

The Bluestem Post



Turning skills for a new generation.

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On the cover: Kidron Bethel Village resident John Buckner has been mentoring Bethel College students in the art of the wood turning for about 18 years. During the current school year, he is working with four international students, pictured with him. Photo provided.

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.



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

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Turning skills for a new generation



Buckner and a Bethel College student demonstrate the process of making a pen for Bluestem Communities Vice President of Advancement Derek Yoder. Photo provided.

When John Buckner retired from a career teaching music at both the high school and collegiate levels, he thought his days of teaching were through. More than 30 years later, he still teaches on a regular basis, though the subject matter has changed.

Buckner, an independent living resident at Kidron Bethel Village, is notorious in the area and at neighboring Bethel College for mentoring Bethel College students in woodturning, a specialized branch of woodworking in which pieces are created as they turn on an axis of rotation on a wood lathe. Over the 18 years he has lived at Kidron Bethel Village, he has mentored 17 Bethel College students in the art of woodturning, creating not just beautiful and functional wood art, but also connections that create bridges

between the generations and inspire younger people of the digital age to pursue the traditional art form.

"I'm always amazed that these busy college students want to come here to do this, but there is something so fun and fulfilling about being creative," said Buckner. "They seem to get a great deal of joy out of doing it."

Buckner's foray into mentoring budding woodworkers did not begin at Kidron Bethel Village, but in the 13 years immediately following his retirement when he lived in western Nebraska and first encountered high school students who were interested in learning the art.

"My dad was a very fine woodworker," said Buckner. "He had me turning on a lathe - even though I had to stand on a box - by the time I was seven, so it's

been a hobby for me for a very long time."

When he moved to Kidron Bethel Village, Buckner knew he wanted something to keep him busy and decided to set up a woodshop for himself in his garage. He reached out to Bethel College's student employment coordinator to find students who could help clean up his garage and get it set for being a shop.

"After I was set up and working in the shop, I realized it would be nice to have somebody do the clean up work for me while I did the artistic work on the lathe," said Buckner. "I hired a second set of students - a pair of twins - to do that for me and soon I was teaching them how to work the lathe. They ended up spending four years with me, and it's all just grown from there."

continued on next page

Turning skills continued

As students graduate and move on, new students come in to take their place, with the availability for the experience spreading by word of mouth alone. Buckner has mentored students from all over the world, including his current group of four, who are all international students.

“So far, all of my students have been beginners,” said Buckner. “I don’t think any of them have had any kind of shop or woodworking experience. So we start from scratch and by the end of four years, they are doing some pretty remarkable work. You learn to turn wood by turning wood, not by somebody hovering over you and telling you what you’re doing wrong. You have to make mistakes and figure out what tools work best at what time.”

John Buckner and Friends, as they are known in the artistic world, are featured in five galleries throughout the state of Kansas from Garden City to Emporia. They also do custom projects as requested, including a current project of making “legacy pens” for Bluestem Communities Fund Advancement to gift to donors who have made Kidron Bethel Village part of their estate plan.

Buckner recognizes the mutuality of the relationships he builds with the college students, noting that he learns from them even as they are learning an art form from him. He is grateful for the connections that continue beyond a student’s time at Bethel College.

“I chose to live at Kidron Bethel Village because I have no family, and I thought it would be a good place to be when it comes time to needing someone to push me around in a wheelchair,” said Buckner. “The students I work with become like my family during the years we have together. One of the most striking things to me has been how invariably nice they are. I’m 91 years old and these kids are so solicitous with me. They are patient when I don’t think straight. They always contact me before they come here, and mostly they keep coming. They are so busy with their lives, but they continually make time for this. This whole arrangement is a great joy for me, and the kids are just amazing.” **TBP**

A FRIENDS OF KIDRON EVENT SUPPORTING THE HEALTH CARE BENEVOLENT FUND.

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Jill Schmidt Weaver
Independent Living Chaplain, Schowalter Villa

People of the light

In the darkest season of the year, our Kansas winters provide about nine and a half hours of sunlight a day, as opposed to summer when we receive about 14 and a half hours of sunlight a day. On these shorter, colder days, some of us suffer from the lack of light. We may feel lethargic, sad, and might have more physical aches and pains than we do in the summer months. We long for the extended sunshiny days of spring and summer!

During a very dark period in the history of God's people, Isaiah prophesied the Messiah's coming in this way: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in a land of deep darkness, a light has dawned." What words of hope to those who were longing for the light of God's presence!

Indeed, about 700 years later, Jesus was born on earth as a vulnerable little babe. After he grew in wisdom and stature, he proclaimed, "I am the Light of the world! Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

To be sure, as we read the

gospels, we see God's light radiating from Jesus. Jesus illuminates the way of life before us, modeling how to resist our own ego's desire for power, control, money, and fame, and teaching us instead to serve in humility, seeing others with the compassionate eyes of God. This seems like a tall order for us, doesn't it? Perhaps one that only Jesus could truly live out!

But surprisingly, in Matthew 5:14, Jesus tells us that we, too, are light! "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others..." We, like Jesus, are given the privilege of radiating God's light on this earth. We, too, are called to walk humbly, and live with grace and in peace with those around us.

Friends, we are people of the light! We are created in God's image, and God is light (1 John 1:5). The Apostle Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5:5, reiterates this, saying, "You are children of the light."

So, I ask, what are we radiating out into the world? Are we sending out grace and peace? Or are we radiating fear and anxiety?

Are we lashing out at others in frustration? Or are we responding to others' anger with love and curiosity?

I invite you to pay attention to your attitude over the next few weeks. At random times of the day, pause and ask what kind of energy you are sending out to those around you. If you realize you are expressing unhelpful negativity, what can you do to align yourself with the Light, your true nature?

Perhaps it's time to ask yourself, "How do I want others to remember me?" (As wise author Maya Angelou has said, people don't remember what you say, but how they feel when they are around you!)

Experiment with this. Pay attention to the energy you are sending out, how it is affecting others, and how it is returning to you. Why should we do this, you ask? Because our world is longing for The Light. We have been given the privilege and joy of radiating God's love, peace and mercy. Together let us turn up the brilliance of Christ in this world! **TBP**

Respite suite addition accommodates short-term care needs

Suderman Assisted Living Center at Kidron Bethel Village has added a respite opportunity for Bluestem Communities independent living residents and members of the surrounding community.

This fully-furnished suite provides a short-term retreat opportunity for individuals who require some assistance with day-to-day tasks, offering access to new experiences and social interactions, and providing temporary relief for caregivers.

“We’re excited to have this new option at Kidron Bethel Village and a way to meet a variety of needs,” said Jennifer Traglia, Kidron Bethel Village Executive Director. “It offers individuals the opportunity to receive some help on a short-term basis or gives those who might be interested in assisted living the chance to try it out.”

Guests to the suite follow the same admission

requirements as assisted living residents, and receive support equivalent to assisted living residents, including three meals per day, basic assistance with daily living tasks and medication administration.

“In-home caregiving can take a toll on family members or friends,” said Traglia. “The respite suite offers a respite for the caregiver as much as the individual using the suite. It can simply provide a break for the caregiver, allow them the opportunity to travel or attend to other needs without the added responsibility of caregiving, or offer individuals considering a move to assisted living the chance to explore new experiences and social interactions to see if it would fit with their lifestyle and care needs more permanently.”

For more information or to inquire about the suite’s availability, contact the Bluestem Communities Senior Living Advisor Team at 888-388-7445. **TBP**



Photos by Tyler Stutzman.

Welcome home to Bluestem Communities.



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



**KIDRON BETHEL VILLAGE
SCHOWALTER VILLA**
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The new age of managing efficiency

One of the newest employees at Schowalter Villa is improving staff efficiencies with technological advances.

Rosie the Robot is a new addition to dining services that has created a buzz with its capabilities in filling a role for resident service and added a fun and novel experience to meal times.

“Robots are kind of the new big thing in restaurant and dining experiences,” said Jeff Ritche, Schowalter Villa Executive Director. “Rosie is able to do some basic tasks with transporting food, which frees up people to keep at other tasks and continue to make connections with residents.”

During meal times, Rosie is loaded up with food to be delivered to residents in their rooms or dining halls, or to transport dirty dishes back to the dish room. After being programmed with a location, she makes her way independently through hallways,

navigating people and other obstacles to get to her destination. A human companion accompanies her to serve food items to residents.

“Rosie is helping with time management for staff,” said LaDeena Burke, Food and Nutrition Manager. “She is able to deliver food from the kitchen to the Meadowlark serving area, allowing the cooks to continue with their tasks in the kitchen. When staff is limited in the Tallgrass dining room or limited among nursing staff in certain hallways, she can deliver meal orders, freeing up nurse aides to continue giving care to the residents.”

Residents enjoy watching Rosie work as well. She plays a musical sound as she navigates the hallways, getting people’s attention and allowing a bit of amusement as they embrace new ways of service. **TBP**



Schowalter Villa's dining robot, Rosie, and a dining staff companion serve residents in their rooms. Photo by Rachel McMaster.



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Bluestem U expanding offerings in 2025

The Bluestem U lifelong learning program at Bluestem Communities will launch its third year in 2025, featuring an expanded lineup of courses and a new schedule.

“Through the first two years of Bluestem U, we paid close attention to course feedback and requests from the community to identify ways to expand the program and make it more accessible,” said Julie Miller, Lifelong Learning Project Manager. “We’re excited to implement changes that respond directly to the communities’ request.”

The new schedule shifts from the previously offered two or three classes twice a year in spring and fall to a revamped approach that will now span winter/spring and summer/fall sessions. It will offer various course lengths, including one-time classes and at least one free offering per year.

“Our goal is to give participants more flexibility in accommodating their busy lives while opening up more opportunities for involvement,” said Miller.

Bluestem U offers lifelong learning opportunities to people 55 and better, and is a partnership between Bluestem Communities and its neighboring higher education institutions, Bethel College in North Newton and Hesston College in Hesston.

“Lifelong learning not only promotes enhanced quality of life and personal growth, but also fosters a sense of community,” said Miller. “It’s been exciting to see people come together to learn, share ideas and make new connections.”

Courses for 2025 include philosophy, bird-watching, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics),



Photo by Gavin Peters Photography.

literature, astronomy, history, painting, holiday cookie decorating, planting spring bulbs in pots, and a free speaker series featuring published authors who live at Kidron Bethel Village.

For a schedule, registration or to learn more, visit bluestemu.org. **TBP**

Get on the path of lifelong learning.

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Age 55 and better?

Learn more and register: BluestemU.org



Heartfelt dialogues: Navigating life's tough topics as we age

by Jennifer Traglia, Kidron Bethel Village Executive Director

As families prepare for later years, discussing important topics like health, wellbeing, safety and financial security can be challenging, especially when loved ones have been managing their affairs independently. These conversations often cause anxiety and can touch on painful issues. While the pressure to have these conversations can feel heavy, it doesn't have to be that way.

Unique family dynamics such as birth order, familial roles and communication styles can complicate these discussions. Understanding whether a loved one is a low- or high-intensity communicator, for instance, can make a difference.

By using specific techniques to foster a respectful and open dialogue, families can navigate these difficult conversations effectively, allowing everyone to express their concerns and contribute to a meaningful plan.

PREPARE

When addressing complex topics like late-life goals and desires, estate planning or daily support needs, anticipate multiple conversations to move from sharing concerns to taking first actionable steps. Create a collaborative environment by scheduling a convenient time for everyone and choosing a neutral, comfortable and private space. Focus on achieving a plan that supports the late-life goals.

AGREE TO GROUND RULES

To get everyone in step, decide how to navigate the discussions. Ground rules must include:

- Each person sharing their goals and ideal outcome for the talk. Often, the overarching goal is pretty similar across conversations – to support the best quality of life.
- Take turns to share perspectives so each person can be heard.
- Agree to be hard on the issue, yet soft on the people involved.
- Take notes and review them together, outlining next steps.

- Agree to take breaks or even stop the conversation if necessary.

RELY ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Bring your most neutral, impartial self to the conversation and leave all the usual baggage – busy schedule, history, differences in values, etc. – at the door.
- Engage your active listening skills. Listen to understand, not to respond. Summarize what the other person is saying to check for accuracy. This often invites important clarification.
- Sometimes conversations can be stilted by what's not being said. Perhaps there is a fear too painful to express. Through your words and actions, demonstrate that the conversation is a safe, appropriate place to address all concerns.
- If you reach an impasse, rely on the power of love. A simple "I love you" and "I care about your happiness" can recalibrate the conversation to keep it on track.

AVOID COMMON PITFALLS

- Listen to everyone, including yourself.
- Stay calm and resist the urge to raise your voice to be heard or to match another's volume.
- Be aware of assumptions that may get in the way.

There is no doubt that being open and honest about the unknowns in late life can lead to feelings of vulnerability. Yet, collaborative family planning has significant benefits. Not only does it avoid a guessing game for your loved ones, the process also serves as a crucial model for future generations.

If handled with care and empathy, tough conversations can be an important step toward strengthening trust that makes challenging circumstances easier to navigate together. **TBP**

Defining support

Each year, residents and the wider communities are invited to events hosted by Bluestem Communities where there is an extra event description stating: "Proceeds from this event will assist residents and participants who, due to unforeseen circumstances, are unable to cover the full cost of their care."

What exactly does all of that mean?

In short, it means that Bluestem Communities is committed to continuation of care for all residents and participants even when they find themselves faced with challenging financial circumstances. To do this, Bluestem Communities has a Fund Advancement team dedicated to fostering connections and relationships that support benevolent funds at each location, as well as a new endowment, ensuring no resident or participant need ever worry over losing care due to financial hardship.

"Individuals can have all of their life and finances in order, and sometimes things still happen that are outside of their control," said Derek Yoder, Bluestem Communities Vice President of Fund Advancement. "The benevolent funds and the endowment serve as a safeguard for the evolving needs of residents and participants, allowing Bluestem Communities to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining our unwavering commitment to their well-being."

Approximately 50% of residents receiving care in Bluestem Communities' health care settings receive some assistance from the financial safeguard funds annually, emphasizing the unique position Bluestem Communities is in as a non-

profit organization to ensure continuation of care. More than 800 households and businesses give annually to Bluestem Communities benevolent funds. Among them, Visionaries – those who give \$1,000 or more each year – comprise 280 households and businesses. Many others support less formally by attending and participating in events in which proceeds benefit the benevolent funds. The Bluestem Legacy endowment, meanwhile, is built primarily through estate and individual gifts.

"Our constituency base enjoys experiences like the events we hold each year in support of the benevolent funds," said Yoder. "They are also fun, relaxed ways to make connections and showcase the work and mission of Bluestem Communities."

The largest event is the Bluestem Gala, held annually in early November. The event features a catered meal, entertainment and a vacation raffle, making it a highlight of the year for supporters.

"We are so grateful to the many who embrace this ministry and support residents and participants through contribution to the benevolent funds and the Bluestem Legacy endowment," said Yoder. "The Bluestem Communities family truly stretches beyond the perimeters of our campuses and allows us to offer care unwaveringly. Thank you."

Join in the fun of Bluestem Communities events in 2025. Follow Bluestem Communities on Facebook to stay informed about these events and more. [TBP](#)

Attendees of the 2023 Bluestem Gala enjoy the evening's meal, entertainment and connections. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Villa Partners garage sales - *monthly*
- Kidron Bethel Village garage sales – *quarterly*
- 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*

Hallways to galleries

If you slow down and take in what's around you as you walk the halls of Kidron Bethel Village, you may feel a bit as though you are on an art tour. Over the last few months, the art in the campus' main building has become much more intentional thanks to a resident Art Committee.

Appointed by Executive Director Jennifer Traglia, independent living residents Janet Friesen, Virgil Penner and Kathie Podliska have been curating art in hallways and other spaces to make resident spaces more interesting and stimulating.

"Our task was to help curate exhibits and highlight resident art," said Friesen. "Some of the art that was here before had been here for quite a while. It's good for changes to happen. It's enriching and stimulating for people to have something to look at that's fulfilling and interesting."

For their first step, the committee worked primarily in hallways of each of the three floors of Village Heights. They moved some existing pieces to different locations so a different audience would see them as they walked the hallways, and added some new pieces by Podliska and Friesen.

In time, the committee would like to make the first floor Village Heights hallway an evolving gallery, switching out the pieces several times each year with a focus on resident artists.

"There are several residents on campus who are artists and exhibit frequently," said Podliska. "We may feature one or two artists for a period of time and then switch them out. Many people walk the first-floor hallway everyday – residents, staff and visitors. We want it to be ever evolving; ever changing."

Each of the members of the art committee are experienced artists themselves who continue to thrive with their art in retirement.

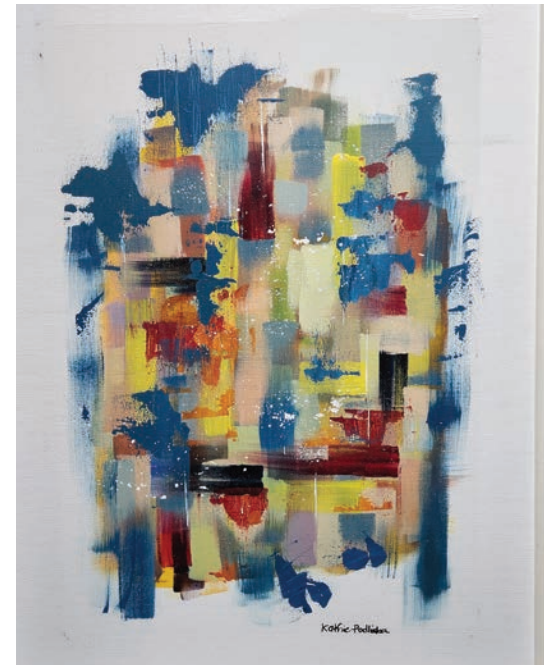
Friesen earned an M.A. in art from San Jose (Calif.) State University and spent her career teaching at both the high school and collegiate levels, and worked in a museum. Her emphasis has been print making, and she's audited several semesters of print making at Bethel College since being at Kidron Bethel Village.

Podliska is mostly a self-taught artist who occasionally took courses as she found time, and did some work in

graphic design. She most enjoys painting, sketching, pen and ink and watercolor mediums, and has several abstracts currently on display on the first-floor hallway.

Penner is also largely self-taught and has created his whimsical landscape paintings as a hobby for many years. He enjoys being creative with whatever task he undertakes. With career experiences as a high school teacher, coach and businessperson in the local area, his connections are vast.

"It's exciting to have so many artists in a community our size, and it's an honor to be able to feature their work," said Podliska. "Giving people the chance to look at, consider, create and enjoy art is so exciting and important in creating connections and community." **TBP**



Some of the resident art currently featured in Kidron Bethel's Village Heights. A resident art committee is curating exhibits to keep the hallways fresh and interesting. Photos by Rachel McMaster.





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The Bluestem Post is published to share information, fellowship and fun with participants, residents, staff and friends of Bluestem Communities.

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