therapist?”

The Bert Nash Center Mobile Response Team goes to an individual’s home or other community sites to facilitate de-escalation, clinical assessment and brief intervention for people in crisis. The Mobile Response Team is a good option when you are concerned for someone’s safety and they refuse other types of help. Call the Douglas County Emergency Communication Center at 785-832-7509 or 785-843-0250 to connect with the Mobile Response Team.

First aid for the mind

One way local organizations are working to improve public awareness and support is through Mental Health First Aid training. Morgan Carnage, LMH’s employee health and wellbeing manager, likens it to learning CPR.

“We learn CPR to be able to help our friends, families, neighbors and strangers. This is kind of the same thing, from a mental health perspective, and we offer the training to LMH staff each quarter,” she explained.

The Mental Health First Aid program provides skills to help community members recognize, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance abuse challenges to provide initial help to someone experiencing a mental health crisis. It doesn’t take the place

of professional help, but does provide a stepping stone to help someone in a crisis while guiding them to professional care.

The Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center was one of seven pilot sites in the U.S. for Mental Health First Aid and has offered the training since 2008.

In 2026, Bert Nash began a collaboration with DCCCA to provide more opportunities through public

and private training to help the community learn how to respond to someone experiencing mental health or substance abuse challenges.

“Bert Nash and DCCCA are working together to equip people with the skills to help in a crisis,” Dixon said. “By recognizing the warning signs, checking in with those around us and offering support, we can all make a difference with someone who is hurting. Everyone can help.”

- Autumn Bishop is the strategic communications manager at LMH Health.





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S*ambucus nigra*, commonly known as elderberry, is a medicinal plant with a long history in traditional medicine, folklore, food, and culture. The European elder (*Sambucus nigra*) is especially recognized for its clusters of small, dark purple-black berries, prized for their distinctive flavor and medicinal uses.

Europeans and other cultures have used elderberry since ancient times, using various parts of the plant for medicinal purposes. Traditional herbalists prepared teas, syrups, wines, and other remedies from elderflowers and elderberries. Elderflowers were commonly used in traditional treatments for colds and fevers, while the elderberries were used in foods and drinks and to make dyes.

Elderberry holds a significant place in European folklore. People often viewed the elder tree as a magical or protective plant. Some traditions believed benevolent spirits resided in elder trees, and harming a tree without permission could bring bad luck. Others linked the tree to witches, fairies, or other supernatural entities. These contrasting beliefs

highlight the elder's unique role in folklore: seen as both protective and mysterious. Elderberry and elderflowers also became part of rituals, household customs, and seasonal activities.

Today, *Sambucus* is commonly used as a natural herbal supplement, particularly in syrups, gummies, lozenges, teas, and extracts. Elderberries are rich in compounds such as anthocyanins, flavonoids, and other antioxidants. These components have attracted scientific attention for their potential anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.

Research suggests that elderberry preparations may help shorten or lessen the severity of certain upper-respiratory symptoms when taken at the start of an illness. Traditionally, people have used elderberry for colds, flu, coughs, and other infections. Some studies suggest it can inhibit certain viral strains, such as influenza A and B. It has also been used as an anti-inflammatory, reducing pro-inflammatory markers and enzymes. Rich in anthocyanins and flavonoids like quercetin, elderberry helps neutralize free radicals and

decreases cellular oxidative stress. Additionally, research shows elderberry extracts may help control blood sugar and cholesterol levels, while also providing dietary fiber. That said, if you are considering an elderberry supplement, check with your healthcare provider before taking it. Also keep in mind that raw elderberries and other parts of the plant can make you sick.

From ancient herbal practices to

modern wellness, *Sambucus* exemplifies how a medicinal plant connects food, medicine, folklore, and culture. As modern studies explore its potential benefits, elderberry's long-standing medicinal use highlights the enduring relationship between humans and medicinal plants.

- Dr. Deena Beneda, N.D., is a Naturopathic Doctor practicing at Natural Medical Care in Lawrence. She can be reached at 785-749-2255.

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MAYO CLINIC Q & A



Why are my feet always cold?

By Jesse Bracamonte, O.D.

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: Even when it's not chilly outside or in the house, my feet are always cold. Should I be concerned about this?

ANSWER: If you live in a colder climate, having cold feet isn't uncommon during the winter months, and it usually can be remedied by putting on warm socks or covering your feet with a blanket.

Other simple remedies include raising your feet to improve circulation. Sometimes, just moving around or going for a short walk will take the chill out of your feet.

There are other causes of cold feet other than cold or chilly days. Staying well hydrated can help keep your feet warm because water distributes heat from head to toe. Eating a balanced diet with a variety of foods will help ensure you're fueling your body with the nutrients it needs to support cell function that keeps you warm.

In addition to your feet being cold, pay attention to their color.

It's not uncommon for your feet to change color somewhat when it's really cold outside. But if you notice discoloration more frequently or if you experience sensations in your feet such as tingling or burning, these could be indications of a medical condition.

If your feet are consistently cold or discolored, you should consult with your health care professional for an evaluation. An evaluation can help identify any underlying health conditions and determine possible treatments.

Among the conditions cold feet may indicate include circulatory issues, heart conditions, nerve disorders or autoimmune problems, such as thyroid disease.

Circulatory problems

These can include peripheral artery disease (PAD), a narrowing of the arteries in your legs caused by a buildup of plaque from cholesterol and other substances on the walls of the arteries. You may have leg pain when walking which can cause lower blood pressure in your legs and contribute to cold, discolored feet. Smoking is a cause of PAD, so if you

smoke, seek help to break this habit.

Raynaud's disease causes your body to overreact to cold. It's more common in cold climates and typically affects women more than men. When you're exposed to cold — a frosty day or chilly air conditioning — this disease causes the arteries in your feet and hands to spasm and constrict. It is benign and remedied by warming the extremities.

Heart conditions

A number of conditions, such as heart rhythm or valve damage, can affect how strongly your heart beats and circulates blood throughout your body.

Nerve issues

If sensory nerves in your feet are damaged, it can affect how your brain receives sensations from the skin, such as temperature, pain, vibration or touch. Some vitamin deficiencies may contribute to this, as well as diabetes.

Thyroid disease

Hypothyroidism — or not enough thyroid hormone — can

increase your sensitivity to cold.

Your physician or clinician can perform some simple evaluations in the office and also order other testing to ensure you don't have circulatory issues. Blood tests can determine if you have an autoimmune problem, including anemia, caused by various issues, which can also be a factor in cold feet.

Based on the results of the tests, your healthcare professional can help find treatments that alleviate your cold feet. — Jesse Bracamonte, D.O., Family Medicine, Mayo Clinic in Arizona

- Mayo Clinic Q & A is an educational resource and doesn't replace regular medical care. This Mayo Clinic Q&A represents inquiries this healthcare expert has received from patients. For more information, visit www.mayoclinic.org.

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RYAN'S RETIREMENT TIPS



The retirement tax trap most people never see coming

RYAN SHUMAKER

When most people think about retirement planning, they focus on saving enough. But there's a quiet threat that can silently erode your retirement income that has nothing to do with market performance or spending too much. It instead has everything to do with how the IRS taxes Social Security, and how your retirement accounts can make that problem significantly worse.

This isn't a niche issue that only impacts the rich. It's a trap that catches middle-class retirees every single day — people who did everything right, saved diligently for decades, and still end up paying far more in taxes than they ever anticipated.

Why Social Security Taxation Is Unlike Anything Else

Most income is taxed straightforwardly: you earn it, you report it, you pay tax on it. Social Security doesn't work that way. Whether your benefits are taxed, and how much, depends on a formula called modified provisional income. Here's how it works: take half of your annual Social Security benefit and add it to all your other income for the year. That includes wages, dividends, interest, pension payments, and withdrawals from tax-deferred accounts like IRAs and 401(k)s. Even interest from municipal bonds, which is otherwise tax-exempt, counts here. Once you have that combined number, the IRS applies a two-tier system:

Tier 1 — For every \$1 over these thresholds, \$0.50 of your Social Security benefit becomes taxable income:

- Single filers with combined

income over \$25,000

- Married filers with combined income over \$32,000

Tier 2 — For every \$1 over these thresholds, \$0.85 of your Social Security benefit becomes taxable income:

- Single filers with combined income over \$34,000
- Married filers with combined income over \$44,000

It's worth noting that the \$32,000 married threshold is only 64% of what you'd get by simply doubling the \$25,000 single threshold. This is one of those 'marriage penalties' that happen in the tax code that makes taxation worse for those who are married.

A Problem Frozen in Time

These thresholds were established in 1983 and 1994, and they have never been adjusted for inflation — ever. Regular income tax brackets are updated each year to account for rising prices, but these thresholds are not. As wages and savings have grown over time because of inflation, more and more Americans get pulled into Social Security taxation — not because they're wealthy, but simply because prices have gone up.

When these rules were first written, fewer than 10% of Social Security recipients owed any tax on their benefits. That number has since grown fivefold, and it continues to climb every year. This was not an accident. It was a quiet mechanism to collect more revenue without ever officially raising tax rates.

How Your IRA Can Make Things Much Worse

Here's where retirement savers

often get blindsided. With a traditional 401(k), 403(b), or IRA, contributions go in pre-tax and grow tax-deferred, and you pay taxes when you withdraw the money in retirement. Every dollar you pull out counts as income, and that income flows directly into the provisional income formula above.

Let's walk through a real example. Suppose you and your spouse have combined provisional income sitting right at \$44,000 — the threshold where the 85% tier begins. You decide to take an extra \$1,000 from your IRA. Here's what actually happens:

- You owe income tax on the \$1,000 withdrawal — at 12%, that's \$120
- That \$1,000 also triggers \$850 of your Social Security to become taxable that otherwise would have been tax-free
- Tax on that \$850 at 12% = \$102

- — Total tax bill from a \$1,000 withdrawal: \$222 — an effective rate of 22.2%

You're in the 12% tax bracket, but effectively paying a 22.2% tax on every dollar you withdraw! If federal tax rates were ever to increase in the future, that math gets worse in a hurry. If the 12% bracket went back to 15% like it was prior to the Trump Tax Cuts, the effective tax rate on those same dollars would jump to a staggering 27.75%!

What This Means for Your Planning

The conventional advice has long been: defer taxes through a traditional 401(k) or IRA, then pay at a lower rate in retirement because you will likely have lower income and be in a lower tax bracket. As we've shown, though, the Social Security taxation formula can quietly push the actual tax triggered from a retirement account withdrawal to a rate

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Ryan Shumaker
RetireFromTaxes.com



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FINANCIAL FOCUS



Is FIRE right for you? What early retirement really takes

DEREK OSBORN

The idea has never been more appealing: quit your 9-to-5 decades ahead of schedule and spend your days on your own terms. You may have heard of the FIRE movement, but what is it really and does the hype live up to reality?

FIRE stands for Financial Independence, Retire Early. While some FIRE advocates focus on retiring early, others are more interested in achieving enough financial independence to gain greater flexibility over their career, lifestyle and future.

Wherever your goal falls on that spectrum, FIRE is typically built around three commitments: high savings, frugal living and disciplined investing. Proponents generally save from 50-75% of their yearly income, according to CNBC Select, live more frugally and invest those savings for growth potential over time.

Why FIRE resonates with some people

- **It can help you prioritize.** While you may want a long and successful career, you may instead prioritize earlier retirement or a path that allows you more time with family, a more meaningful job or a downshift from your current daily grind.

- **It advocates for some sound financial principles.** Living within your means, saving for your goals and investing for long-term growth potential can help build a solid financial foundation.

- **It helps you set a strategy for the future.** Achieving your retirement goal is easier when you've defined what you want retirement to look like and built a strategy to help achieve it.

What to consider before pursuing FIRE

- **Your budget may change.** Future expenses may look different than they do today. Family obligations, emergencies and other life changes can increase the amount you'll need in early retirement.

- **You may need to bridge the retirement benefit gap.** Medicare covers many healthcare costs for retirees 65+, but if you retire early, you'll need to find and pay for health insurance until you become eligible. You'll also need to rely more heavily on personal savings for longer before claiming Social Security benefits. Because Social Security benefits are generally based on your highest 35 earning years, retiring early may result in a lower benefit than if you'd continued working.

- **Your flexibility may be limited.** Market declines can be particularly challenging in retirement. One way to help weather a decline is by reducing spending, but a lean budget with more necessary expenses may leave you with fewer options to adjust your spending.

- **Your strategy should be personalized.** Many FIRE proponents advocate for rules of thumb like the 4% withdrawal rate and saving 25 times your annual expenses. However, retiring earlier than normal means your savings must support a longer retirement, and inflation has a larger impact. Therefore, your withdrawal rate may need to be lower and your planned savings higher than traditional rules of thumb, and those targets should

be personalized to you.

Start planning now

Whether your goal is early retirement or a more traditional path, a financial advisor can help you with a plan for your goals and the path ahead.

- Derek Osborn is with Edward

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Retirement tax trap

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

that is much higher than the tax bracket you're in.

The earlier you recognize this dynamic, the more options you have and the less in tax you'll likely pay over your lifetime. These strategies are most powerful when implemented years before benefits begin, but many can still be put to work even after you've started collecting. Next month we'll walk through exactly what those strategies are and how to evaluate which ones make sense for your situation.

- Ryan Shumaker hosts a radio show Saturdays at 7:30 a.m. and Sundays at 8 a.m. on FM93.5/AM1440. Listen anytime at RetireFromTaxes.com/Radio. Other great articles about retirement, investing, and tax reduction are available at RetireFromTaxes.com/Blog. Material discussed is meant for general/informational purposes and is not intended to be used as the sole basis for any financial decisions, nor be construed as advice to meet your particular needs. Please consult a financial professional for further information. Investment advisory services offered through Retirement Portfolios, LLC.

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Don't miss your Medicare window

Q: I'll turn 65 in one year. What should I start doing now to prepare for Medicare?

A: Good for you for asking early. Medicare has deadlines, and missing them can cost you money for the rest of your life. Here's how I'd use the next twelve months.

Learn your window. Your Initial Enrollment Period lasts seven months: the three months before your birthday month, your birthday month, and the three months after. Mark those dates on your calendar now. Signing up in the first three months means your coverage starts on time.

Check your Social Security status. If you're already collecting Social Security, you'll generally be enrolled in Medicare Parts A (hospital) and B (medical) automatically. If you're not, you must sign up yourself through the Social Security Administration. Don't assume it will happen on its own.

Are you still working? If you or your spouse have coverage through a current employer, ask your HR department how it works with Medicare. Whether you can delay Part B without penalty depends on the size of the employer and the type of plan. Get the answer in writing. Retiree

coverage and COBRA usually don't count, and relying on them can lead to penalties.

Know the penalty. If you skip Part B without qualifying coverage, your premium rises 10 percent for each full 12-month period you could have had it, and the increase lasts as long as you have Part B.

Mind your HSA. If you contribute to a Health Savings Account, stop at least six months before you enroll in Medicare. Part A coverage can be backdated, and contributing during that period can trigger tax penalties.

Understand your choices. You'll pick between two main paths:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



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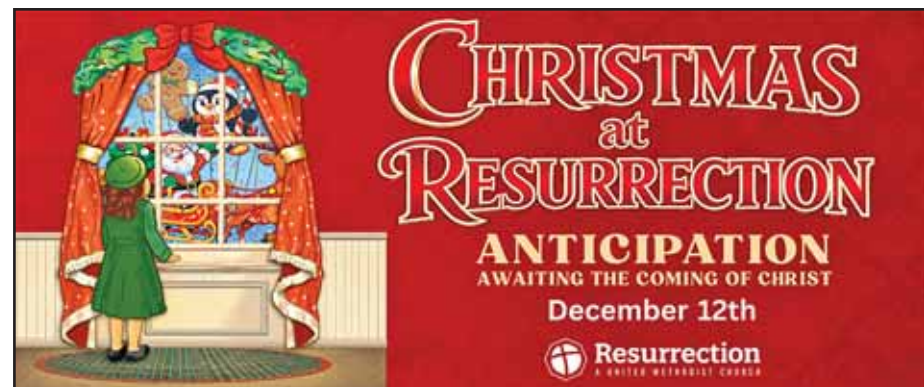
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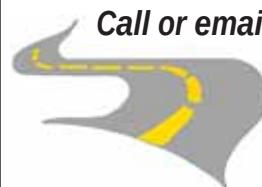
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Seasoned Advice

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

- Original Medicare (Parts A and B), usually paired with a Medigap supplement and a separate Part D drug plan. It typically costs more in premiums but offers broad access to doctors and hospitals.

- Medicare Advantage (Part C), which bundles everything into one plan. Premiums are often lower, but you'll generally have a provider network and may need prior approval for some services.

Neither is right for everyone. It depends on your health, your budget, and where you want to be able to get care.

List your doctors and medications. Write down every doctor, specialist, and prescription. Before you choose any plan, confirm your providers are in it and your drugs are covered. Plans change each year, so this check is never one-and-done.

Use this fall as practice. Annual open enrollment runs October 15 through December 7. You can't enroll yet, but you can compare plans on Medicare.gov's plan finder and get a feel for the costs and terms.

Get free, unbiased help. Kansas offers SHICK counseling, where trained volunteers explain Medicare without selling you anything. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Be wary of unsolicited calls, emails, or visitors offering Medicare deals. Medicare doesn't cold-call to sell you plans, and you should never give out your Medicare number to someone who contacts you first.

If you start now, you'll walk into your enrollment window informed, not rushed. Take a few small steps each month, and turning 65 will feel like a milestone instead of a scramble.

- Have a question about life after 60? Email it to kevin@seniormonthly.com and it may appear in a future column.

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NORTH

♠ K Q 10 9 8 4 3
♥ Q 8 6 4 2
♦ Void
♣ 7

WEST

♠ 7 5
♥ A 3
♦ A 10 5 3 2
♣ 9 6 5 4

EAST

♠ J 6 2
♥ J 5
♦ Q 9 7
♣ K J 10 3 2

SOUTH

♠ A
♥ K 10 9 7
♦ K J 8 6 4
♣ A Q 8

The bidding:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♣*	Dbl	Redbl	Pass
4♥	All pass		

*Splinter bid, heart raise with shortness in clubs

Opening lead: Six of ♣

What would you open with the North hand? It is certainly not a clear-cut decision. In a recent team match between a team from Ukraine and a team from the Faroe Islands,

both North players chose to pass. They wanted to listen to a round of bidding in the hope that it would help them judge the hand later. Both heard their partner open the bidding one diamond and rebid two hearts. Two hearts was a reverse, promising at least 17 points.

At this table, the Ukrainian North made a splinter bid of four clubs. East doubled to show strength in clubs and South redoubled to show a first-round club control. North might have bid four diamonds to show his diamond control, but North felt he had done enough and bid four hearts. South had a minimum reverse with weak suits, so he also passed.

At the other table, the Faroe Islands' North, knowing that it often pays to be aggressive with freak hands, raised two hearts to six hearts! We would love a peek at South's face when his passed-hand partner raised him to slam. It had to be quite a surprise.

Six hearts would fail on a bad day, but both major suits behaved and 12 tricks rolled home at both tables. It was a big gain for the Faroe Islands, who went on to win the match.

(Bob Jones welcomes readers' responses sent in care of this paper.)

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By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



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_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

PUZZLES & GAMES

CROSSWORD

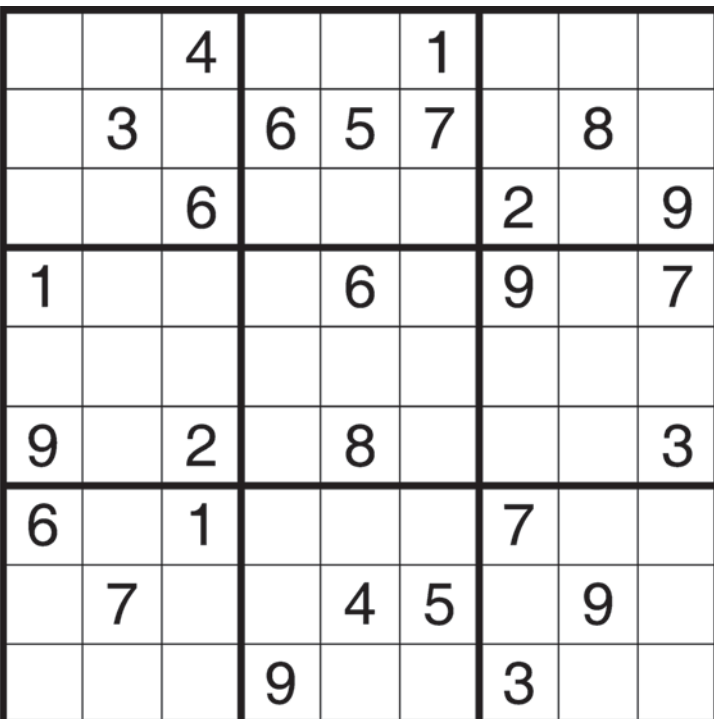
Across

- 1 Cop to
6 Of this clue, approve he would
10 Flows back
14 Previous
15 Brief analysis?
16 Blind strip
17 Christmas party
19 Unit of lipstick
20 Fuel made from corn
21 Beverage with tapioca pearls
23 Winter coat?
25 Many an island in the South Pacific
26 Slumber party
32 Starting squad
33 "Good Omens" co-writer Gaiman
34 Couple
37 Pasta filling, sometimes
38 Popped with a low blow
40 Source of a low

- blow?
41 Justin Trudeau and Christopher Luxon, for short
42 Degr. for filmmakers
43 Call for pizza, say
44 Halloween party
47 Professionals who might bug people
50 Impassioned request
51 Seemingly unbeatable foe
54 Get the big picture
59 Maroon 5 lead singer Levine
60 Cocktail party
62 Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, say
63 Glutinous glob
64 D sharp equivalent
65 Whole lot
66 Border lines?
67 Black Sea resort

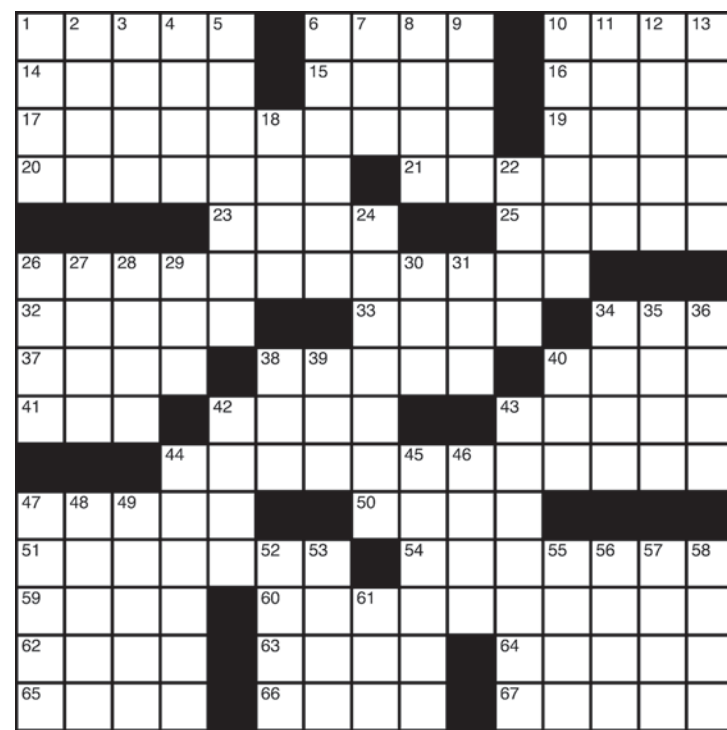
Down

- 1 Choir section



SUDOKU: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9 with no repeats.

- 2 "Dang it!"
3 Ho Chi ___ City
4 Crumb
5 Classic Pontiac
6 Like many a school bus
7 Egg cells
8 Mark on a bingo card
9 "On top of which ..."
10 Lot of wealth?
11 Popeye's rival
12 Genesis locale
13 Terrific bargain
18 Nutmegger's st.
22 Word with hard or soft
24 Apple often used to make cider
26 X Games launch point
27 "Unexpected ___ in bagging area"
28 Pair in a pod
29 Factory tub
30 Word that indicates a name change
31 "Diary of a Wimpy ___"
34 "Seriously, man!?"
35 Superlative prefix
36 Couple in a boat
38 Company whose X account only follows some Spice Girls and seven guys named

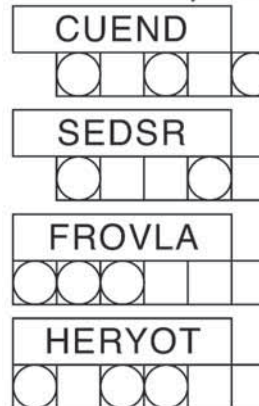


- Herb
39 "Don't bother"
40 Tackle
42 Fail to notice
43 Walter who moved the Dodgers to Los Angeles
44 Granny, to some
45 Puts in a seat
46 Host before Fallon
47 Bumps in the road
48 One of two on a tri
cycle
49 Instagram upload
52 Urge
53 Worn-down part of a shoe
55 ___ Romeo
56 Streamlet
57 Tiny pest
58 "¿Cómo ___?"
61 May celebrant

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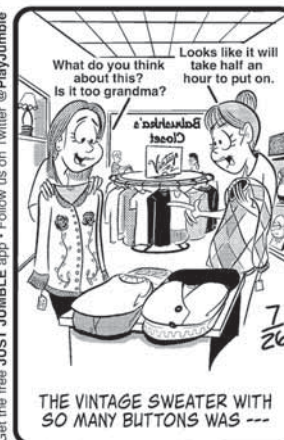
JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.



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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



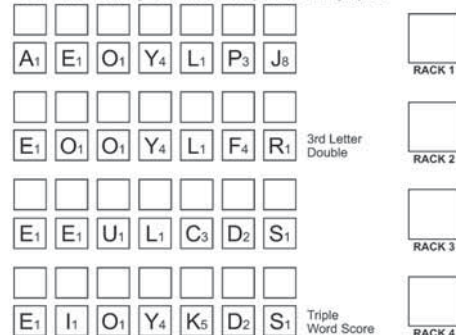
THE VINTAGE SWEATER WITH SO MANY BUTTONS WAS ---

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.



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PAR SCORE 155-165
BEST SCORE 237

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. Finally, 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All the words are in the Official SCRABBLE® Players Dictionary, 5th Edition.

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01-11

Answers to all puzzles on page 26

HUMOR HOTEL



Oh, to be 12 with \$4 million on the way

GREG SCHWEM

I have a message for Kevin Sosa, the 12-year-old baseball phenom from the Dominican Republic.

Save all receipts.

Sosa, for those of you who don't follow international youth sports, raised eyebrows recently after the Detroit Tigers made him a verbal offer that includes a \$4 million dollar signing bonus. Note the word "verbal." Major League Baseball prohibits teams from officially signing players until they reach 16, probably because they need driver's licenses to get to practice.

Verbal agreements are nothing more than that; no money has been exchanged. That way, if Sosa trips and blows out his knee on his way to middle school math class, the Tigers are protected. He could have an untimely skateboard accident or develop carpal tunnel from hours spent playing Xbox. You know how kids are at that age.

Nevertheless, I'm sure a lot of people in Sosa's orbit are convincing themselves that none of that will ever happen. Numerous media outlets have circulated an image of Sosa,

adorned in a Tigers hat and T-shirt, standing between two grown men, his arms around their shoulders. One man is flashing a "thumbs up" gesture while grinning ear to ear. The other, sporting a similar grin, is pointing to Sosa. I can't find a single website verifying the identity of either and AI chatbot assistants won't help. I'm going to assume, for purposes of this HUMOR column, that one is Sosa's father and the other is a hastily hired accountant who advertises his services on bus billboards.

Judging by their faces, both seem supremely confident that Sosa is finished developing physically and somehow skirted the awkward stage most pre-teen boys experience. Indeed, Sosa is a full head taller than the mystery men in the photo; but that proves nothing. I played youth baseball and, at 12, found myself cowering at the plate as I prepared to face pitchers in need of a shave and a foot taller than I was. Three years later some of those "can't miss" prospects found themselves riding the benches of their high school teams or out of baseball altogether, realizing

the marching band might be a better use of their time.

Puberty is funny that way.

Still, I'm pulling for Sosa. Heck, he shares the same last name as one of the most famous players to hone his skills in the Dominican Republic. That's an excellent start. If he can stay away from corked bats and steroid allegations, all the better.

He just has four short, or in his case excruciatingly long, years to wait before that \$4 million hits his bank account. So, Kevin, let me tell you what's going to happen in the interim.

You're going to become the most popular kid in your class. You probably already are. Friends are going to ask if you can spot them some lunch money, which they have no intention of reimbursing you for. Get used to it.

Does your school have dances? You will have your choice of dates, assuming you've reached the age where you don't think girls are "gross." When I was 12, I was waffling on that subject. Trust me, the girls at your school don't feel that way about boys. Well, maybe they do but you're the exception. Probably because they're convinced you can afford a limo to wherever the dance is taking place. Also, be aware of their parents. How many of them are convincing their daughters to be nice to "that boy in

your school who's gonna be stinking rich in 2030"?

Just remember who you are. Kevin, a perfectly normal middle schooler a professional baseball franchise feels is already worth more than what it cost to build the diamonds you're currently playing on. If you want to buy a new video game console, that's your choice. Just make sure you can return it if things don't work out the way everybody around you thinks they will.

Also, don't be afraid to learn a musical instrument.

You never know.

- Greg Schwem is a veteran comedian, motivational speaker and humor specialist known for blending business insights with standup comedy. He is also the author of three Amazon bestsellers. His latest, "Turning Gut Punches into Punch Lines: A Comedian's Journey Through Cancer, Divorce and Other Hilarious Stuff," was released in September 2024. Visit Greg on the web at www.gregschwem.com.

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Walking together toward a world without Alzheimer's

By Billie David

This article is not a report on the Alzheimer Association's Mid-America Walk to End Alzheimer's, which was held in Lawrence on October 10. Instead, after participating in the walk with members of my support group, I was so impressed by what we experienced that I decided to extend a heartfelt thank you to all who made the event possible.

Everyone in my group was inspired by the outpouring of support for those diagnosed with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, but the 15 members of my group agreed that the most outstanding element of the event was the overwhelming abundance of cheer, hope, and unity.

The speaker opened the event by explaining the meaning of the pinwheel-shaped flowers of many colors that we carried: blue for those with Alzheimer's (including myself, having recently been diagnosed), yellow for the caregivers, purple for those who have lost a loved one to the disease, orange for those who support the cause, and one special white flower that is reserved for the first person who will one day be cured. The explanation for the white flower was the most poignant moment in the event for me, and others in my group also commented on it.

My granddaughter, Neah David, who appreciated the size of the crowd, attended with a friend, Abigail Swanson, who echoed our appreciation for the white flower when she said, "My grandma passed away with Alzheimer's six years ago. It was a really painful experience. I hate that there was nothing that could be done to stop or even slow it. That's why I'm so heartened to see so many people coming out for the walk."

Another aspect of the event we

all appreciated came from the members of the Sigma Kappa sorority, the KU cheerleaders, and the Jayhawk mascot, all of whom lined the entire walk and greeted us with balloons, bubbles, and cheers. (Sigma Kappa also raised \$30,000 for Alzheimer's research.)

The outpouring of cheers was not lost on us. My sister, Marsha Williams, who cares for her husband who has dementia, expressed her thoughts on the importance of hope and encouragement showered on us when she said, "I was so impressed with Lawrence's Walk to End Alzheimer's. The atmosphere was celebratory. That is so important for those who have been diagnosed with it, and for the families of those who struggle with watching their loved one's decline. It was such an uplifting experience! At least three members of my immediate family have dementia of some kind. It is good to be with people who are experiencing this together. And to be cheered on and applauded was wonderful, when the disease so often leaves people feeling unappreciated and lonely.

"So much in the world of dementia is struggle," she continued. "Caregivers struggle and those who have it struggle. The struggle is not just emotional. It requires so much time and patience, physical assistance, and giving up activities and dreams. It just feels so good to be cheered on by so many, to feel appreciated and cared for, and it is so promising to know that the Alzheimer's Association is supporting research to find a cure. Thank you to all those who made this possible.

"And thank you to everyone who cheered us on, including Sigma Kappa and the Alzheimer's Association. Dementia has touched the lives of almost everyone in some way. It's

difficult. It's sad. It's isolating. It's fatal, and it's incurable, at least for now. For people who reach age 55, the overall lifetime risk of developing dementia is 42 percent."

My son, Chelan David, who was also part of our group, said, "The first thing I noticed as I entered South Park was the uplifting energy surrounding the Alzheimer's walk. A large group of college students enthusiastically welcomed participants. It was a heartfelt community gathering. Families and friends came together to walk alongside loved ones, sharing moments of hope and support. There was also a tinge of sadness as those gathered remembered loved ones they had lost. When organizers announced that the event raised \$65,000, everybody raised their flowers, almost like a toast to a future without Alzheimer's.

"The walk was a powerful reminder that Alzheimer's affects not only those diagnosed but also their families, caregivers, and entire communities. On this day, everyone came together to raise awareness, honor those affected, and look forward to a future without Alzheimer's."

My youngest sister, Elaine Rolfs, shared her thoughts about watching her older siblings deal with aging. "I have concerns about the future, what shared genetics might predispose me to regarding my own health," she said.

As for hope, she said, "I worked in mental health, and I saw new treatments come out frequently. If people have difficulty with current options, if they keep the faith and hold on, new treatments that are more efficient for them could become available at any time. I have known this to be true for many medical conditions, and now I know this to be true for Alzheimer's. For example, people didn't believe me when I told them that my sister was diagnosed with a lab test because this is extremely new. Her treatments are cutting-edge. Keep the faith."

"Attitudes about your condition are important as well," she added, stressing that anxiety and depression worsen the condition, so she urges people to refuse to let Alzheimer's make them miserable and afraid, but to realize that peace and acceptance are options.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

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Alzheimer's

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

My daughter, Adonia David, was also touched by the people at the event. "One of the things that struck me most throughout the whole event was a feeling of joy and hope, and the knowledge that Alzheimer's is a disease that affects all of us, from the people who are facing it in their own lives to community members who care. As the walk began, music played, but it wasn't the somber, serious tone I might have expected, or even something calming or classical. It was bouncy and made you want to dance a little in place. The KU cheerleaders and Jayhawk mascot taking pictures added to the feeling of a hard game ahead, but one that could be won."

Adonia also noticed that some sorority members cheering us on carried flowers that signified their relationship to Alzheimer's. "Purple signified loss of a loved one, and I noticed a number of them carried these purple flowers, their lives also personally touched by it," she said.

My son-in-law, Brandon Munger, summed up the event succinctly when he said, "I saw a park full of people holding up flowers, one color going up at a time, each color representing a way in which this disease has touched our lives, whether we were the ones with Alzheimer's, whether we were the ones caring for an individual with Alzheimer's, or had lost someone."

"All of us affected and all of us standing to create this beautiful sea of pinwheel flowers spinning in the wind, united by our relationship to

the disease, all of us united by our relationship to each other. In a single moment, we could all have sympathy and empathy for what each of us understood. Alzheimer's manifests differently in every person and every family; we are all at different stages of the journey, and yet still, in one moment, we were all united as a field of flowers and unique as individuals. It was a very powerful visual.

"But we were there to march boldly onward to a cure. Others lined our path to cheer us on and encourage us onward. Those sorority sisters and KU cheerleaders did not know us and will not know us, and yet it felt as if their cheers were not just for our family members dealing with dementia but for me as an individual, as a caregiver, and I too felt the enormous emotion put forward on our behalf, a small gesture that was very real in the moment.

"Later, when the walk had ended and the park had returned to its



Walkers gather at South Park in Lawrence on October 10 for the Alzheimer's Association Annual Walk to End Alzheimer's.

normal state, downtown Lawrence still had flecks of purple sprinkles in the landscape, and they too formed a bond and a reminder that this fight was not being fought alone nor was it being fought on one front. I will not call them strangers, yet I do not know their names, simply because they and we were wearing purple and holding

flowers, united yet unique."

So thank you, Alzheimer's Association, KU's cheerleaders and mascot, Sigma Kappa, those who are living with dementia, their caregivers, family and friends, and everyone else who gave their time, energy, and money to make this event such an encouraging one



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MY PET WORLD



My kitten turned 1 and suddenly she's a handful

CATHY M. ROSENTHAL

Dear Cathy: My one-year-old Siamese rescue cat, Lilibet, has developed some rambunctious behavior. She follows me everywhere but constantly bites at my feet, tries to trip me on the stairs (I have a broken foot to prove it), and climbs the window screens. I am careful not to let her get outside. Right now, she doesn't settle down enough to sleep with me.

She has always been the perfect kitten. Is this typical behavior for a cat her age, and how long will it last? She is eating fine and has no litter box problems. — Ann, Plainville, Connecticut

Dear Ann: Lilibet has entered the feline equivalent of the teenage years. At one year old, she may look like a grown cat, but she still has plenty of youthful energy and a strong drive to chase, pounce, climb and explore. Young cats commonly engage in predatory-style play, and moving feet can become especially tempting targets.

You can redirect much of that energy into more appropriate activities. Try giving Lilibet several short, vigorous play sessions throughout the day using a wand or fishing-pole-style toy that she can chase, leap after and eventually "catch." Letting her complete that sequence is important. Puzzle feeders, climbing structures and rotating toys can also give her more ways to use her brain and body, which help wear her out.

I would pay particular attention to the foot biting and weaving around your ankles because, as your

broken foot demonstrates, this has become a safety issue. Before you start walking, toss a few treats or a favorite toy across the room, or use a wand toy held well away from your body to engage her somewhere else. Then walk away once her attention is focused on the treat or toy. Over time, this can help shift her attention away from your feet and onto more appropriate things to chase.

For the screen climbing, give her a tall, sturdy cat tree placed near a window to satisfy the urge to climb. You may need to temporarily block access to screens while she learns that there are better places to exercise her climbing skills.

As for when she will settle down, there isn't a birthday when someone flips the "calm cat" switch. But you should see her energy level gradually change as she matures. Rather than waiting for Lilibet to outgrow the behavior, help her learn where all that enthusiasm belongs.

Don't worry if she isn't ready to sleep with you. A cat who follows you around the house is already telling you she enjoys being near you. She may eventually decide your bed is the perfect place to sleep, or she may simply have other ideas about bedtime. (Cats are nocturnal and it can take time for some cats to get the message that nighttime is for sleeping.)

Because this represents a noticeable change in behavior, however, mention it to your veterinarian, especially if the biting seems aggressive rather than playful or you notice

any other physical or behavioral changes. Pain and medical problems can sometimes contribute to sudden changes in behavior.

For now, though, it sounds like you may have a healthy young cat with a serious case of the zoomies. Your job is to give those zoomies somewhere safer to land.

- Cathy M. Rosenthal is a long-time animal advocate, author, columnist and pet expert who has more than 25 years in the animal welfare field. Send your pet questions, stories and tips to cathy@petpundit.com. Please include your name, city, and state. You can follow her @cathymrosenthal.

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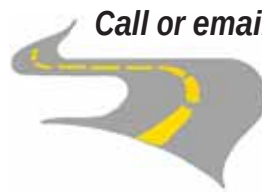
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PROTEIN POWER



A high-protein, fall-friendly chili

CLAUDE AIKEN

(Editor's Note: As we age, getting enough protein becomes increasingly important for maintaining muscle strength, supporting overall health, and staying active. Our new Protein Power column will feature delicious, easy-to-prepare recipes designed to help older adults meet their daily protein needs.)

This hearty chili gets a nutritional boost from lean ground turkey, beans, and pumpkin. The pumpkin adds richness and a subtle sweetness without making the chili taste like dessert.

Pumpkin Turkey Chili

Serves: 6

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1½ pounds lean ground turkey
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (15-ounce) can pure pumpkin — not pumpkin pie filling
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed

1 (15-ounce) can kidney beans, drained and rinsed

1 (14½-ounce) can diced tomatoes

2 cups low-sodium chicken broth

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2 tablespoons chili powder

2 teaspoons ground cumin

1 teaspoon smoked paprika

½ teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

Cayenne pepper, optional, to taste

Directions

1. Brown the turkey. Heat the olive oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the ground turkey and cook until browned, breaking it apart as it cooks.

2. Add the vegetables. Add the diced onion and cook for 4–5 minutes, until softened. Add the garlic and cook for another 30 seconds.

3. Build the chili. Stir in the pumpkin, black beans, kidney beans, diced tomatoes, and chicken broth,

AI-GENERATED IMAGE



Pumpkin Turkey Chili

then add the tomato paste.

4. Add the spices. Stir in the chili powder, cumin, smoked paprika, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Add cayenne for extra heat, if you like.

5. Simmer. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 25–30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

6. Taste and adjust. Add additional chili powder, salt, pepper, or cayenne as desired.

Serving Suggestions

Top each bowl with a spoonful of plain Greek yogurt, reduced-fat shredded cheddar cheese, diced avocado, sliced green onions, fresh cilantro, or pumpkin seeds.

tro, or pumpkin seeds.

Why It's Protein-Packed

Lean turkey, black beans, and kidney beans provide substantial protein, while the pumpkin adds fiber and nutrients. Greek yogurt can provide an additional protein boost when used as a topping.

Nutrition values will vary depending on the specific turkey, beans, broth, and toppings used. Check package labels for the most accurate protein, calorie, and sodium information.

Make-ahead tip: The chili can be refrigerated and reheated, and it also freezes well.

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RICK STEVES' EUROPE



Climbing for Europe's best views and a broader perspective

RICK STEVES

From church domes to bell towers and fanciful rooftops to sky-piercing monuments, Europe is full of climbable structures. While most lead to impressive views, the best also offer insights into the historical, artistic, and religious thinking of their times. These are some of my favorites.

In Milan, a highlight is strolling the rooftop of the Duomo—the city's cathedral and the third-largest church in Europe. After taking the stairs or elevator to the top, visitors can climb up and down the roof's multiple terraces, wandering among gargoyles, statues, and frilly spires.

The roof features 135 lovingly-decorated spires that are similar, yet different. Walking among them, it's inspiring to think that every detail—each flower, saint's face, and so on—is an individual work of art carved out of pink marble centuries ago by artists who believed that few would ever see it. Their art was a gift for God to enjoy from the heavens.

Another worthwhile climb is to the top of the dome at Florence's Duomo. Though it was built when Gothic style dominated Europe, the Florentines decided not to cap their cathedral with a spire—but left it instead with a gaping hole. (They bet that technology would soon catch up with the city's vision, and the Duomo could be completed with a dome instead.) In 1420, Filippo Brunelleschi won the job and built the dome that kicked off the architectural Renaissance.

Brunelleschi's dome, which inspired the likes of the US Capitol

and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, showed how art and science could be combined to make beauty. Today, it rewards those who ascend the 463 steep, narrow steps with glorious views. Along the way, climbers are treated to a close-up of the dome's Last Judgment ceiling painting, a grand view of the cathedral's interior, and a look at Brunelleschi's "dome-within-a-dome" construction.

A thoroughly different—but equally spectacular—dome climb is the hike to the top of the Reichstag in Berlin. Completed in the late 19th century, the German parliament building was gutted by a mysterious fire and World War II bombs, then stood like a ghost, barely repaired, through the Cold War. But after German reunification, this historic ruin was rebuilt with a modern element: a striking glass dome.

A walkway winds all the way to the top, providing 360-degree views. Climbers see forests of skyscrapers

DOMINIC ARIZONA BONIUCELLI, RICK STEVES' EUROPE



As you climb the dome of the Reichstag, you circle a cone of mirrors that point down, directing your vision toward where legislators gather.

interspersed with historic sights, such as the nearby Brandenburg Gate and the Berlin Cathedral's massive dome.

But for Germans, mindful of their

dark 20th-century history, the view that matters most is inside, where a cone of mirrors points down, direct-

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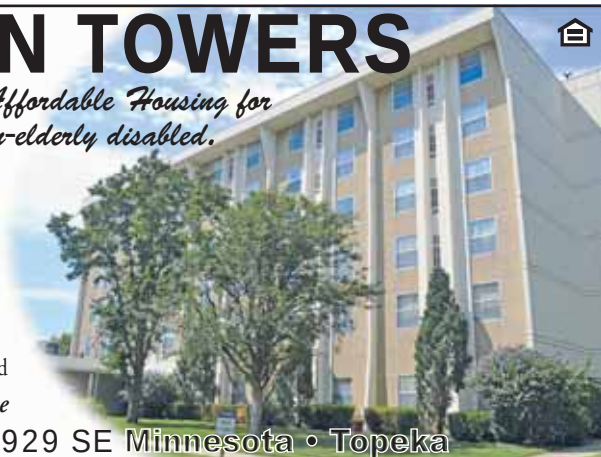
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Rick Steves

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

ing your vision toward where legislators gather. The architecture comes with a poignant message: The people are determined to keep a wary eye on their government.

Ascending the Eiffel Tower is one of Europe's great travel thrills, period. Built for the 1889 World's Fair, the project celebrated the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and demonstrated that France had the wealth, knowledge, and can-do spirit to erect a structure taller than anything the world had ever seen.

Even with a reservation, many stand in long lines to take the elevators up and down. For hardy visitors, it's cheaper and less crowded to climb the stairs. It's quite a hike—720 steps up to the second level (the top level is only accessible via elevator). But as you ascend, you get an up-close look at Gustave Eiffel's amazing engineering.

Perhaps the most memorable climb I've done in Europe was just 28 steps—on my knees—up Rome's Scala Santa (Holy Stairs) next to the Church of San Giovanni in Laterano. In AD 326, Emperor Constantine's mother brought home what was reputed to be the marble steps of Pontius Pilate's residence in Jerusalem. Jesus is said to have climbed these steps on the day he was sen-

tenced to death. Today the steps are covered with wooden slats to protect the marble, but they're spotted with glass-covered holes to show stains from Jesus' blood on the original stairs.

For centuries, pilgrims have ascended the Scala Santa on their knees while reciting a litany of prayers. And for decades, I watched them from a staircase on the side. But finally, a voice inside me said "Do it!" and I tried the climb myself. With my knees screaming, weathered faithful struggling up the staircase beside me, and a fresco of a crucified Christ high above, I climbed each step, learning about both the bone structure of my legs and the value of pain when praying.

Because they're so popular, many of these sights require reservations in advance. But for the savvy traveler who's up for going up, these climbs are worth it. From ascending the first Renaissance dome to climbing steps on your knees, a little exertion can mean a big payoff in your travels.

- Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

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JUMBLE ANSWERS

Jumbles: DUNCE, DRESS, FLAVOR, THEORY

Answers: The vintage sweater with so many buttons was -- OLD-FASTENED

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BOGGLE ANSWERS

APE, HARE, MULE, MOLE, HORSE, WHALE, SNAKE, MOOSE, MOUSE, ANTELOPE

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MY ANSWER



Sin can impair physical and mental well-being

BILLY GRAHAM

Q: Is it true that sinful living can have a negative effect on a person's physical and mental well-being? I grew up with a mother who had it all, but she was a bear to live with. I've tried to unravel just how this may have played out in her life, but now that she is gone, I hope she found peace before leaving this world. I should have prayed for her more. – I.M.

A: Sin and the sense of inner unworthiness impair physical and mental well-being. The sense of physical impurity and physical immorality, the sense of hatred directed toward our fellow men, the awareness of our

own inadequacy and frustration, and our inability to achieve the goals to which we aspire—these are some reasons for physical and mental illness.

The sense of guilt and sin that natural man carries within renders him unfit for the performance of his duties; it renders him sick in both mind and body. It's no accident that Jesus combined healing with His preaching and teaching when He was on Earth. There is a very real relationship between the life of the spirit and the health of the body and mind.

Those who have read the Bible know the transformation that took place in the life of a man named Saul

when he encountered Jesus Christ. His heart was changed, and he was transformed from being one of the most destructive enemies of Christ to one of His mightiest advocates—the beloved Apostle Paul. Equally dramatic changes in human personalities take place still today.

We can never pray for too many people, asking the Lord for an outpouring of God's Spirit upon a willful and unrepentant soul. The ministry of intercessory prayer is so important, and it's never too late to begin praying for someone today.

- This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.

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A woman with short grey hair, wearing a red bandana, glasses, a blue denim jacket over a green patterned shirt, dark pants, and black rubber boots with blue trim, is sitting on a wooden bench. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. To her left is a small brown goat with a black collar. To her right is a larger black and white goat. The background is a wooded area with bare trees and a blue sky.

Thank you **ROBIN**

For inspiring us to deliver more comprehensive heart care.

Robin Goff was walking through the hospital lobby when she began to feel a little off. One of our volunteers suspected Robin might be having a heart attack and got her to the emergency department just in time. From there, the LMH Health Heart Center's board-certified cardiologists performed a procedure that saved her life.

 **LMH Health**

lmh.org/Gratitude