

SUMMER 2021

Blue Skies of Texas
COURIER

A

Mother &
Daughter

Retired at Blue Skies

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SENIOR LIVING IN THE TRADITION OF AIR FORCE VILLAGE

Executive Report



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Lieutenant General, USAF (Ret)
President & CEO

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Spring is here and my elephant ears bounced back, just as we're doing!

Our residents, staff and their families have been through a lot this year. We faced the uncertainty of COVID and, to add insult to injury, we were hit by a horrific week-long winter storm that left 4 million Texans without power and caused countless damage to homes and property. In my backyard, my beloved elephant ears (why I am so attached to them I do not know) froze and withered to the ground, but they taught me a lesson.

When things look bleak, there is always hope. We learned that this year dealing with COVID. We relied on each other for protection, for understanding, and for friendship – as we've been doing our whole lives. We relied on our family, and at Blue Skies the word family has a lot of different meanings. Your family might include a neighbor you've known for 40 years since serving together in the military, or it may be someone you met recently, or you might be talking about your mom or dad or a sibling who lives down the street at Blue Skies. It is extraordinary how many multigenerational families retire here. Much the way plants draw strength from light and warmth, we draw strength from our family.

Strength gives us the ability to be adventurous and live life to the fullest. The RVers and travelers we highlight in this edition of the Courier are a great example of strength. Whether our residents drive around the country, fly around the world, or just venture out into the culturally rich San Antonio area, they know their home is always safe and secure. Blue Skies is truly the home base for adventure.

Finally, this Courier highlights one of our core values: the duty to serve and care. If there were one attribute that runs through the Blue Skies staff, it would be a servant's heart. Being part of something bigger and serving others is characteristic of our staff – some of whom also serve in the Guard and Reserves and return to their Blue Skies family with new skills and dedication.

Last week my grandsons visited for the first time in a year because of COVID. They came for their great-grandmother's 90th birthday. It had been hard not seeing them, but we had to protect them, their parents and our residents. The boys are only three and one, so they got a big kick out of helping granddad count how many elephant ears were starting to grow again. We inspected and counted them daily. They were amazed at how they had bounced back, but spring is a time of rebirth and growth.

If you are ready to start growing anew, come visit us at Blue Skies. You might find your family can get a whole lot bigger and more exciting.

Be safe,
Darrell

Blue Skies Family Begets Another Generation

Blue Skies is one big, caring family. We watch out for each other, laugh, play, learn, travel, worship, dine, celebrate and grieve together. Just like a family.

Pat Perry and her mom, Jenona Whitlatch, have carried the family idea one step further. They really are family – Jenona has been a Blue Skies resident since 1988, and Pat, her daughter, moved here in 2019. Their cottages are just a two-minute walk from each other, and they enjoy daily visits.

“I had been visiting my parents since they moved here and when I retired, I left Hendersonville, NC, to be near my mom and because I love this place. Also, I inherited my parents’ thinking – if you’re in a continuing care retirement community, your kids don’t have to worry about you as you age.” (Pat has a grown son who lives in Montana.)

She remembers how impressed and grateful her parents were when Freedom House opened. After her dad, Major General Wayne Whitlatch, USAF (Ret), suffered a stroke in 2015, he developed dementia and moved to Freedom House where he died in 2017. “I love Freedom House. They took such great care of my dad.”

A young retiree at 64, she’s not alone. “I see a lot of younger retirees moving here now. They’re active and they believe what I believe – that it’s wise to move here sooner rather than later. I’m a strong advocate of that. We can engage in so many activities and leave our



Pat and her mom share coffee and memories in their daily visits, and Max comes along to enjoy the outdoors.

home for months at a time and not worry about anything,” she says.

Pat spent most of her life in small towns, working for the federal government, and one of the many perks of life at Blue Skies is having access to everything San Antonio has to offer. Before COVID, she had season tickets to the San Antonio Symphony and enjoyed riding the Blue Skies bus to concerts, avoiding traffic and parking hassles. “I love all the city amenities, including having the wonderful San Antonio Zoo nearby!” she says.

Neighbors wave as she and her Basset Hound, Max, walk to and from her mom’s cottage every day. They share meals and enjoy Sunday Brunch with fellow residents. When Pat’s not visiting her mom, you’ll find her working out with a robust Zumba class, cooling off with aqua therapy, or heading out with the Seasoned Soles, the Blue Skies popular run-walk group. For less rigorous activity, she enjoys canasta and mahjong. Whatever she does, she enjoys the company of friends and neighbors – family. Because that’s what Blue Skies does best – creating a sense of family, whether you’re related or not.



Some travelers find bliss in cruising the world's seas. Some love staying in luxury hotels and taking in the big city lights and culture. Others heed the call to exotic foreign lands.

Then there are the Adventurous RV Travelers

Hitting the open road in a home-on-wheels, these folks are always up for new discoveries and intimate glimpses of nature's magnificence. At Blue Skies, you'll find an RV community of folks who love to share their photos and stories with other RV aficionados.

The spacious, paved, 35-vehicle capacity RV facility at Blue Skies West Campus is a draw for retirees who love the RV life. Let us introduce you to two couples who find joy in retirement as intrepid RVers.

Mike & Karen McGinty

Lieutenant General Mike McGinty and his wife Karen travel in style in a 27' Mercedes Sprinter Chassis with a Winnebago coach. The fine accommodations are second only to their lovely Garden Home at Blue Skies. Avid RVers since Mike's retirement in 2005, they're bird-watchers and nature lovers who've logged 90,000 miles in two different RVs over the past 17 years.

When they began researching retirement communities, Blue Skies was at the top of their list, and the decision was made easier when they discovered the excellent RV accommodations. Natives of Minnesota who traveled the world during Mike's 34-year Air Force career, they were happy to return to Texas, where they'd previously served at Randolph Air Force Base. They've traversed the U.S. from East to West, toured north into Canada, and also enjoy shorter trips to the diverse State Parks scattered throughout Texas.

After a year at home base during the pandemic, they're eager to hit the road again. "We drove to Fredericksburg to check out the RV and make sure it's travel-worthy after a cold winter," Mike says. After that, "We're planning a trip to Colorado this summer, and to South Carolina to see our daughter for Christmas."



Blue Skies RVers swap stories 'round the campfire.



Mike McGinty, intrepid hiker, hits the trails.

Karen adds, "Blue Skies did a great job protecting us from COVID, and now we are grateful that we can leave and not worry about our home. We have wonderful neighbors and security here."

The RV Lot at Blue Skies is ideal for the McGintys and their fellow RVers at both campuses. "We have electrical hookups, we can fill our water tanks, wash our RVs and use the dump station. And Blue Skies security staff patrols the site to ensure all is well." Mike is grateful to Catered Living, one of the many courtesies afforded to Blue Skies residents. "About once a year, we hire them to do a thorough washing of our RV."

RV travel continues to beckon them. "We've seen some impressive birds, and once we were surprised by wild horses that came through our campsite in North Dakota." Still enjoying each other's company on the open road after 56 years of marriage, Mike and Karen are an inspiration to their friends and family.

Ed and Ann Albert

Lieutenant Colonel Albert and his wife Ann have found their happy place on North America's highways. Their longest trip took them on an 11,000-mile journey to Fairbanks, AL, staying at national parks and military campgrounds along the way, meandering through scenic states that brought them a deeper appreciation for nature's splendor. At Denali National Park in Alaska, Ed says, "We got our fill of moose, eagles and bears."

Blue Skies gives them the opportunity to securely park their 30-foot 5th wheel trailer and pickup camper, just a short ride away at Blue Skies West campus. For these longtime RV enthusiasts, that was a selling point. "We can keep the battery charged so we're always ready to head out," Ed says. "We were so grateful to find RV accommodations here. It's so easy to lock our doors and go away for two or three months, safely assured all will be well."

They've stayed at national, state and military campgrounds in the U.S. and into Canada. Even COVID could not stop these bold travelers. "We've got wanderlust," they confess. Their last trip was in April. "We'd been in Texas six years and had not seen the Rio Grande, so we went for a long weekend, camping in Harlingen."



Ann and Ed Albert are drawn to spectacular waterfalls like this one in Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska.

Their special passion is hidden away in a small, beautiful cave in Arizona – Karchner Caverns State Park, where they have volunteered as tour guides for 10 seasons. Ed says, "It is considered the most mineralized, colorful cave in the U.S., with a fully accessible pathway for electric scooters and wheelchairs – very popular with retirees." They spend two to three months there every year and share their stories in presentations on the cave and its bat residents with Blue Skies friends.

While home at Blue Skies, they take advantage of activities and social life. Ed serves on the Residents' Council and Ann launched a stained glass studio. Her artistic creations have placed first in ArtsInspire, a senior art competition hosted by LeadingAge Texas.

The Alberts agree: "The best thing about living at Blue Skies is all the friends and knowing everyone's names. Of all the retirement communities we visited, this is the friendliest," they say.

Staff Reservists **Serving their Country, Coming Home to Family**



Heather Olney on a recent field training mission with the Army Reserve.

Service to country is a long-standing tradition at Blue Skies, with many residents having served in every branch of the military, and civilians who've devoted their lives to making the world a better place through education, medicine, business, law and industry. Among the Blue Skies staff are also military veterans and reservists.

Kathie Estrada, Director of Human Resources says, "We see veteran status as a positive because military training focuses on attention to detail,

punctuality, problem-solving and going the extra step to find answers. We offer military leave for those who continue to serve in the reserves as another way of lending our support."

Formerly enlisted in the Navy, Ida Leithead, RN, Director of Hospice, now is an Army Nurse Corps Officer in the National Guard. She was activated several times in 2020 in response to the pandemic and sent to places of racial unrest, including the George Floyd funeral in Houston. She says, "Although our reserve work is part time, it takes priority, and because the majority of our residents and corporate staff have been in some line of military work, they understand."

As evidence, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Award was presented to Jennifer Aguirre in 2020, Administrator at The Mission, recognizing her and Blue Skies as a military-friendly employer. "We have several on our staff who are former military and the experience they bring, the way they handle tough situations, their commitment to our residents ... it's an honor to have them on board," Jennifer said of Blue Skies' response to staff veterans.

For this story, we tracked down MSG Heather Olney, a Clinical Social Worker at The Mission, who was field training a platoon of 78 young soldiers at Fort Leonard

Wood in Missouri in her service with the Army Reserve. "I joined the Army to give back, and I'm in social work for the same reason. Blue Skies lets me encompass all of that. I work with people who paved the path for me as a female and young adult. Our residents sacrificed years, time, money, even risked their lives. To be able to work with people who have that ethic and drive is a total privilege," Heather said.

She added, "The Army Reserve has given me the opportunity to continue giving to my nation – training soldiers, helping develop these young people so they will be prepared for a life of greater purpose. I do not take that responsibility lightly." While on assignment, her supervisor, Jennifer Aguirre, sends her text messages of encouragement. "When I was called, Jennifer asked, 'What do you need from me?' Blue Skies is so supportive, and I know not all work environments are like that."



Residents Lt Col Ed Albert (left), and LTC Roland Keller (center), congratulate the Blue Skies staff on winning the ESGR Award. From left, Ida Leithead, Jennifer Aguirre (holding plaque), Heather Olney, and Blue Skies President & CEO Lt Gen Darrell Jones.

She looks forward to "coming home to my family at The Mission." Her five-year-old son Jaxon is in the Blue Skies childcare center because that's what families do – keep each other's children safe and happy while mom is serving her country.

To all of our residents and staff who've sacrificed for our freedom: *Thank you for your service!*

Hospice Expands and Adds UT Health Medical Director

In 2008, Blue Skies Hospice initiated a caring, holistic approach to patients in the final stage of life, providing loving, nurturing and comforting care in collaboration with the patient, family and caregiving team.

The success of the program has resulted in expansion of its services into the community in 2020, and in 2021, Blue Skies Hospice added a new Medical Director – Margaret Finley, M.D., who is affiliated with UT Health. Ida Leithead, Director of Hospice, says, “With the impressive credentials of our hospice physicians and the strength of the UT Health system, we are expanding our capabilities, including the addition of palliative care to our menu of services. We are excited that Omar Zantua, M.D., will continue to serve Blue Skies Hospice patients as Associate Medical Director.”

Hospice and palliative care address each patient’s physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. Hospice patients are those who are diagnosed with a terminal illness, where life-prolonging medication is no longer used, and the patient is kept comfortable through the end of life. Palliative care uses life-prolonging medications for those who are suffering but may or may not be terminally ill.

“Since the inception of this service at Blue Skies, our philosophy has been that patients deserve to live the best quality of life throughout the remainder of their life. We are now carrying our compassionate care into other senior facilities, including Morningside Ministries and Harbor Valley Nursing Home, as well as into individual homes in our service area. Wherever their home is, that’s where we will go,” Ida says.

Among the unique features that set Blue Skies Hospice apart: the integrity and reputation of Blue Skies healthcare, and a skilled, highly trained staff that includes physicians, nurses, certified nursing assistants, social worker and a chaplain. Blue Skies Hospice has earned accreditation through the Joint Commission, an achievement that ensures compliance with the highest national standards for safety and quality of care.

New Date
Friday, September 10, 2021
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For more information, contact Daniel Garcia Casillas
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OUR VISION

We will set the standard of excellence in senior lifecare through our relentless pursuit of innovation, service and compassionate care.

OUR MISSION

We will improve lives by providing exceptional retirement living and continuing care with an emphasis on individual quality of life and dignity.

REFER AN ELIGIBLE AIR FORCE WIDOW

Blue Skies of Texas is an exceptional retirement community with an extraordinary charitable mission – reaching out to the widowed spouses of retired Air Force officers who would like to live in this safe community and may need some financial assistance to do so. Our mission comforts those in need and gives purpose to our community that transcends the ordinary. If you know of an eligible widow of a retired Air Force officer who might qualify, please call (210) 568-5029 or (210) 568-3282. All assistance is strictly confidential.



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