

The Bluestem Post



Returning home after a hospital stay:
A Bluestem Communities guide to transition support page 6

IN THIS ISSUE:

FEATURE
Meaningful work after retirement

CAMPUS NEWS
Kidron Bethel Village celebrates Live Forward project

COMMUNITY
Partnerships for communities to live well

CONTENTS

FEATURE	3
Meaningful work after retirement	
INSPIRATION	5
Lenten Reflections	
PROFESSIONAL	6
Returning home after a hospital stay: A Bluestem Communities guide to transition support	
CAMPUS NEWS	8
Kidron Bethel Village celebrates Live Forward project	
Schowalter Villa establishes high-functioning memory support neighborhood	9
COMMUNITY	11
Partnerships for communities to live well	
LIFESTYLE	13
Considering our histories: A review of <i>East of Liberal: Notes on the Land</i> by Raylene Hinz-Penner	

On the cover: Yvonne Fast serves as Transition Nurse for Bluestem Communities. Learn more about transition support on page 6.

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](https://www.bluestemks.org)

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Meaningful work after retirement



Ed and Ruth Basinger have a map hanging in their home denoting all of the places they have done service across the country. Photo by Rachel McMaster.

Ed and Ruth Basinger began their retirement journey nearly a decade ago and entered into a period of life where they could choose what they want to do more than what they have to do. What they want to do is continue to pursue meaningful work through service.

Service work and volunteering has been an important and meaningful part of life for both Ed and Ruth for much of their lives. The couple met as young adults in a Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS) unit in Buckeye, Arizona, and have maintained a commitment to serve where they are able for more than 50 years.

After completing their educations, raising a family and maintaining professional careers – Ed as a structural engineer working primarily in the oil and gas industry, and Ruth with a background in office work and

accounting – the couple returned to service work following Ed's retirement in 2014. Since that time, they have served with a variety of faith-based service organizations, including Mennonite Mission Network's Service Opportunities with our Partners (SOOP – formerly Service Opportunities for Older People), Baptist organization Nailbenders for Jesus and, since 2018, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). A map hanging in their home marks both the places they have lived as a couple, and the places they have served.

Since the middle of 2019, the Basingers have lived at Bluestem Communities' Schowalter Villa campus in Hesston, Kan., in an independent living neighborhood, which affords them the opportunity to do as many short- or long-term service assignments as they desire all across the country without having to worry about their home

while they are away.

"We have had many blessings in our life," said Ruth. "We feel a calling from God on our lives to pass that on to those who are in need."

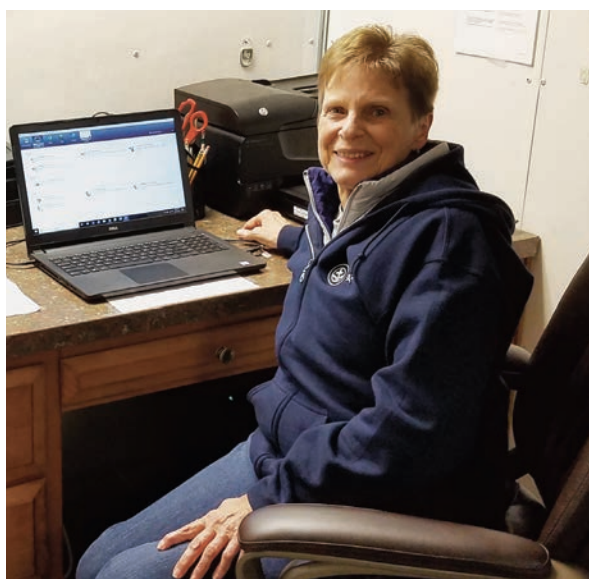
"There are many scriptures that talk about service to others that resonate with us," added Ed. "One that particularly speaks to us is: 'If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion – how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.'" (Reference 1 John 3:17 & 18, NLTse)

In early January 2023, the Basingers left for their ninth MDS assignment – a two-month job as part of an "RV group" working to complete three new-build

continued on page 4

Meaningful work after retirement continued

homes in McAllen, Texas, for families whose homes were devastated by a 2018 flood. The seven couples in the RV group – all of whom are age 55 and older and who come in their own RVs for several months – picked up after the previous group finished up the exterior and interior rough-framing of walls in December 2022 to complete



Top: Ruth Basinger performs office manager duties when serving at MDS service sites, including in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in 2019. Photo provided.

Bottom: Ed Basinger works a saw at an MDS service site in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in 2019. Photo provided.

plumbing, electrical, insulation, drywall, flooring, lighting and cabinets. By April, the homes should be ready to be turned over to the homeowners.

Mennonite Disaster Service is a volunteer network service organization that cleans up, repairs and rebuilds homes for those affected by disasters such as floods, tornadoes, hurricanes and wildfires in North America. Volunteer groups serve anywhere from a day or a few days at a time to several months. As they have as part of other RV groups, Ed serves as a “workhand” on the job site and Ruth serves as office manager, making sure everything is in place for the site to operate smoothly and efficiently.

“We appreciate the care MDS has for their volunteers and the organization,” said Ruth. “It’s an easy organization to work with.”

Aside from feeling a call to service, the Basingers add that serving in this way and seeing lives turned around hooks a person.

“The joy and excitement in these projects is addictive,” said Ruth. “You see these people at the beginning who are hopeless and helpless in many cases to seeing their absolute joy and excitement at having a place that is their’s at the end – why would you not want to be part of that?”

As the Basingers hop to different service sites across the country, one thing they don’t have to worry about is their home at Schowalter Villa. In everyday living, the campus’s maintenance and grounds crew provides all indoor maintenance from maintaining HVAC systems and appliances to changing light bulbs, to outdoor maintenance such as lawncare and snow removal. An added benefit to living in Bluestem Communities Independent Living, then, is having

these teams provide home oversight even while the residents are away enjoying the things and people that bring them joy in this stage of life.

“We knew about Schowalter Villa because my parents lived in Hesston and my mother was a resident of the health care center for sixteen years,” said Ed. “My sister and brother-in-law were also planning to move here, and encouraged us to get on the waiting list. We had never really considered it for ourselves.”

“In fact,” added Ruth, “we had built our dream retirement home in the suburbs of Tulsa (Oklahoma). We thought, ‘Why would we leave this home we put all this work into?’ Then we returned from an MDS assignment to a note on the front door letting us know they couldn’t do the fall lawn treatment because there were too many leaves on the lawn. So we spent our whole first day back raking and hauling leaves.”

The Basingers soon realized the amount of work they would have to give their home every time they returned from being away, and finding people to upkeep it while they were gone. The idea of Schowalter Villa began to rise more to the top of their minds.

“In April 2017 we decided to visit with the Schowalter Villa staff and fill out an application to get on the waiting list,” said Ruth. “They told us we would likely be waiting a while for something to open up.”

At the end of October, Schowalter Villa called with two openings in the Basingers’ desired Prairie Lakes neighborhood.

“At first we thought, ‘We’re not ready yet,’ but the more we thought about it, we thought, ‘What if the right home is

continued on page 7



Anita Kehr
Chaplain, Schowalter Villa

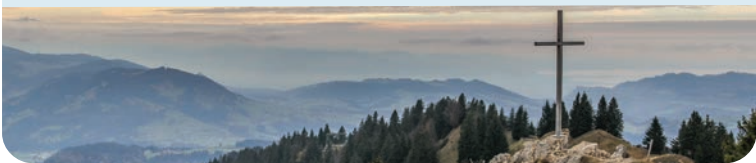
Lenten reflections

This year, all of March is in the season of Lent. It's not always that way. Sometimes, we have a little bit of time in the early part of the month prior to Ash Wednesday, and sometimes, we have a little bit of time in the latter part of the month after Easter. But this year, the entire month is Lent.

Lent is a season of remembering and preparing and walking along with Jesus on his road to the cross. As the weeks go by, the weight of Jesus' obedience to the way of God gets heavier as his challenges to the people in power become more pointed. And yet, we see that Jesus remains undeterred. He keeps on doing what he knows he's supposed to be doing, right up until the time he forgives those who have put nails in his hands and a spear in his side.

We know, of course, that the cross is not the end of the story. Easter celebrates Jesus' resurrected life and his overcoming of death, not just for himself but for all of us. The gifts we receive from Lent and Easter together give us the hope and the courage to keep on doing what we know we're supposed to be doing and becoming who we're supposed to be throughout the entirety of our lives—even when it's hard.

May the gifts of Lent and of Easter bless you along your way.



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Returning home after a hospital stay: A Bluestem Communities guide to transition support

When you live in a Bluestem Communities independent living neighborhood, you are just that – independent. However, you still receive an array of benefits such as home upkeep, lawncare, snow removal and on-campus amenities. One of the more unique benefits available to you is transition support.

This service supports you as you settle back into your home following a hospital or rehabilitation stay. It is also available to outside community members who leave a Bluestem Communities short-term rehab program, such as Progressive Recovery Academy at Schowalter Villa. Transition support is designed to assist you in better meeting your recovery goals and position you with skills for long-term success in self-managing your health conditions.

WHAT IS TRANSITION SUPPORT?

Transition support focuses on:

- Understanding best practices in medication self-management.
- Recognizing and responding to red flags to keep your recovery on track.
- Enhancing communication with your doctor and the doctor’s staff.
- Meeting your personal goals.
- Working alongside home health and therapies.

In the first few days after you go home from a hospital or rehabilitation stay, the transition support nurse will visit you in your home and follow up with several phone calls to help monitor your recovery progress.

WHO PROVIDES TRANSITION SUPPORT?

Yvonne Fast, MSN, APRN-CNS, is Bluestem Communities’ Transition Support Nurse. She also serves as a Senior Living Advisor. Yvonne has more than 40 years of nursing experience, with specialization in care of older adults.

WHEN SHOULD I REACH OUT TO RECEIVE TRANSITION SUPPORT?

A variety of situations might benefit from transition support. Some include:

- Before a scheduled hospital stay.
- Following any hospital stay – planned or unplanned.
- Following a return home from a rehab stay.

If you are unsure whether your situation would benefit from transition support, contact Yvonne at 620-327-3787 to discuss it and your options. [TBP](#)



Yvonne Fast, MSN, APRN-CNW, Bluestem Communities Transition Nurse, visits with a resident receiving transition services.



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Meaningful work after retirement continued

there for us right now?" said Ed. "We came up to look in early November. We looked at the first home and it didn't really fit what we wanted. We had often talked about the thing we would miss most about our dream retirement home was the back deck that overlooked a pond and was set far

enough back that we felt like no one lived around us."

"Then we walked in here," said Ruth, indicating their home, the back of which is lined with large windows and overlooks a patio and pond. "We decided this is probably the right

thing to do, and it was. We have never looked back. We love it here."

The Basingers will continue to plan service work assignments for as long as they are able, and they will do so knowing their home is being cared for while they are away. **TBP**

Kidron Bethel Village celebrates Live Forward project

Bluestem Communities’ Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton celebrated new and renovated spaces with a dedication event for its Live Forward project on February 16, 2023.

The Live Forward project is a comprehensive \$10.7 million endeavor that included new construction and upgrades of existing spaces impacting nearly 50,000 square feet to position Kidron Bethel Village as a place for engagement and connections across the community and generations. Highlights of the project include the new Kaye Penner Education Center, expanded chapel and community gathering space with the addition of Kidron Hall, a modern entry and reception area, improved dining options, outdoor patio and courtyards, a therapeutic indoor/outdoor walking loop that connects three health care neighborhoods and remodeled health care rooms.

“This innovative project is the most significant capital endeavor in Kidron Bethel’s history, and we are excited by the opportunities it creates to connect the campus with the broader community,” said Bluestem Communities President and CEO James Krehbiel.

Many of the spaces were created with the intention to make Kidron Bethel Village a hub for community gathering and engagement. The Kaye Penner Education Center, named in honor of former Kidron Bethel Village resident, board member and longtime nursing professor at neighboring Bethel College, was a partnership with Bethel College to create educational spaces that promote intergenerational interaction by bringing Bethel College students to campus.

Kidron Hall was an addition meant to create a larger chapel and community gathering space to allow for greater numbers of residents and others from the North Newton, Newton and other local communities to gather for events and celebrations.

“We are grateful to be part of such a wonderful and supportive community,” said Krehbiel. “We now have the opportunity to host a wide variety of events that allow residents in all care levels to connect with the wider community.”

continued on page 10



Top: Kidron Hall will allow for members of the Kidron Bethel community and the wider communities to gather together for events, presentations and more.
Bottom left and center: New dining and living areas in Bethel Health Care Center allow for more comfortable and welcoming spaces to relax, fellowship and gather for activities.
Bottom right: The Kaye Penner Education Center creates spaces for intergenerational interaction and learning on campus.



Schowalter Villa establishes high-functioning memory support neighborhood

Both of Bluestem Communities' life plan communities – Schowalter Villa in Hesston and Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton – offer top quality dementia care programs for health care residents through the Comfort Matters program. Comfort Matters is “a dementia care education and research program dedicated to improving the quality of care and life for people with dementia.”

physically capable of some of their own care,” said Jeff Ritcha, Schowalter Villa Executive Director. “Residents who qualify as ‘high-functioning’ are able to walk, dress, eat and do other daily activities independently, yet they also need a safe environment to live in due to their difficulty thinking. It’s similar to assisted living memory care. The new Hess Plaza neighborhood meets those needs, while our North Meadows

to offering them those options for socialization and stimulation here,” said Ritcha.

The new neighborhood is located in the Villa Life Center’s 700 Hall, which was previously the neighborhood for Progressive Recovery Academy (PRA), a program that provides short-term care after hospitalization and rehabilitation services. The PRA program at Schowalter Villa still exists, it just no longer has its own dedicated neighborhood. Instead, PRA residents now stay in available rooms throughout any health care neighborhood.

“This neighborhood is very convenient for residents as they progress through the aging process,” said Ritcha. “It’s just down the hall from North Meadows, which offers higher-level memory care, so it’s a short move when they need to move to the next level. The neighborhoods also share the same nursing staff and social worker, and that kind of consistency is important in providing memory care.”

“With the neighborhood transitions underway, Hess Plaza rooms have also been receiving updates, including new paint, flooring and hardware. The neighborhood outdoor courtyard is also being enhanced to be more welcoming and comfortable.”

“We are excited about being able to offer this new service to residents and prospective residents,” said Ritcha. “It’s been a proactive decision that will continue to help us promote meaningful quality of life for residents.”

TBP



A home in Schowalter Villa's Hess Plaza neighborhood for high-functioning memory support in the Villa Life Center. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.

Over the last several months, Schowalter Villa has been working on creating a specialized neighborhood among the health care neighborhoods that is dedicated to offering “high-functioning memory support.” “High-functioning memory support” is focused on providing a safe, engaging environment for high-functioning individuals who need memory support. The new neighborhood is called Hess Plaza, and has received its Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) approval.

“As we have assessed the future of senior care needs, we have begun to see a need for a focus on memory care for individuals who are more

neighborhood, which is our existing memory support neighborhood, will continue to serve residents who are not able to care for themselves independently.”

The Hess Plaza neighborhood provides a vibrant and active life for residents. A Life Enrichment staff member dedicated specifically to the neighborhood plans and facilitates daily activities to keep residents socially engaged, including regular outings away from campus.

“Residents who live in the Hess Plaza neighborhood are still physically capable of being very active and engaged, and we are committed

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Kidron Bethel Village celebrates Live Forward project continued

Construction on the Live Forward project began in October 2021. The project has been done in phases, so some areas have been completed for some time while others remain in an on-going state. On-going projects include the remodel of all health care rooms and the completion of a new dining option, The Local Table, that is slated to open later this spring. The new addition area that includes Kidron Hall and the Kaye Penner Education Center were completed just prior to the February dedication. **TBP**



The Local Table is restaurant-style dining, serving breakfast and lunch, that is collaborating with local partners to provide fresh, delicious options. The Local Table will open later this spring. Photo by Tyler Stutzman.

Partnerships for communities to live well

Bluestem Communities is dedicated to important work in providing homes for people making life transitions and personalized care for people as they progress through the aging process. Fortunately for Bluestem Communities and the residents and participants who benefit from services, it's not work that Bluestem must do alone. Community partners also make commitments to working alongside Bluestem Communities leadership and staff to provide top quality services. One important partnership Bluestem Communities' maintains to ensure residents and participants are being met with the best care is with local pharmacies, particularly with Hesston Pharmacy and Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy.

Both Hesston Pharmacy and Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy can serve residents and participants at all Bluestem Communities locations, but Hesston Pharmacy is particularly

contracted to supply Schowalter Villa in Hesston with medication needs, and Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy plays the same role for Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton and Bluestem PACE's locations in McPherson and Hutchinson.

Pharmacist Sandie Kueker, who owns Hesston Pharmacy along with her husband and pharmacist Adam Kueker, says the story that was passed down to them is that in 1986, Schowalter Villa helped start the Hesston Pharmacy that exists today. The town had a pharmacy prior to that point, but it closed. Having an obvious need for local pharmacy services, Schowalter Villa helped recruit the pharmacist that would start a new pharmacy, and which continues more than 35 years later. The Kuekers also own and operate Harvey Drug in Newton, and the two stores work closely with one another to provide services across their communities and

other local communities.

"When we took over the pharmacy in 2016, this wonderful partnership with Schowalter Villa already existed," said Kueker. "It's continued to grow and develop even since then, and we are so grateful for it. We want to make sure we do things that help make our patients lives easier and keeps them healthy. Schowalter Villa is amazing in terms of the care and services they provide. We've worked with a lot of nursing facilities over the years, and Schowalter Villa is truly exceptional. It's not just a rating on a piece of paper. We're glad to help with that success and we want to set them up for success."

Hesston Pharmacy provides medications for most of the Schowalter Villa residents in the health care and assisted living neighborhoods, and also serves independent living residents

continued on page 12



Left: The staff of Hesston Pharmacy and Harvey Drug. Photo provided.
Right top and bottom: In addition to providing medication needs, Hesston Pharmacy and Harvey Drug both offer a variety of home and gift options for all ages and interests. Photos by Rachel McMaster.

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Partnerships for communities to live well continued

who choose to use the pharmacy located just a few blocks down the street from campus.

"We love when independent living residents who are new to the Hesston community choose to use us as their pharmacy," said Kueker. "I think it gives people and families extra peace of mind when you personally know your pharmacist and can see them face-to-face."

Aside from being able to stop into the pharmacy when needed, Hesston Pharmacy and Harvey Drug both offer a refill reminder program, two levels of medication packaging programs and delivery services for independent living residents and other people living locally.

In addition to medications, Hesston Pharmacy and Harvey Drug provide flu shots and COVID boosters, can special order specific medications or other items that might not be in the store with delivery within a day, do blood pressure checks and provide diabetes education for those looking for help managing insulin injections, nutrition tips and more. The stores also sell

hearing aides for people with mild to moderate hearing loss with the ability to go home with hearing aides the same day. Both stores also operate as gift shops with items that are meant to provide help or comfort to people.

"We keep a lot in our gift shops, and the idea is to keep people healthy and living well with those items," said Kueker. "For example, we carry a lot of puzzles because puzzles are good for brain health. We have different sizes of puzzles to help with handling, and some even have special, easy-grip edges for people with arthritic hands. We try to keep gifts in our store that are thoughtful and make it feel more homey when you come in."

Located about 25 minutes from both North Newton and McPherson, Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy provides similar services for residents at Kidron Bethel Village and participants at Bluestem PACE. The partnership has been in place with Kidron Bethel Village since about 2015, and since the beginning of Bluestem PACE in 2016.

"We began these partnerships because of the service level we provide," said pharmacist Eric Driggers, owner

of Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy. "Larger pharmacies just aren't able to provide the personalized services we are able to."

As the medication provider and pharmacist consultant for health care and assisted living at Kidron Bethel Village, Hillsboro Hometown Pharmacy makes at least once daily trips to campus so they are able to provide delivery services to independent living residents there who would choose to use them as well.

The pharmacy offers three packaging options for Kidron Bethel Village residents, and are working on adding a fourth. For PACE participants, options vary and are more customized for unique participant needs.

Relationship is the most important part of these partnerships," said Driggers. "Any pharmacy can pack medicine, but having good, open communication lines and be able to quickly solve problems is so valuable. When something comes up, Bluestem Communities knows we will do whatever necessary to take care of it, and I'm grateful that we have that shared level of trust." **TBP**

Considering our histories: A review of *East of Liberal: Notes on the Land* by Raylene Hinz-Penner

"I set out to tell this story of life on the land," wrote Raylene Hinz-Penner in her newest book, *East of Liberal: Notes on the Land* (Cascadia Publishing House, Dec. 2022). "As I moved

"What's so unique about my story?" she pondered. "But I always did want to write a story of place."

East of Liberal: Notes on the Land is both a story of place and a memoir

the beautifully crafted prose. Hinz-Penner now lives in an independent living neighborhood at Bluestem Communities' Kidron Bethel Village in North Newton.

"I think I always knew I wanted to tell the story of my parents coming to that land east of Liberal because it felt like a unique story," Hinz-Penner said. "They didn't come when the land was settled in the early 1900's. They came so many years later – after the Dust Bowl – and they tried to farm sand. That's a distinctive story."

The book is Hinz-Penner's second and also carries some lessons she learned while writing her first, *Searching for Sacred Ground: The Journey of Chief Lawrence Hart, Mennonite* (Cascadia Publishing House, 2007), which tells the story of a modern-day Cheyenne peace chief.

"Chief Lawrence Hart taught me the value of deep history," said Hinz-Penner. "When he told stories, he told them in the context of generations prior. I was inspired by that idea of deep history and how we are who we are because of how others lived."

Organized over an annual cycle of seasons, solstices and equinoxes, holidays, celebrations and traditions, *East of Liberal* explores the things that are integral to shaping Hinz-Penner's life – place, farming and faith.

"I think I had a slow dawning that farmers, in some ways, share attitudes toward the land with indigenous peoples who lived so closely on it," said Hinz-Penner. "I have a huge need to celebrate every equinox, every full

continued on page 14



Author and Kidron Bethel Village resident Raylene Hinz-Penner with her latest book, *East of Liberal: Notes on the Land*. Photo by Rachel McMaster.

through generational time I began to recognize the mythologies created by story, the ways our beliefs are shaped in community. I am only beginning to recognize what it means to be a Mennonite settler."

Hinz-Penner says she never wanted to write a memoir.

as it weaves researched history with Hinz-Penner's own experiences and memories about the land her family owned and she grew up on three miles east of the southwest Kansas town of Liberal. As a retired literature and writing professor, she also incorporates her own poetry with

Considering our histories continued

moon. Where does that come from? Is it part of my Mennonite background? Is it a farmer? Maybe it's just my closeness with the land growing up. Farmers' lives are pretty routine – they need celebrations. We got so excited about the Christian celebrations, and then I started digging into those and they are linked very deeply with the indigenous relationship with the earth."

Hinz-Penner was also inspired by an indigenous calendar that hung above her desk during the nearly decade of research and writing of *East of Liberal* that shows the Ancestral Puebloans circle of time. As she looked at it daily, she began noticing the similarities with a farmer's cycle of time with the land and even the annual celebrations part of her Christian Mennonite faith.

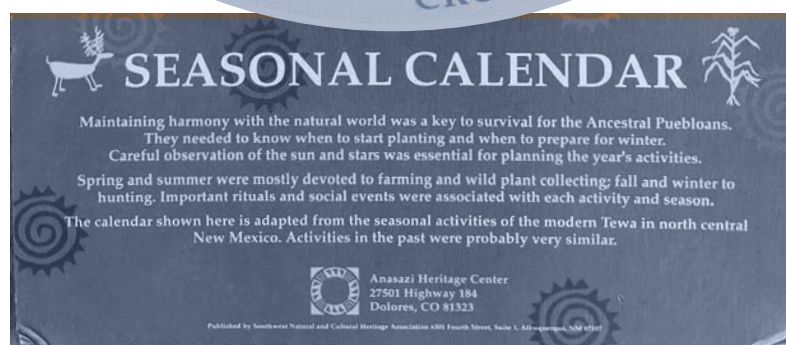
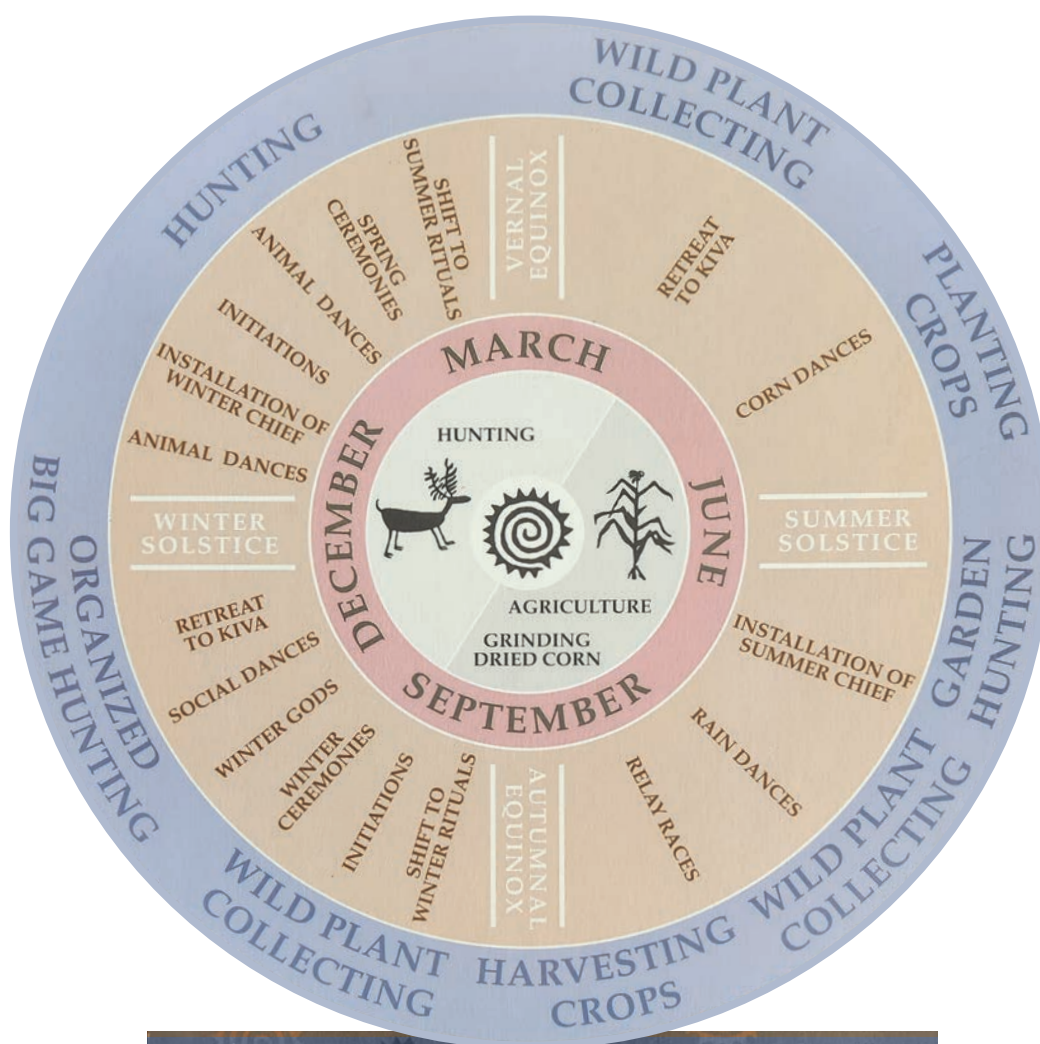
A theme of tension runs throughout the narrative. Tension between a childhood viewed as happy and positive with thoughts of what settlement on the land meant for the native peoples who lived there previously. Tension between deep appreciation for her Mennonite faith and the attitudes of land settlers who tried to force the land into working for them.

In the last few years, both responsible stewardship of the land and land acknowledgement – the idea and practice of recognizing indigenous peoples as the original stewards of the land that was often taken from them and what it meant for them – have become particularly important to Hinz-Penner. Both are explored in detail throughout the book.

"Our own farming people believed if the land wasn't being farmed it was empty," said Hinz-Penner. "That made Native Americans invisible. My parents came to that land with nothing

and used that land to live very well. I benefitted from that and I will inherit it someday. All the while, the native people who were there before got shoved onto reservations in Oklahoma and lived a very different life than me. It's important for me to recognize that inequality. It's not about reparations or a condemnation of farming. More than anything it's a recognition of what we got because of what others lost."

East of Liberal is reflective and relatable, allowing the reader to perhaps consider ideas different than those that have shaped life and thinking for many years and generations. It can make readers consider their own histories regardless of where and how their experiences may differ, and give new appreciation for the things we take for granted. **TBP**



The indigenous peoples seasonal calendar that hung above Hinz-Penner's desk and inspired new ways of thinking.

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