

# The Bluestem Post



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WELLNESS

*Our fitness journeys: Real stories to inspire your fitness lifestyle*

INSPIRATION

*Faith, resilience and the prairie spirit*

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*Leading the way in person-centered health care*



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On the cover:  
Misty Eldringhoff, a Senior Living Advisor at The Cedars in McPherson, reviews information with a resident. 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***

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*Residents at The Cedars, Bluestem Communities’ newest life plan community, enjoy walking paths on the expansive campus.  
Photo by Gavin Peters Photography.*

# Rooted in history, growing together

The second half of 2025 marked a particularly defining chapter for Bluestem Communities – one of bold strides, transformative growth and milestones that signal a dynamic new era.

On June 11, it was announced that The Cedars Retirement Community in McPherson would become the fifth location and third life plan community in the Bluestem Communities network. That affiliation became legal just a few weeks later, on July 1, and the preceding months have been full of getting to know the newest Bluestem campus.

“Getting to know The Cedars these last few months has been wonderful,” said Tonya Keim, Bluestem Communities Chief of Staff. “They have an incredibly gifted staff who are committed and loyal. I admire how lighthearted they are while they do this good, difficult work. The residents, like all our Bluestem Communities residents, are active and live life fully. They have embraced this change wholeheartedly, and with their experiences and ideas, they bring such a richness to Bluestem.”

Founded in 1893 by members of the Brethren Churches in Kansas, the organization that would become The Cedars

was initially known as the Old Folks Infirm and Orphans Home Association of the German Baptist Brethren, and was located in Darlow, Kansas, a small town southwest of Hutchinson. Boasting 134 years since its founding, this history makes The Cedars the oldest senior care organization in the state of Kansas.

“When I think back to the beginning of The Cedars, I’m humbled to think of the people and denomination who recognized the need among them, as well as the challenge to provide that kind of care and stepped up to make it happen,” said LaMonte Rothrock, Director of Transitions and Stakeholder Relations and former CEO of The Cedars.

The modern era of the organization dates to 1948 when a tornado forced the closure of the Darlow campus. A home and land was purchased in McPherson for a new location, and by 1953 the home had relocated with 10 residents. A decade later, the organization began its venture into independent living, and rebranded itself as “The Cedars,” inspired by the abundance of cedar trees on the land. The last 60 years has been marked by periods of growth that have built The Cedars into what it is today.

*Continued on next page*



The Cedars that is now part of Bluestem Communities is a modern life plan community, offering independent living, assisted living, and both full long-term and short-term rehabilitative health care services. The congruence of services with what Bluestem Communities offers made The Cedars a logical fit within the network, but more importantly, an alignment of values, culture and commitment to a non-profit mission of service has driven a smooth and energizing affiliation process in the first few months.

“As we looked to the future of senior living and The Cedars in particular, it was clear we were going to need to do an affiliation,” said Rothrock. “I’m so pleased that we were able to find an organization in Bluestem Communities that fit who The Cedars was so well, and that we were able to put all of the pieces of the puzzle together to make sense for both organizations.”

“The heart of any great senior living network is its people, and the residents, employees and families of The Cedars are surely the life blood of the campus,” said James Krehbiel, Bluestem Communities President and CEO. “They bring energy, passion and dedication to the community and the mission of serving seniors.”

The atmosphere of The Cedars is vibrant and full of life. Nestled in a quiet neighborhood next to McPherson High School, the campus includes plenty of green space, walking paths, a pond and a putting green. An event center and wellness center offer opportunities for the wider community to also enjoy the campus. The assisted living complex features a newly remodeled lobby, restaurant-style dining and outdoor courtyard spaces. Health care spaces – The Cedars Houses – are inspired by family home living with a small cohort of resident homes circling shared a shared common space that includes a kitchen, dining area and a living area for sitting and social interaction.

“The Cedars was the only choice for us because of all the amenities it offers,” said assisted living resident Meg van Asselt. “We had health issues, a too big house and a too big yard. My husband needed physical therapy, and there was a pool and physical therapy here that attended to his needs. When he moved to memory care, it was such an easy transition, and so convenient that we stayed under the same roof.”

After three years of living at The Cedars, van Asselt is grateful every day that she chose The Cedars.

“I’m glad we moved when we could make the decision to do so and not have to rely on our children to do it for us,” van

Asselt said. “I can continue to do the things I love, and I like the camaraderie. I have become close with other residents and with staff. This is home now.”

Staff also point to connections with colleagues and residents as some of the greatest benefits to working at The Cedars.

“I love spending time with the residents and working at their pace,” said Iliana Carrillo, Assisted Living Activities Coordinator. “After 14 years as an activities aide in health care, they wanted to put me in charge of activities in assisted living. I was scared and didn’t think I could do it, but leadership encouraged me and worked with me to be successful. I’m so glad I was given the opportunity to grow and that I can continue learning every day.”

This fall, Bluestem Communities made significant progress in integrating The Cedars as the newest campus. Staff at The Cedars were officially brought under the Bluestem Communities umbrella, and those who are considered shared staff for the whole organization have been spending time getting to know their team members across all campuses, learning from and sharing with one another to develop processes that best serve residents, participants and Bluestem Communities.

“It’s been incredible at how supportive leadership has been through all of this,” said Rothrock. “Often, when a new leader steps into an organization, others within the organization step away. That hasn’t happened here. Everyone has been retained, and now we get to look at how we thrive rather than how we survive.”

“There are so many exciting opportunities ahead because of this affiliation,” said Keim. “We look forward to strengthening collaboration between campuses and expanding our collective knowledge and capability through shared expertise. This partnership also opens possibilities such as PACE gaining access to rooms at The Cedars for respite stays. At The Cedars, we’ve already seen a fresh approach to sales take hold, resulting in an increase in new residents moving to campus. We’re taking steps to fulfill a wider community need by expanding health care, and we anticipate that independent living will soon be full, further enhancing the vibrancy and sense of community on campus.”

These developments represent more than growth. They reflect a shared vision for the future. Through the uniting of two successful and storied organizations, we’re building a stronger future rooted in care, connection and community.



## Our fitness journeys: Real stories to inspire your fitness lifestyle

*by Katelyn Wilson, Director of Bluestem Wellness Center-North Newton*

Each person has a unique fitness journey, but a commonality we all share is that we're on one. There isn't just one way to write your fitness story, and no one else can write it for you. But what we can do is hold each other accountable and walk the journey together.

Over the years of working in the fitness industry, I've witnessed people from all walks of life achieve incredible progress in their new healthy lifestyle — whether they were starting from scratch, getting back on track after a break, or trying a new style of fitness with different goals. The biggest takeaway I've learned is this: it is possible for anyone and everyone.

For the past seven years, I've had the privilege of being a part of many individuals' wellness programs. I hope to continue supporting those who have been with me — and also join the journey with new friends. Over these years, I've seen so many people accomplish big goals, and I want to encourage you, the reader, to keep going with your goals.

One story that always inspires me is about an 81-year-old client I've trained for the past five years. On his 80th birthday, he did 30 push-ups in front of his entire family!

It was incredible to see his grandchildren get inspired and join him, challenging each other to do as many push-ups as they could. Today, he continues to do up to 30 push-ups daily, along with maintaining his regular activities like yard work and house chores. He's driven by the desire to keep up with his three children and many grandchildren.

Another client I've had the privilege to work with is a 72-year-old who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease about a year ago. While Parkinson's is difficult to treat, we've discovered together that regular exercise can help slow down its progression. Because of his consistency and determination, he's still able to enjoy daily life, support his grandkids in their activities, and continue traveling. In fact, one of his goals was to visit Italy this fall, and through our work together, he's ready for the trip!

These are just two of the many stories I've had the honor to witness that show how powerful and life-changing exercise can be. I hope you find some encouragement to stay committed to your own fitness journey. And remember — Bluestem Wellness Centers are here to help!

Let's move our bodies — today and every day!





Chris Whitacre  
*The Cedars Chaplain*

## Faith, resilience and the prairie spirit

One of the many beautiful places I deeply appreciate in Kansas is the Flint Hills. They capture my imagination as I ponder both the fragility and strength of this region which holds a profound and significant history.

The Flint Hills are a geological-ecological area situated in eastern Kansas, stretching from the northern part of the state and continuing south into the Osage Hills of northern Oklahoma. This rolling countryside is comprised of shale, limestone and flint under a thin layer of topsoil. A unique feature of the Flint Hills is the variety of grasses that grow there, including bluestem varieties. The family of bluestem grass varieties are hardy and resilient, finding a way in the tough Flint Hills region. Bluestem tallgrass can grow as high as eight feet and boasts a root system that can run as deep as 15 feet, providing a secure foundation for the Great Plains tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The deep root system makes the grass highly drought tolerant while helping to control erosion.

Without knowing the origins of the name “Bluestem Communities,” I imagine it being a nod to the bluestem grasses of Kansas. I believe it to be a meaningful description of the strengths and resilience of this organization that has now grown to include The Cedars. Bluestem Communities anchors us in a name and place that we call home. Bluestem grass is native to Kansas as is Bluestem Communities. Like bluestem grass, Bluestem Communities is hardy and adaptable to the



*Like bluestem tallgrass that grows in the Flint Hills of the Kansas plains, Bluestem Communities is hardy, resilient and has roots that run deep*

changing environment. Bluestem grass is grounded in-and-to the earth from which it rises as part of God’s amazing creation. Bluestem Communities are grounded in earthy, agrarian roots that care for all life, aware of the footprint we leave behind, while caring for individuals who live in and receive services from Bluestem Communities.

These values are manifested in providing a rich and meaningful quality of life. Bluestem Communities anchor with deep roots and build upon relationships that enhance community and a sense of wellness. Bluestem Communities is deeply rooted in Anabaptist tradition and history – stemming from Mennonite values and beliefs. The Cedars is steeped in the traditions of Anabaptist values and beliefs from within the Church of the Brethren. The Mennonite Church and Church of the Brethren have both endured difficulty and experienced deep joy. Both have in common the values of justice, faith and service. Both organize out of a tradition of faith in action and care for others.

As the Bluestem Communities and The Cedars affiliation unfolds and grows, we stand on the good soil of common values and shared beliefs. Both organizations have deep roots that have taken hold even when the soil seems rocky and thin. We need one another in the ever-changing landscape of senior care, but we have deep roots to ground us and take us into the future.

# Leading the way in person-centered health care

At 90 years old, Butch Mosiman no longer has to wake with the sunrise like he did in all those years of working the land and cattle on the farm. Now he wakes when he chooses and enjoys a slow-paced morning of breakfast and conversation with friends, and he's just fine with that.

"They give me really good care here, and I'm grateful for that," said Mosiman, a Kidron Bethel Village health care resident.

Health care at Bluestem Communities – what has been known traditionally as long-term nursing care – is not a one-size-fits-all routine, but rather a person-centered model of care. It's a philosophy that honors residents' individuality – replacing packaged routines with compassion, choice and a renewed sense of home, and redefining what it means to age with dignity and grace.

Each of the life plan campuses in the Bluestem Communities network – The Cedars in McPherson, Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton, and Schowalter Villa in Hesston – offer unique services and amenities designed to make residents feel comfortable, supported and at home.

"Our approach goes beyond traditional long-term care by focusing on individualized experiences that promote wellness, dignity and joy," said Shelby McCauley, Kidron Bethel Village Director of Nursing.

Some of the services offered at each of the health care locations are on-site therapy and rehabilitation services, engaging life enrichment activities, wellness programs tailored to different abilities and interests, restaurant-style or family-style dining with nutritious, freshly prepared meals, and cozy community spaces where residents and families can gather, relax and connect.

Memory care is also of special focus, including a dedicated memory care living area at The Cedars, and accreditation in the award-winning Comfort Matters dementia care program at Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa.

While each location also fosters intergenerational connections with a variety of ages from infants to college students, a hallmark of Schowalter Villa is its close partnership with the Hesston Intergenerational Child Development Center, which is connected to both health care and assisted living neighborhoods. This unique relationship allows residents and young children to interact naturally each day through shared programs and

spontaneous moments of connection, bringing joy and energy to campus life.

Bluestem Communities has established itself as a leader in the senior care industry by demonstrating excellence in care and compliance. The original members of the Bluestem Communities organization – Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa – have regularly achieved successful regulatory surveys, including deficiency-free results. Both campuses also hold the highest five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which was developed to help consumers, their families and caregivers compare long-term care services more easily.

"The five-star ratings that we have with CMS and others reflect our commitment to exceptional quality and care," said Jeff Ritcha, Schowalter Villa Executive Director.

Since affiliation with The Cedars, Bluestem Communities leadership and nursing staff have spent a great deal of time with counterparts at The Cedars evaluating the elements that result in top-tier results and educating them on the processes and procedures that have been found to be successful at Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa.

It's clear that Bluestem Communities views success in health care through residents who live with choice, meaning and purpose. Together we strive to nurture not only physical health, but also emotional, social and spiritual well-being – creating an environment where every individual can truly live well.





# Bluestem Communities among best nationally in long-term care

Bluestem Communities’ long-term care campuses – Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton and Schowalter Villa in Hesston – have both been recognized as a Best Nursing Home for Long-Term Care for 2026 by U.S. News & World Report.

“*Bluestem Communities staff understand what it means to make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve, and these honors reflect that.*”  
- James Krehbiel, Bluestem Communities President and CEO

The annual Best Nursing Homes rating, now in their 15th year, assist prospective residents and their families in making informed decisions in consultation with their medical professionals about where to receive short-term or long-term care. Only 19 percent of U.S. skilled nursing

communities rated by U.S. News earned the “Best Nursing Home” designation this year.

Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa both earned the “High Performing” rating, the highest possible achievement.

“I am so proud of the teams at Kidron Bethel Village, led by Executive Director Jennifer Traglia, and Schowalter Villa, led by Executive Director Jeff Ritcha, who provide exemplary care and compassion to every resident,” said James Krehbiel, Bluestem Communities President and CEO. “Bluestem Communities staff understand what it means to make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve, and these honors reflect that.”

For the 2026 rankings, U.S. News rated almost 15,000 nursing homes on care, safety, infection rates, staffing and health inspections. To calculate the Best Nursing Homes ratings, U.S. News evaluated each organization’s performance using a variety of data obtained from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

## Honoring residents’ rights

In September, Schowalter Villa Executive Director Jeff Ritcha, and Schowalter Villa resident Elaine Bingamon, were invited to attend a Governor’s Proclamation signing declaring October as “Residents’ Rights Month” in Kansas. The special designation given to the month celebrated the dignity, rights and individuality of long-term health care residents across the state and highlighted the importance of listening to their voices.

The proclamation request was made by the PEAK program (Promoting Excellent Alternatives in Kansas), through the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), which encourages long-term care communities to adopt a more individualized approach to care rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Schowalter Villa is a Foundation Home of the PEAK program.



Schowalter Villa resident Elaine Bingamon (front row left) and Executive Director Jeff Ritcha (back row behind Governor Kelly) were among a small delegation representing the PEAK program at the signing of the Governor’s Proclamation for “Residents’ Rights Month.”



# Dementia care programs receive re-accreditation



*Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa received re-accreditation for the Comfort Matters dementia care program. Pictured are Kidron Bethel Village staff with Tena Alonzo, director of the Comfort Matters program and member of the accreditation team (second from left).*

Both Kidron Bethel Village and Schowalter Villa were re-accredited in October in Comfort Matters, an evidence-based philosophy and care practice providing holistic care with an integrated approach to improving quality of life for people living with dementia.

At both campuses, staff was commended for the thoughtful and intentional collaboration between departments to provide personalized care to each resident.

Founded at the Beatitude's Campus senior living community in Glendale, Ariz., Comfort Matters is an award-winning program developed through more than a decade of research around person-directed health care practices and the latest science on supporting people living with dementia.

Schowalter Villa first became a Comfort Matters-accredited provider in 2016, followed by Kidron Bethel Village in 2019. At Bluestem Communities, Comfort Matters is a philosophy that extends beyond nursing care. Both campuses require their entire staff in all departments to complete the training.

## Bluestem U lifelong learning launching new semester in January

Bluestem U, the lifelong learning program of Bluestem Communities, is launching a new semester in January 2026 with a lineup of classes that span a wide range of topics.

The semester will feature three courses; each for a cost of \$50. Anyone age 55 and better is welcome to be part of Bluestem U.

"Life Upon the Wicked Stage: Classics of Western Theatre" will be taught by retired theatre professor Lauren Friesen. The class will be held from 9:30 to 11 a.m., once a week on Thursdays from January 8 through February 12, in the Kaye Penner Education Center Classroom A at Kidron Bethel Village.

"Health, the Human Face of Climate Change" will be taught by Dwight Krehbiel, a retired Bethel College psychology professor. The course will partner with a current Bethel College course for an intergenerational element. The

climate change course will meet from 2 to 3:30 p.m., every other Friday from January 30 through April 10, in the Kaye Penner Education Center classrooms at Kidron Bethel Village.

Kevin Wilder, former Hesston College psychology and Bible instructor and current adjunct psychology professor, will teach the Hesston College cornerstone course, Biblical Literature, from 2 to 3:30 p.m., on Wednesdays from February 11 to March 11, in the Dayspring Room at Schowalter Villa.

Bluestem U is a partnership between Bluestem Communities and its local neighboring higher education institutions Bethel College and Hesston College to provide lifelong learning opportunities to anyone age 55 and better.

Registration is open now at [bluestemu.org](https://bluestemu.org). For questions, contact 316-836-4846 or [learning@bluestemu.org](mailto:learning@bluestemu.org).

# Giving back, gaining joy

Volunteers are an essential part of life at Bluestem Communities, enriching daily life with compassion, connection and purpose. Through their time and talents, they help transform communities from places to live into places to truly belong – bridging generations, fostering friendships and enhancing the well-being of residents and staff alike.

Karen Regier, a dedicated health care volunteer at Schowalter Villa, shared how her volunteer experience has impacted both her life and the lives of those she serves.

“At an early age, my parents instilled within me the importance of helping others by sharing my talents through volunteering. When I retired from my career in nursing, I had the tie to serve Schowalter Villa residents by assisting with organized activities. Little did I know, it would benefit me just as much, by adding value to my life through entertainment, joy, dedication and friendship.

As we advance in age, changes in health care and capabilities can be a struggle to accept, especially when the four walls of a room begin to close inward. Residents experience a wealth of emotions, such as joy, loneliness, separation, grief, love, friendship, frustration, yet they deserve comfort, compassion and happiness each day. Acknowledging their presence by greeting them by name can ignite healthy emotions and self-worth. Visiting about their childhood or young adult life is most interesting and most important for them to tell their stories. We can all learn a lot from aging adults.

As a volunteer, I direct simple games of dominoes and UNO, assist with fishing at Lake Vista, accompany trips to Walmart, decorate for special resident dinners, accompany residents to enjoy the courtyard, and just take a moment to visit about their day. Volunteering at Schowalter Villa is a commitment of a varied amount of quality time to bring a ray of sunshine into residents’ days. That ray of sunshine frequently reflects back to warm my own heart.”



*Karen Regier, a Schowalter Villa volunteer, interacts with residents during a game of UNO. Photo by Rachel McMaster.*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## PACE RACE

April 4, 2026  
McPherson, Kansas

## SENIOR OLYMPICS

April 17, 2026  
Kidron Bethel Village



# Nowhere

by Laurel Gugler

Where is God in this moment?  
Is God in this moment?  
Is God?

Where?

Praying this question, I notice...

“Here” lives within **where**  
Also within **there**  
**Anywhere**  
**Everywhere**

Even within **nowhere**  
Uh-oh!

Again, breathing this question,  
I ponder  
Does it mean “no where” or “now here”?

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.





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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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