

The Bluestem Post



Getting real about aging

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*Kidron Bethel Village
leadership transition*

COMMUNITY
A ministry of caring

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On the cover: Kidron Bethel Village resident, Eleanor Kliewer, and Life Enrichment Associate, Cortnie Michaelson, read together.
Photo by Gavin Peters.

LIVE WELL WITH BLUESTEM COMMUNITIES

Bluestem Communities is a nonprofit organization in south central Kansas that serves seniors through various living options, care settings and care-centered services. Bluestem Communities locations include Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton, Schowalter Villa in Hesston and Bluestem PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) in McPherson and Hutchinson.

MISSION STATEMENT

Bluestem Communities' mission is to have a positive impact on quality of life by promoting lifelong wellness, purpose, choice, genuine connection and personalized care with Christian compassion.



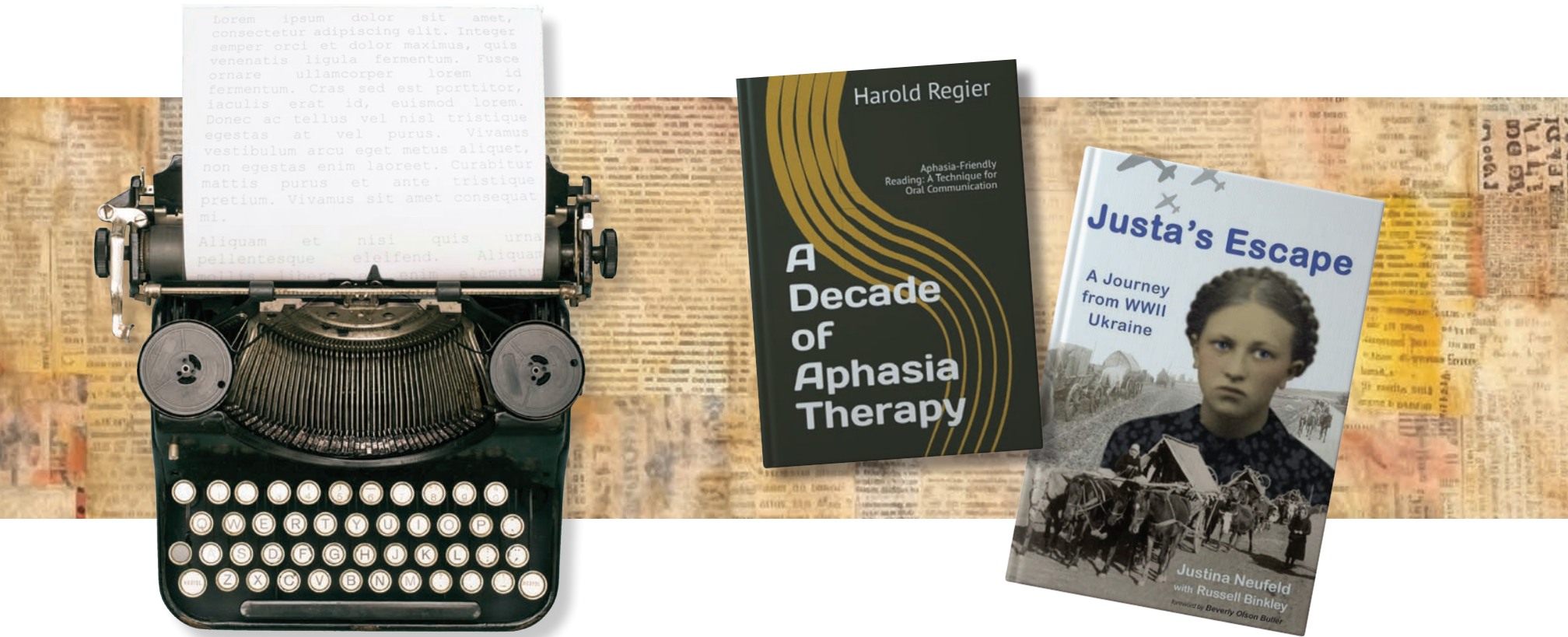
BLUESTEM PACE
KIDRON BETHEL VILLAGE
SCHOWALTER VILLA

To learn more about Bluestem Communities' services and locations visit bluestemks.org

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A story from every corner

Every lived experience offers opportunity for important meaning and lessons to be gleaned. It can become an even more rewarding experience when sharing it with others.

Two independent living residents at Bluestem Communities' Kidron Bethel Village life plan campus understand that reward first-hand, and recently received recognition for sharing their life experiences through the books they have written.

Justina Neufeld is the author of *Justa's Escape: A Journey from World War II Ukraine* (Resource Publications, May 2022), which was one of 15 books honored with the 2023 Kansas Notable Book award by the State Library of Kansas. Harold Regier is the author of *A Decade of Aphasia Therapy – Aphasia-Friendly Reading: A Technique for Oral Communication* (self-published, 2021), and presented about the technique he created at the 2023 annual convention

of American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in November.

While the authors' subject matter are vastly different, both are memoirs – recalling very particular parts of their own lives – and Regier's also ventures into research-based documentation.

JUSTA'S ESCAPE BY JUSTINA NEUFELD

Neufeld first documented her family's 1943 escape from World War II-ravaged Ukraine in *A Family Torn Apart* (Pandora Press, 2003), which chronicled the story of how the life she knew crumbled and was rebuilt in the war's aftermath. Nearly 20 years later in 2022, the story was released again as *Justa's Escape*, a re-working written in free verse for a middle school-age audience.

The idea of writing her story for a younger audience was first presented to Justina while she was writing *A Family Torn Apart*. A friend's daughter,

who was a sixth grade teacher in Wichita, asked Justina to come share her story with the class shortly after they had finished reading Anne Frank's story.

"I said I couldn't do it," Justina said. "I was writing my book and didn't want to expend my energy talking about it while I was also writing it. However, I had a story about a slip my mother had made me from a pillowcase, and I would be willing to share that story. While I was reading, a little girl sitting in the front started crying. She later told me that her parents were getting divorced and she didn't know where she was going to live. She saw herself in my story of being a refugee."

Justina's friend was persistent in encouraging her to write her story as "one that sixth-graders can read." "When I finally sat down to write it, it flowed so easily," she said.

continued on next page

Neufeld knows that sharing this piece of world history with younger audiences is important to educate and inform them about history. Likewise, as her friend Beverley Olson Buller shares in the foreword to *Justa's Escape*: "Books have long provided young readers with a way to vicariously experience pain, sadness and hardship. [This book] does that for young readers today."

Neufeld says she was surprised that her book had been nominated for the Kansas Notable Book award, and she was honored to win. She enjoyed meeting other authors during the award activities in Topeka, Kan., in September.

The 80 years that have passed since Justina was a girl in Ukraine haven't numbed the pain of the losses and trauma she endured. She still feels the emotions both when she shares her story, and when she reflects on the war happening now in her home country.



Justina Neufeld with her award-winning book. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.

"It's been very hard," Neufeld said about the current Ukrainian war in a September 16, 2023, interview with Kansas Public Radio in Lawrence, Kan. "I hear about the cities mentioned – every place I have been. It's horrifying; the fear they live with gives me goosebumps."

A DECADE OF APHASIA THERAPY BY HAROLD REGIER

Regier wrote *A Decade of Aphasia Therapy* to chronicle the journey of navigating his wife Rosella's aphasia diagnosis following a stroke in 2009, and the successful communication technique he discovered along the way.

Aphasia is the loss of the ability to understand or express speech. For 13 years, the Regiers navigated a unique journey full of experimentation, discovery and dedication. Rosella ultimately passed away in May 2022.

"This is not a biography," Regier wrote in the book's introduction. "It is the story of a new life experience that takes us into the mystery of aphasia. I do not have an academic or clinical understanding of aphasia. But I have a sense of how aphasia affects day-to-day living. And I

understand the challenge and struggle of the journey of continuing a loving and creative relationship through this new reality. And communication is one of the keys to maintaining that relationship."

Aphasia-friendly reading is, in short, a reading strategy Regier developed that helped Rosella with oral reading, and a way for the couple to continue to connect with one another. The technique requires writing and formatting stories or anecdotes using very short three- to five-word sentences that can be read alternately by the aphasia client and a co-reader. As people with aphasia have difficulty finding the correct words to express, the simple, short sentences allow for greater accuracy and fluency.

For many years, Rosella participated in speech therapy through Wichita State University's (WSU) Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic, where masters-level students majoring in communication disorders studied aphasia clients and provided therapy for them. Regier shared with clinicians about his aphasia-friendly readings. Dr. Erin O'Bryan, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, a certified speech language pathologist and assistant professor in the WSU Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, continues to test the technique with other aphasia clients. Katie Strong, a professor and researcher at Central Michigan University (Mt. Pleasant) is also studying the technique. The professors collaborated on a presentation at the November ASHA convention in Boston, in which they invited Regier to present his story for how he discovered and created the aphasia-friendly reading technique. O'Bryan, Strong and Regier have also co-authored an article for the journal "Aphasiology" that has been approved for publication.

"I am honored that this technique has gotten into the national research," Regier said. "I will continue to be an advocate for educating others on the underdiagnosed and underexplained disorder of aphasia, and will always be happy to share what I learned in my journey with Rosella." **TBP**



Harold and Rosella Regier do an aphasia-friendly reading. Photo provided.



Dawn Yoder Harms
Chaplain, Kidron Bethel Village

Navigating change

Change is a part of life. We start a new job or perhaps move into retirement. We relocate to a new community. A new family member joins us. A loved one dies. Our bodies continually remind us of the inevitability of change: we are born, we live and grow, we die.

Sometimes change comes suddenly; sometimes it creeps up without our noticing. Sometimes we choose it; sometimes it shows up without invitation. Often, we resist it because we're more comfortable remaining where we are than stepping out into the unknown.

Change is no stranger to Bluestem Communities. The pandemic ushered in changes that none had imagined. And we continue to live into change as we adjust to newly renovated spaces, new neighbors and caregivers, new leadership, new ways of being community.

Change is part of life, whatever the season. The question is, how do we choose to navigate it?

The process of navigating change is called "transition." The work of transition involves reorienting our hearts and minds as we adjust to new realities. What are we learning along the way? How might we help shape the new reality that is unfolding? This work takes time and requires patience with ourselves and others.

Throughout my own experiences with transition, I've found it helpful to remember:

- **Transition begins with an ending.** Something has ended to make way for the new. With ending comes grief, as well as opportunity to celebrate the good that has been. At this point in the transition process, it has been helpful for me to

ask: What am I grieving? How might I celebrate the good that has been?

- **The space between the ending and a new beginning can sometimes feel like wandering in the wilderness.** We're not always sure where we're headed or how we'll get there, and anxiety may be our companion. This is a time to listen deeply to ourselves: What am I needing to release? What remains steady in me even when everything around me is changing? How am I being invited to grow through this time of unknowing?
- **We grow into new beginnings** as we release our grip on what has been and open our hearts to what is becoming; as we commit ourselves to curiosity and growth; as we generously share our gifts, including laughter and insight and care for others; as we ask: How might I add my positive energy to what is unfolding?

While transition brings challenge, it provides unique opportunity for growth in trust, courage, and clarity about what matters most. Along the way, we will find hope emerging. Our work? To watch for glimmers of new life that are on the way; to name it when we see it; to joyfully join into what is unfolding. **TBP**



Improve wellness with group exercise classes

Bluestem Wellness Centers has options for a variety of workout interests and every fitness level. Members of Bluestem Wellness Centers can access the full lineup of fitness amenities and programming, which includes a variety of land-based and pool-based group exercise classes to fit whatever wellness goals you might be looking for – improve your health, fitness or socialization.

Residents of Bluestem Communities are automatically Bluestem Wellness Centers members, and those from the wider community can purchase membership as well. Membership includes access to both wellness center locations in Hesston and North Newton. Take a closer look at the group exercise classes Bluestem Wellness Centers offers.

LAND CLASSES

Adaptive Yoga – Gentle yoga poses for strength, balance and flexibility. Prepare to walk taller, breathe better and strengthen your core, as well as relieve stress and become more mindful. In Hesston: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday at 9:30 a.m. In North Newton: Tuesday, Thursday at 8 a.m.

Body Basics – Moderate-intensity exercises to improve strength, coordination and balance. In North Newton: Monday, Wednesday at 7:30 a.m.

Cardio Kickboxing – High-intensity, challenging training program that incorporates punching, kicking and blocking to boost your energy, strength and more! In Hesston: Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

Fusion Fit – High-intensity interval training, full body workout that includes a variety of cardio formats, core stabilizers and strength training moves. In Hesston: Monday at 5:30 p.m.

Modified Strength Training – Chair-based resistance training using stretch bands and dumbbells. In North Newton: Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 1 p.m.

Silver Sneakers Class – A variety of exercises using hand weights, elastic tubing, balls and a chair to improve muscular strength, range of movement and activities for daily living. In Hesston: Monday, Friday at 9:30 a.m.

AQUATIC CLASSES

Just My Speed – Gentle, low-impact class to help improve range of motion, flexibility, and heart and muscle conditioning. Those with types of arthritis, Parkinson’s and new or deconditioned exercisers are especially encouraged to attend. In Hesston: Tuesday, Thursday at 9 a.m. In North Newton: Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 8:40 a.m.

Splash – A higher-intensity workout designed to strengthen upper and lower body as well as the abdominals. In Hesston: Tuesday, Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

Wake Up! – Combines strength training, cardio conditioning and movements for improved flexibility. In Hesston: Monday, Wednesday, Friday at 8 a.m.

Learn more about Bluestem Wellness Center group exercise classes and other fitness options at bluestemwellness.com. **TBP**

SAVE THE DATE!
APRIL 6, 2024

**PACE
RACE 5K**
..... Run/Walk

Residents at Kidron Bethel Village participate in Strength Training group class.
Photo by Tyler Stutzman.



Getting real about aging

Aging is one of the most natural life processes. By definition, every person of every age is in a constant state of “aging.” However, talking about aging with those who are experiencing it most acutely can sometimes be a sensitive subject. Being honest about how you experience aging with yourself and those who care about you most can alleviate stress and extend the time you are able to live independently.

Be honest about the aging process. As we get older, our bodies and physical needs change. Don’t be ashamed about the ways your body may feel or perform differently than what you have been used to.

Have conversations about your needs and preferences. Share with loved ones, friends and support systems about the things you need to be at your best. This can include health, diet and social habits. To determine what your needs and preferences might be, consider what you like about your current lifestyle or what daily activities bring you happiness and fulfillment.

Have a plan for various scenarios. You don’t always control how aging affects you. Make a list of “what if” scenarios and an action plan for dealing with each of those scenarios. For example, if you become incapable of making your own decisions, who will take care of you? This will ensure that your loved ones know what your wishes are even if you are no longer able to communicate about them.

Focus on what you can do. Don’t become discouraged if you are no longer able to do some of the things you did when you were younger. Instead, find the positives of life and focus on the things that you love that you are able to do. Let other people know what brings you joy so they can help foster those things for you as well.

Widen your circle of support. It’s common to think that you only need to rely on one person to walk with you through the aging process. However, you shouldn’t rely solely on one person. What happens if something were to happen to them? Build a well-rounded circle of support through family, friends, your faith community and social connections who can help you physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

Prioritize your needs. You may feel like you’re being a burden on your loved ones if you ask for help, but you must be honest with yourself and remember that we all need help sometimes. Reach out to those you trust to help with specific things like taking you to appointments or getting groceries. Also remember that living at Bluestem Communities offers you respite from home maintenance responsibilities from the smallest tasks of changing a lightbulb to yard maintenance and more. **TBP**



Are you 55 and better?

Bluestem Communities has partnered with our neighbors, Bethel College and Hesston College, to offer Bluestem U, a lifelong learning experience for those age 55 and better. Join us Spring and Fall 2024 to enjoy the college experience with all of the fun but none of the homework!



Learn more and register at **BluestemU.org** or call 316-836-4846.



Kidron Bethel Village leadership transition



Linda Peters



Jennifer Traglia

Bluestem Communities’ Kidron Bethel Village life plan community has begun an executive director transition that will be finalized at the end of the year.

After serving Kidron Bethel Village for nine years as executive director, Linda Peters plans to retire December 31, 2023. During her tenure, Peters has guided the community through some monumental changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the \$10.7 million Live Forward capital project that affected about 50,000 square feet of new and existing spaces. She also helped lead Kidron Bethel Village to the highest five-star quality ratings with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and has led the staff through several deficiency-free surveys, including throughout the pandemic.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to have served Kidron Bethel Village as its executive director,” said Peters. “It’s been a privilege for me to have been a part of an exceptional team of individuals who are passionate about the work they do. I’ve grown and learned so much over these last nine years. I will miss being a part of this team, but I do look forward to beginning a new chapter of my life.”

Succeeding Peters as executive director is Jennifer Tragalia, who began in the role in early October and has been working closely with Peters throughout the transition.

Traglia comes to Bluestem Communities with vast leadership experience in a variety of health care consultant and ambassador roles, including several working with an older population. She holds a master’s degree in gerontology from Northeastern Illinois University (Chicago) and completed undergraduate work at Michigan State University’s (East Lansing) Eli Broad College of Business, Hotel, Restaurant & Institutional Management. She is a certified as an Advanced Elder Mediator through the Winnebago Conflict Resolution Center (Oshkosh, Wisc.), First & Last Steps Advanced Care Planning Facilitator, and a CARES Dementia Specialist.

“The Bluestem Communities culture was an immediate draw for me,” said Traglia. “It’s filled with genuine, caring and collaborative people. The organization’s openness to grow and evolve while keeping a focus on cultivating vibrant community initiatives is a model for the industry.” [TBP](#)

Family donates bench in gratitude

The family of Bob Young, a resident of Schowalter Villa who passed away earlier this year, donated a bench in his memory and in gratitude for the care he received at Schowalter Villa. “Although our loved one was only at Schowalter Villa for a short time, the love and care he received in his final months were more important to us than anything,” said Bob’s wife and children. “We knew he could be taken care of physically, but the emotional support he, as well as we, received couldn’t have felt more warm or supportive. The greatest thing we noticed and loved was that every person knew him, not just his individual nurses, but also staff in housekeeping, dining services, office personnel and medical teams. We wanted to do something to give back to the community that cared for our husband and father, and also provide something for future residents that he would have loved and used himself. Bob loved the outdoors and loved conversation and we feel this bench represents those two important aspects of who he was.” Pictured are Bob Young’s wife, Judy, (back), daughter Staci Richardson (front right) and grandson Brandon Hansen. [TBP](#)



A ministry of caring

Bluestem Communities is committed to making a positive impact on each resident’s and participant’s quality of life. As a non-profit, that commitment positively impacts care regardless of what personal matters they may face.

“Individuals can have all of their life and finances in order, and sometimes things still happen that are outside of their control that have a major impact,” said Derek Yoder, Bluestem Communities Vice President of Fund Advancement. “The benevolent funds are such an important ministry of caring for others. We are grateful to the many who embrace this ministry and support the benevolent funds.”

Each branch of Bluestem Communities has its own benevolent fund to assist residents and participants who, due to unforeseen circumstances, are unable to cover the full cost of their care – the Bluestem PACE Good Neighbor Fund, the Kidron Bethel Village Health Care Benevolent Fund, and the Schowalter Villa Good Samaritan Caring Fund.

More than 800 households and businesses give annually to Bluestem Communities benevolent funds and support residents and participants. Visionaries – those who give \$1,000 or more each year – are 280 of those households and businesses. Many others give less formally by attending and participating in events in which proceeds benefit the benevolent funds. It is the role of the Bluestem Communities Fund Advancement department to foster relationships with donors and educate them about the needs of residents and participants. Friends of Kidron at

Kidron Bethel Village and Villa Partners at Schowalter Villa are volunteer groups comprised of campus residents and members of the wider communities that help plan and facilitate events to support their campus’s benevolent fund.

“It is a joy to me to thoughtfully select where I would like to give some of my resources,” shared one donor who is also an independent living resident at Bluestem Communities. “The benevolent funds provide in areas of great need, and I feel my heart warmed by giving to the place I also call home.”

Support Bluestem Communities residents and participants by giving to benevolent funds at bluestemks.org/giving, and attend fun community events throughout the year. Follow Bluestem Communities on Facebook to stay informed about these events and more. [TBP](#)

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Villa Partners garage sales - *monthly*
- Kidron Bethel Village garage sales – *once or twice per year*
- PACE Race - *April*
- Schowalter Villa Garden Party - *June*
- Kidron Bethel Village Fourth of July Fireworks – *July*
- Bluestem PACE Squeals and Froth – *September*
- Villa Partners Home Sweet Hesston events – *September or October*
- Kidron Bethel Village Country Breakfast - *October*
- Bluestem Gala – *November*
- Kidron Bethel Village Holiday Market - *December*



Left: Participants at the Bluestem PACE Race. Center: Vendors serve treats at Kidron Bethel Village’s Fourth of July Fireworks event. Right: Community members enjoy the Villa Partners-sponsored community meal at Home Sweet Hesston.

An orchestra on the prairie



The communities in which Bluestem Communities calls home are well rounded. Situated in the rural areas of south central Kansas that boast a strong agricultural and manufacturing presence, the area is also rich in the fine arts.

One such fine arts organization that has been a longtime part of the wider community is the Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra (NMKSO).

NMKSO was started in 1956 as the Newton Civic Chorus and Orchestra by Elvera Voth, a Bethel College (North Newton, Kan.) choral director and current Bluestem Communities resident, who needed a large orchestra for her choral oratorio performances. Over the years, the group evolved and became more of a stand-alone orchestra. Now in its 67th season, NMKSO presents classical music performed by local musicians.

“This community and the surrounding area are so musically rich,” said Jill Gatz, NMKSO general manager. “Many people

participate in music through high school and college and it remains very important to them even if they haven’t made it their career. Being part of musical groups develops a camaraderie that is very meaningful. Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra gives musicians an opportunity to continue making music with others.”

The orchestra’s seasons run from fall through summer. The 2023-24 season includes three classics concerts and a summer chamber music concert, as well as school outreach and special events. Each classics concert features 60 to 65 musicians. NMKSO is directed by Dr. Chris Westover-Muñoz, now in his second full season. Westover-Muñoz previously taught three years at Bethel College (North Newton, Kan.), and now serves as Associate Professor of Music and Director of Bands at Denison University (Granville, Ohio).

continued on next page

Welcome home to Bluestem Communities.



See available independent living home options here:
bluestemks.org/availablehomes



**KIDRON BETHEL VILLAGE
SCHOWALTER VILLA**
888-388-7445 | bluestemks.org

An orchestra on the prairie continued

Because many of the musicians have careers outside of music and performance, the orchestra has implemented a festival format for concerts and rehearsals, making it easier for community musicians to commit to. Musicians work on their music on their own in the weeks leading up to a concert. Full concert rehearsals then begin the Friday evening prior to a Sunday afternoon concert.

“Having a place in their own community for musicians to perform is meaningful, and it’s also meaningful for audiences,” said Westover-Muñoz. “The community is what makes Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra work. It’s your friends and neighbors you see playing in the orchestra and also that you see in the audience. It’s high-quality

and welcoming. The fine arts are alive and well in Harvey County.”

Concerts are typically held at Memorial Hall on the Bethel College campus or the Newton High School Auditorium. Season tickets and single tickets are available at nmkso.org, or two weeks prior to concerts at Faith and Life Bookstore in Newton. [TBP](#)

REMAINING CONCERTS IN THE 2023-24 SEASON ARE:

- January 28, 2024, 4 p.m. – Winter Classics Concert
- April 21, 2024, 4 p.m. – Spring Classics Concert
- June 9, 2024, 3 p.m. – Summer Chamber Music



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ELLEN
Resident of Bluestem Communities



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*“I feel like I am in heaven. I didn’t
know care like this existed.”*

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