

# The Bluestem Post



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On the cover: Transportation is one of the services available to Bluestem PACE participants. Learn more inside about how the program is also a benefit to caregivers. Photo by Gavin Peters Photography.

## 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 The Cedars in McPherson, 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 **[bluestem.org](https://bluestem.org)***

**Editor:** Rachel McMaster  
**Design:** Mackenzie Unruh  
**Printing:** Baker Bros. Printing  
**V.P. of Marketing & Sales:**  
Ariana Kauffman  
**Contributors:**  
Articles by Rachel McMaster, Bluestem Communities Director of Marketing and Communications, unless otherwise noted.

**Bluestem Communities:**  
James Krehbiel, President/CEO  
**Bluestem PACE:**  
Emilie Rains, Executive Director  
**The Cedars:**  
Amy Bennett, Executive Director  
**Kidron Bethel Village:**  
Jennifer Traglia, Executive Director  
**Schowalter Villa:**  
Jeff Ritcha, Executive Director

**Board of Directors:**  
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Verda Deckert  
Ryan Entz  
Lisa Harms  
Sandie Kueker  
Larry Nikkel  
Jen Person  
Marty Ward





*Bluestem PACE provides comprehensive care from one source, with a doctor and nurses on-site at the day center. All photos by Gavin Peters Photography.*

## Helping seniors stay home and caregivers stay strong

At Bluestem PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) the benefits available to seniors who qualify for the program are clear – a specialized care plan tailored specifically to individual needs, comprehensive coordinated care from one source, transportation to the day center and specialist appointments, social opportunities, meals, connection and more.

A secondary benefit of the program, and one that may not be as instantly recognized, is the benefit the program provides in-home caregivers.

The PACE program at Bluestem Communities and throughout the nation is lauded for its ability to help seniors remain living safely in their own homes as long as possible. Participants in the program often see the most success when they have care support at home as well as through the program. Through a team effort between in-home caregivers and the resources and staff at the PACE

program, seniors thrive and caregivers receive some relief from the stresses of caregiving.

For Jamie, whose father, Michael, is a participant at Bluestem PACE, having peace of mind about his care and well-being is one of the biggest benefits she reaps from the program.

“Dad was diagnosed with dementia in 2019,” Jamie shared. “He moved in with me and my husband, but I also work outside the home, so that posed some logistical challenges. Finding PACE was a godsend!”

Instead of being home alone while his family works, Michael goes to the day center in McPherson five days a week where he receives transportation from his home in Salina, compassionate care from an on-site physician and staff who can monitor his status at anytime, and social connections with others.

*Continued on next page*

"It can be difficult to know what's going on day-to-day with someone living with dementia, but the fact that he gets up and goes everyday tells me he enjoys it," Jamie said. "We had tried another place before PACE and it didn't take long before he said he wouldn't go back there. With the PACE drivers and other staff, he seems to remember them from day to day, and the socialization and being around other people has been good for him. He's doing well."

Jamie has the peace of mind knowing her dad is safe and well cared for while she is away at work every day.

"Anytime I have questions or concerns, I can call and talk to the nurse or doctor," Jamie said. "It's a blessing to have the doctor right there on site in case he needs some kind of medical care while he's at the center. We also don't have to worry about getting him from one place to another for general doctor visits. PACE coordinates that. They've even been able to arrange respite care for dad when we went away on vacation. The support the staff give dad and us has really meant a lot."

That model of support and care has also resonated for Holly, whose mother, Kay, is a PACE participant and attends the day center three days a week.

"After my dad died, mom lost her driver's license, which meant she also lost some of her independence," said Holly. "She was just sitting at home all day while I was at work, and we wanted something that would give her more social interaction. Besides the social aspect, PACE has been a wonderful partner in keeping an eye on mom's health and

well-being."

Holly notices significant differences in her mother's improved cognition and energy when she spends a day at the Bluestem PACE day center versus when she stays home alone all day, and she attributes that to the social interaction and stimulation she receives at PACE.

She also admits to the toll caregiving can have on a person – mentally, emotionally and physically – and she's grateful to not be walking that road alone.

"For me, it's been wonderful not worrying if mom is eating enough, if she's taking the right medications or getting the proper care," said Holly. "I am in close communication with the PACE staff who are an extra set of eyes in being able to observe how she's doing. Working as a team, we're able to see trends and habits that might indicate something is changing or she needs a certain kind of care. They can tell me what to look for when she comes home so we can offer the best care to her."

At Bluestem PACE, overarching goals are to support participants in achieving the best possible health outcomes to live full, authentic and meaningful lives. Through a strong team-based partnership between PACE and the home, these goals become not only attainable, but sustainable.

To learn more about Bluestem PACE for you, a friend or loved one, visit [bluestempace.org](https://bluestempace.org) or call 844-588-7223.



*Participants have access to physical therapy at the day centers.*



*Staff social workers are on-site to provide resources and assistance to Bluestem PACE participants.*





## Resilience at any age: Mental wellness matters

*by Holly Hajjaj, Director of Bluestem Wellness Center-Hesston & Bluestem Employee Wellness*

Life is full of unforeseen changes—and as we age, those changes can become more frequent. From health shifts to the loss of loved ones to transitioning into new living arrangements, older adulthood can bring both challenges and opportunities. Through it all, one quality stands out as essential for adjusting well: resilience.

Resilience is our ability to adapt, recover and continue moving forward—even when times are difficult or uncertain. And the good news? Resilience isn't something you either have or don't. It's a skill that can be built and strengthened at any age.

In our community, supporting emotional and mental well-being is one of the cornerstones of our philosophy. We know that mental health is just as important as physical health, which is why we offer programming and resources to help residents and participants stay mentally strong, connected and supported.

One of the key building blocks of resilience is connection. Studies show that people who maintain strong social bonds are better able to cope with stress, grief, anxiety and even physical illness. Whether it's sharing meals with friends, participating in group activities, or simply chatting with a neighbor, these everyday interactions matter.

Having a routine can be another helpful tool for rallying.

Regular activities like morning walks, gardening, journaling or scheduled phone calls with family can provide structure, purpose and a sense of control, all of which support increased fortitude, accomplishment and emotional equilibrium.

Mind-body practices also have profound positive effects. Stretching, yoga, breathing exercises and meditation can help to alleviate distress, bolster mood and provide clarity, confidence and better footing in the security of the present moment.

Bluestem Wellness Centers offer a wide variety of group exercise classes that provide not only physical benefits, but also increased mental balance, flexibility, stamina and strength. Regularly coming to any group classes provides an opportunity to develop dear friendships, have fun, experience additional support, and rejuvenate a weary brain and heart.

Most importantly, remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. Whether it's speaking with a counselor, joining a support group, or simply opening to a trusted friend or team member, talking through tough times is one of the most powerful things you can do to foster resilience. At every stage, this is possible. And with the right support and community, you don't have to build it alone.

# Coming to terms

by Dawn Yoder Harms, Kidron Bethel Village Chaplain

I am currently savoring a book of poetry written by Kidron Bethel Village resident Emerson Wiens, entitled Coming to Terms. In his first poem, from which the collection derives its name, Wiens reflects on the process of aging, which involves coming to terms with failing body parts, retirement, changing purpose and relationships, and the inevitability of death. He also courageously names what he refuses to come to terms with.

While this poem is unflinchingly honest, it is served up with a good dose of humor, infusing it with realism and hope. It may well become my guidebook as I begin coming to terms with my own process of aging.

Fortunately, here at Kidron Bethel Village I am surrounded by many “teachers” who help me see the work before me as I grow older. As I listen and observe, I notice that aging is accompanied by significant challenges and painful losses. I also notice that with these challenges comes opportunity. Opportunity to try new things, to reflect on what matters most, to see ourselves in new and truer ways, to share wisdom drawn from the deep well of life experience, to care for each other, to notice where grace meets us along the way.

The themes of “challenge” and “opportunity” are not unique to the last decades of our lives. But in this time and space, unique challenges do await us. We find ourselves needing

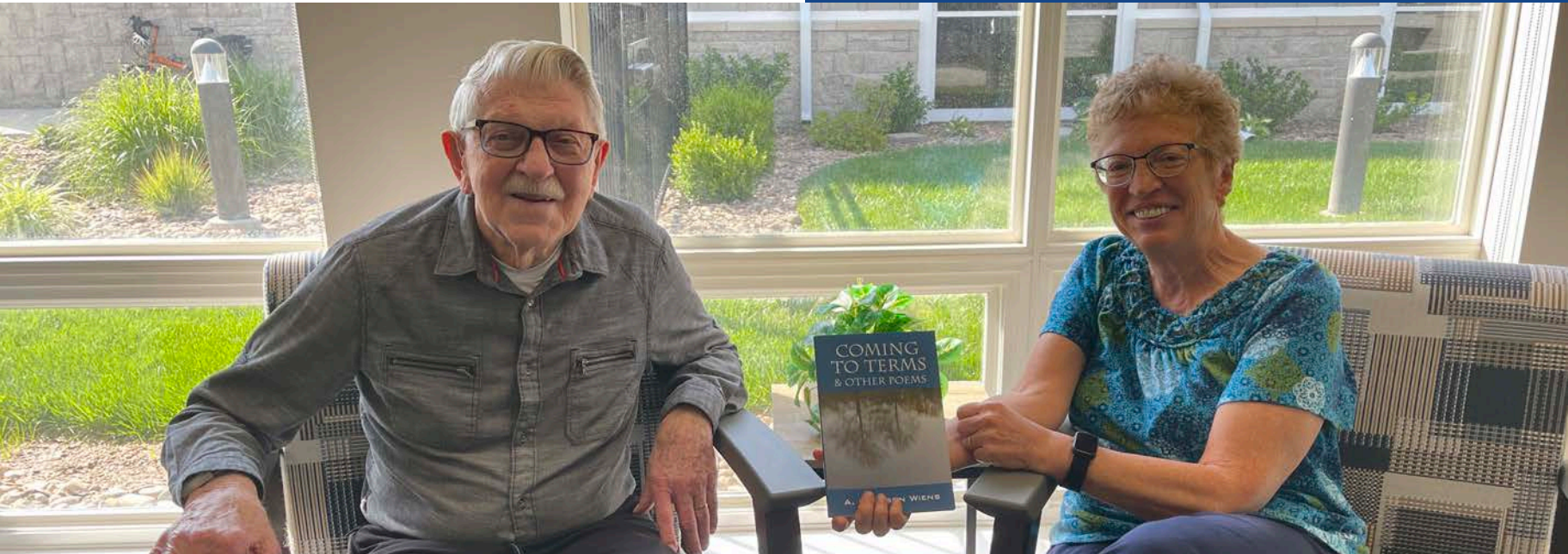
to navigate a changing terrain of health, relationships, roles, purpose.

This is deep spiritual work, work of the “head” and the “heart.” This time of life invites us to consider: What are we being invited to release? And what are we being invited to hold on to? When all else falls away, what still remains?

These are some of the questions I have been pondering as I listen to residents’ lives with them, as I read insight from others who have already passed this way, and as I work to come to terms with my own ailing body parts and the inevitability of death. It is a holy conversation, waiting to be had in community. If you have interest in joining in this conversation, please be in touch with me. While there is much to learn, I also know that among us, there is deep wisdom to be shared. Wisdom about where we’re headed and how grace meets along the way.

**Note about Emerson:**

Emerson Wiens spent 35 years in higher education teaching, writing, and lecturing on the sociological impacts of technology use on society. At age 52, he enrolled in a creative writing workshop that inspired him to express his thoughts poetically. Throughout his life, he has enjoyed nature, gardening, sculpturing, cabinet making, fly fishing and writing.



Emerson Wiens and Chaplain Dawn Yoder Harms with Emerson’s book of poetry, Coming to Terms and Other Poems. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.



# Bluestem Communities expands impact through local affiliation

Bluestem Communities has entered into a strategic affiliation with The Cedars in McPherson, Kansas, a respected local life plan community, marking a significant step in its mission of providing innovative, non-profit, faith-based senior living and care in south central Kansas.

With more than 300 residents across all levels of care and more than 200 employees, The Cedars has become the fifth location in the Bluestem Communities network of senior living and care campuses, while retaining its non-profit corporate identity and affiliation with the Church of the Brethren.

"We are delighted to affiliate with The Cedars, which is a vibrant community and an asset to the greater McPherson community," said James Krehbiel, Bluestem Communities president and CEO. "They are a well-respected organization with a rich 130-year history of serving seniors. Together we can create efficiencies and foster long-term sustainability, enhancing our commitment as a non-profit."

As a life plan community, The Cedars offers living and care opportunities in independent living, assisted living and long-term health care with specialized units for memory care, skilled nursing care and rehabilitation. It is one of the oldest retirement communities in Kansas, first started in the 1890's by the Church of the Brethren. In 1953, the organization relocated to McPherson.

With ever changing climates in the senior living sector, conversations around affiliation began among the two organizations' board of directors more than a year ago.

"When you consider the future of retirement communities, affiliating strong organizations with shared values, goals and a commitment to serving residents will allow The Cedars and the entire Bluestem Communities network to thrive for years to come," said Denise O'Connor-Munsey, Chair of the Board of Trustees for The Cedars.

## MOVE BEFORE YOU HAVE TO, IT'S MORE FUN THAT WAY!

Explore independent living homes at The Cedars with an open house on Tuesday, August 26, beginning at 6:30 p.m., at 1019 Cedars Dr., McPherson.



*Retired CEO of The Cedars, LaMonte Rothrock (left), and Bluestem Communities President and CEO, James Krehbiel. The Cedars has become the fifth location in the Bluestem Communities network. Rothrock will continue to support The Cedars through the affiliation process. Photo by Rachel McMaster.*

Since the legal closing on July 1, the arrangement is in the earliest stages of integration. Some of the early focus will be understanding how operations have been done in the past and blending systems to align with each other.

"We are grateful to The Cedars' leadership team who have navigated the transition smoothly," said Krehbiel. "Their expertise and professionalism is invaluable in the work we do together."

Bluestem Communities operates in a shared services model for top level executives and departments such as Human Resources, Marketing and Sales, Accounting, Independent Living, Information Technology, and Fund Advancement. The organizational model has expanded to include The Cedars campus within these roles and departments. Departments such as Nursing Services, Dining Services, Housekeeping, Risk Management, and Maintenance and Grounds are campus-specific and will benefit through the affiliation by learning from counterparts on other campuses and sharing processes and best-practice for efficiency.

Likewise, residents living at each Bluestem Communities campus enjoy the benefit of expanding their options by having access to amenities and activities at the other locations within the network rather than just at the campus on which they live.

"The mission and culture of The Cedars aligns well with the mission and core values of Bluestem Communities, creating a stronger organization together and reinforcing the commitment to non-profit values," said Krehbiel. "I am energized by the road ahead and inspired by the opportunities this partnership creates to better serve seniors together."



## Planning for the future: Building your support system

*Living and Aging Well is a Bluestem Communities series intended to offer resources and information for residents and families navigating opportunities and the progression of care at Bluestem. The following information was taken from a March 2025 presentation.*

One of the reasons people choose Bluestem Communities is because of the continuum of care all within one campus. Living at a Bluestem Community means you can transition fairly seamlessly from independent living to assisted living to health care while maintaining a familiar setting, amenities and relationships – all of which can provide comfort and stability even when making a big change.

Even though you have a benefit of smooth transitions, advanced planning in certain areas can ensure that a time of change is met with even less stress. At any stage, planning for the unknown and unexpected can be uncomfortable. It's easy to put off this kind of planning or avoid it altogether because the potential situations being planned for may be difficult to face. However, facing these

decisions without plans or tools in place can make them even harder. Planning ahead gives you the ability to make informed decisions and live with more confidence, dignity and peace of mind.

Planning ahead isn't just about you. It's also about making things easier for your loved ones. It reduces stress and uncertainty when the unexpected happens. If your loved ones know what you want them to do and have the tools to do it, they will also have greater confidence and peace of mind in knowing they are helping you achieve your wishes and desires.

### **BUILDING YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Planning ahead is not something you have to do alone. It can be a team effort that begins with identifying your support system.

Your support system should consist of people you trust, who understand you and on whom you can rely in difficult times. This network could include family, friends, doctors, financial advisors, church members or community groups.



Some people are surrounded by loved ones to help support them. Others have loved ones that live far away, and technology can help bridge that distance. In some cases, the best solution may be to hire professional support from a lawyer to carry out future wishes rather than asking family or friends to do it.

Some important roles in your support system are:

- Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) for Health Care is a legally designated person you name to speak for you if you are unable to speak for yourself. The person has the authority to take action on your behalf without the delays of court proceedings. They direct the type of health care you want, including the power to consent, refuse consent or withdraw consent to any type of medical care, treatment, service or procedure. It is essential to designate alternates in case your primary person becomes unable to serve.
- Durable Power of Attorney for Finance is a legally designated person you name to handle financial and legal matters if you are unable to do so. Having someone legally named to this role ensures your bills get paid, investments are managed and assets are protected. As before, be sure to designate alternates so there is a back-up in place.

Though your support people may live anywhere, it's helpful to identify at least one local person who can be present quickly in an emergency or to assist with smaller tasks. Also, make sure your support team is aware of one another. Share each person's role and contact information with the rest of the group so if they need to work together, they know how to do that.

**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE**

The way you can use your support system most effectively is to have honest and candid conversations with them,

ensuring they know what matters to you and how you would like things to unfold if life gets more complicated.

These can be difficult conversations to start, but they are incredibly important. They are also most effective discussions when life is calm, not in the midst of a health crisis.

Some things to discuss:

- Your preferences for health care decisions.
- Your thoughts, wishes and concerns about the aging process.
- What role you would like each person of your support system to play.

Don't make these conversations a one-time thing. As life flows on and different situations arise, keep talking so your support people can continue to learn about you and aware if your wishes evolve. Encourage your loved ones to ask you questions and to share their thoughts with you as well.

One tool to make these conversations easier is to use a guide, one of which is The Conversation Project. The starter guides include self-reflection questions, tips for planning the conversation, step-by-step guidance, worksheets to keep notes and tips for next steps. You can access The Conversation Project tool at [theconversationproject.org](http://theconversationproject.org).

Planning ahead for your future is not a one-time event, but a journey, and it's one that you don't have to travel alone. You've spent a lifetime building and nurturing relationships. Now is the time to be vulnerable with those important people in your life, allowing them to understand you even better and support you along the way.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

<b>SQUEALS &amp; FROTH</b> September 12 McPherson	<b>COUNTRY BREAKFAST</b> October 4 North Newton	<b>SENIOR OLYMPICS</b> October 17 North Newton	<b>BLUESTEM GALA</b> November 6 Newton	<b>HOLIDAY MARKET</b> December 6 North Newton
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# Gifts that keep on giving: Supporter contributions create benefit for years to come



*The Lakeside Workshop dedication brought together a team of people who made the space transformation happen. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.*

Driven by a passion for enriching lives, Bluestem Communities supporters play a vital role in creating meaningful resources that uplift residents and participants every day.

Schowalter Villa recently received generous gifts with lasting impact: a new piano for the chapel, and tools and a revamped work space.

The Yamaha NX3 hybrid baby grand, was given as a memorial gift in honor of Leland and Alda Wedel by their granddaughter, Heather, and her husband, Oliver. Music was central for the Wedels, who spent their final years at Schowalter Villa.

Heather shared, “My grandparents were instrumental in my pursuit of music. They exposed me to the symphony,



*Schowalter Villa independent living residents Verne and Janet Voth with the piano donated in memory of Leland and Alda Wedel, Janet’s parents. Photo by Derek Yoder.*

musical theater, and all kinds of music in between, which served as a launching pad for my own musical endeavors. This gift honors the special moments we shared, and helps continue music traditions in a future-forward way.”

Meanwhile, the woodshop at the Lakeside building was refreshed thanks to partnership between Schowalter Villa and local business Stanley Black and Decker (formerly Excel Industries), who donated 65 tools.

“I’m glad we were able to be a part of this transformational change,” said Bryan Dugan, Plant Manager at Stanley Black and Decker. “Before becoming Stanley Black and Decker, Excel had a legacy partnership with Schowalter Villa and Bluestem Communities, so we’re proud to continue supporting our local communities.”

## Summer of service

Rather than spending the whole summer at the pool, hanging out with friends, or playing travel sports, almost 30 local youth ages 10 to 17 spent time at Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa as junior volunteers. For several hours each week through June and July, the youth would spend time with residents in health care and assisted living visiting, playing games, going on walks and serving in whatever capacity they were needed.

“I was looking for something to do this summer, and this has been a really fun place to be,” said Kai Leinbach, a resident-favorite junior volunteer at Kidron Bethel Village. “The residents have great stories. I love hearing their humor and about their experiences.”



*Sage Bartel, a Junior Volunteer at Schowalter Villa during the summer, spends time visiting with a resident over refreshments at Hesston Bakery & Cafe. Photo by Tyler Stutzman*



# Digging for gold on the Old 81

by Laurel Gugler, Kidron Bethel Village resident

I am traveling down Old 81 Highway. Recently I celebrated my 81st birthday. The Old 81 is a favorite of mine—just my speed and, with my diminishing eyesight, feels safer than the Interstate. Have you noticed that “Old 81” and “old lady one” sound identical? My sister, Carol, and I often joke about being “old lady one” and “old lady two”, though on her last birthday she became “old lady three”. You are likely not precisely 81, but maybe you’re an old lady, too—or an old man. Or maybe you are traveling on Route 60 or 70. A friend told me she was on the famed Route 66. Or maybe you are on Highway 90, or even 100, in which case, congratulations! You have achieved new milestones. Whatever your pathway, highway or byway, perhaps you can identify yourselves and, together, we can pause and ponder, muse and wonder at our own unique journeys. Some say these are the “golden years”. I admit, sometimes it’s hard to find the gold in these olden years. Still...I dig

deep and sometimes discover treasure. Treasure—such as enjoying deep friendships, freedom from career stress, collective wisdom gathered over the years. I will never apologize for being old. We have accomplished many years and given much.

I am deeply thankful for having traveled far enough to even reach the trusty Old 81. It has connected me with places of heart and Soul, including Bluestem Communities here at Kidron Bethel Village, Hesston and McPherson. May we pace our journeys with grace. We need not race to road’s end. Or will it be the beginning?

*Laurel Gugler is an independent living resident at Bluestem Communities’ Kidron Bethel Village. She uses whimsy, rhythm and playfulness in her writing as a storyteller, poet and children’s book author.*





## SQUEALS AND FROTH

ENJOY AN EVENING OF COLD DRINKS  
AND GOOD FOOD FOR A CAUSE!


**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2025 | 5 TO 9 P.M.**

Three Rings Brewery | 536 Old U.S. 81,  
McPherson, KS 67460

**Thursday, November 6, 2025**

Annual Bluestem Communities

# Gala





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

To receive or stop receiving The Bluestem Post contact:  
316-836-4837 or [rachelm@bluestem.org](mailto:rachelm@bluestem.org).

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