

WINTER 2024

Blue Skies of Texas

COURIER

 Pollinators
work their magic
at the Blue Skies
Garden



SENIOR LIVING IN THE TRADITION OF AIR FORCE VILLAGE

Executive REPORT



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ON THE COVER:

Harlan Sager, left, and Jim Conner attend to the busy beehives they nurture at the Blue Skies Community Garden. Photo courtesy of Dorothy Conner.

It's all about trust! You might have expected me to open with a comment about busy little bees given the photo on the cover and *Newsweek* rating us #14 among the top 250 Continuing Care Retirement Communities in the United States -- recognition you'll read about in this edition of the *Courier*. But it's really all about trust.

I recently joined Lt Col (Ret) Jim Conner and CAPT (Ret) Harlan Sager to visit our bee colony. They dressed me in protective gear, gave me expert direction, and soon we were inspecting the hives and passing large sheets of very active bees back and forth. A few people asked me why I would do that. Well, I love new adventures and I had total trust in Jim and Harlan. They know their business.

It's not unlike Blue Skies of Texas. People put their total trust in our selfless employees. They're looking for adventure, for renewed or new friendships, and they know they will be taken care of by professionals, no matter what level of care they need—independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, memory care, or hospice.

In this edition of the *Courier*, you'll learn about our thriving bee community and how it supports our Blue Skies Garden because of wonderful volunteers who are eager to share their passions. It's really a common story. Residents bring their passion to Blue Skies, share with friends, and a whole community of supporters comes together. An entomologist and a beekeeper who can trace his craft back to the Civil War have energized the Blue Skies Gardens and formed wonderful new relationships. Marketing guests even have a chance to win our coveted Blue Skies honey during in-person marketing events. It's a big hit.

You'll also read about Jimmy and Larry Rogers, our first Merchant Mariner and Master of Steam, Motor, and Sailing Vessels of any size. Their love of travel and far-flung places fits right in with the other adventurers at Blue Skies. They recently returned from an eight-month, 25,000 mile around-the-world trip. And they find Blue Skies an exciting place because of the interesting clubs and residents.

You'll meet Shari Proctor, who brings 26 years of service to Blue Skies and introduces us to the benefits of the continuum of care, highlighting our two assisted living communities. "Why didn't we do this sooner?!" is the typical sentiment when our residents realize how their lives improve thanks to Shari's team in Wellness and Life Enrichment.

We've always said Blue Skies is a very busy place and that was truly the case when San Antonio walking clubs and Volksmarchers joined Blue Skies residents and prospects in January to explore our community. Whether tackling the 5K, 10K or something in-between, they got a chance to explore and meet new friends. Based on the turnout, I think we've started a tradition.

I loved visiting the bees and felt safe and protected. That is the feeling you'll get if you visit Blue Skies or decide to join our community. We've got a lot to brag about, and I think you'll find it's pretty sweet here...like our honey. We look forward to seeing you soon.

Darrell D. Jones

After a trip AROUND THE WORLD *their adventure continues at Blue Skies*

Jimmy and Larry Rogers were on a wait list for The Hills at Blue Skies East when they got word on a Monday that a spacious two-bedroom Mid-Rise apartment was available. They drove from Houston on Tuesday, committed on Wednesday, moved their household goods on Thursday, and closed on the sale of their Houston home on Friday. Then they packed their bags and headed for Africa on Saturday to begin an eight-month, 25,000 mile trek around the world, traveling by planes, ships, buses and the occasional rustic conveyance – including a tuk-tuk in Indonesia that was held together with duct tape. It was eight months before they returned – in May, 2023. That’s the way this dynamic duo rolls.

Their travel, sailing and career adventures could fill a book. But they’re too busy to write one. There are people to meet, oceans to explore, seaports to visit, and live music to hear.

San Antonio is further inland than Larry’s usual habitat. A native of a small island, he says – Manhattan – he loved to watch the ships come in and out of the harbor and longed for a life at sea. He served in the Merchant Marine for 23 years and still holds active qualifications as a Senior Instructor/Captain, Honorary Admiral, and Master of Steam, Motor, and Sailing Vessels. His career credentials and education are vast, but he’d rather talk about what’s to come than what’s past.

Jimmy, a native of Iowa, also has had diverse career adventures, but her favorite was fulfilling a lifelong dream. When her daughters were grown, she applied to be a flight attendant. She had tried for a position as a young woman but did not meet the height requirement. She was no taller at age 40, but the rules had relaxed, and she embarked on a 10-year career in the skies. Jimmy and Larry share wanderlust, which has contributed to a well-traveled and delightful 30-year marriage. Their blended families include six children and eight grandchildren. “We are now professional grandparents,” they say, faces aglow.

They were happily surprised to discover that life at Blue Skies offers a vigorous social schedule that proves they made the right decision to move here.

“We chose Blue Skies because we have a daughter and granddaughter nearby, and the reviews convinced us this was by far the best option for future healthcare as we age,” Larry said. “Turns out, it’s the people who are the main attraction.”

“The camaraderie, the way everyone watches out for each other, the high level of adventurous spirit. These are like-minded people who’ve lived full, exciting lives and we are enjoying making new friends,” Jimmy says.

Their modern 6th floor apartment includes 1600 square feet with spacious closets, a large living area, an office, and other amenities. And they have found traveling by elevator is a great way to meet pets and their owners.

During their odyssey, they were among the first visitors to many foreign locales since the pandemic shutdown and were greeted with great enthusiasm. Jimmy says they felt like unofficial U.S. ambassadors. Now they are becoming ambassadors at Blue Skies – ready to embrace and savor friendship, adventure, and all that the future holds.



Larry and Jimmy’s travel adventures find them in the world’s most magnificent places. Here, the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa is their backdrop.

What's all the BUZZ?



Life without bees to pollinate our food crops would be a global disaster. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reports that 100 crop species provide 90% of food around the world and 71 are pollinated by bees.

Residents Jim Conner and Harlan Sager know bees. As a teenager, Jim helped with his family's bee colonies in rural Nebraska. Harlan's family were beekeepers dating to Civil War days. His great grandfather raised bees for honey to support the family during the war. When Harlan was old enough to hold a hammer, he helped his dad operate 2,000 colonies of bees to pollinate fruit orchards, alfalfa, and other seed crops along the Snake River in Oregon.

It was a good day for bees and humans when Jim, a retired USAF Lieutenant Colonel with a 23-year career as a navigator, instructor, and recruiter, met Harlan, a retired US Navy Captain, nuclear submarine engineer and an engineering duty officer for 18 years. Their mutual bee connection set them on a course two years ago that has led to two thriving bee colonies located in the Blue Skies Community Garden.

During Jim's post-retirement career in academia and agriculture, he ran the entomology lab at University of Florida. A dedicated gardener with a plot at the Blue Skies garden, he knows the importance of bees and the threats to them from pesticides, drought, habitat destruction, and climate change. And he knows the health benefits their honey provides.

Harlan ordered two hives containing about 20,000 bees with the queens, and Jim purchased the supers and frames for the bee hives, which Jim and Harlan assembled to provide weather-appropriate homes for their "nice, gentle bees." The bees are garden pollinators, and gather nectar for honey from the many flowering trees and plants around Blue Skies. When Harlan works

a hive, he wears a bee veil over his head but sans gloves on his hands. "I'll get stung now and then," he says, but he chalks it up as part of the process. Jim suits up head to toe and marvels at his friend's confidence and courage.

Harlan's intimate knowledge of bees coupled with Jim's entomology knowledge has made them ideal partners. They are marvels of wisdom about the day-to-day delight of nurturing these tiny critters whose activities are critical to our food supply. Jim says, "The queens have a life cycle of about three years. The smart workers know when the hive needs a new queen, and the nursery bees direct the old queen to lay an egg in a special cell. The larva is fed a mixture called "royal jelly," that allows the egg to develop into new queens. The first queen to emerge will kill off any others and reign until her time is up."

Their first honey harvest yielded enough to share a small jar with each of their fellow Blue Skies gardeners, complete with a "Blue Skies Apiaries" logo on the label designed by Jim's daughter Susanne Skerrett. The gardeners, who operate 52 plots, are delighted that bees are busily pollinating their fruits, vegetables, and flowers. The rest of us are grateful, too.



Assisted Living

Enriching Quality of Life

It's a paradox. One of the oft-cited reasons residents give for choosing a continuing care retirement community is the assurance of access to levels of care should the time come when those levels could enhance and support issues of health and aging. And yet, when the time comes, hardly anyone wants to move from independent living to assisted living or any other level. We want to stay independent. In truth, the best way to remain healthy, independent, active, and happy is to transition to a level of care that delivers benefits to enrich one's quality of life.

Shari Proctor, who has 26 years of service with this community, is a wise and compassionate advocate for Blue Skies residents. She is Director of Wellness and Life Enrichment, and she knows things. She knows that a whopping percentage of residents who grudgingly yet finally make the move to assisted living at Arnold House or Liberty House are thrilled once they move. They may be opposed to their family, friends and advisors who urge them, but once the shift is made, the invariable and joyful response is, "Why didn't I/we do this sooner?!"

"At our two assisted living residences – Liberty House and Arnold House – residents have their own living room, bedroom, fully-equipped bathroom, and a kitchenette. Staff is available to help, but not to smother. You can come and go as you please, and we offer opportunities for socialization. Residents dine together three meals a day. By the time folks move to assisted living, they already know many of the residents. It's not the unknown, risky venture it could be if they lived elsewhere. It's still Blue Skies, still home, and you're still among friends," Shari says.

At Blue Skies, friends, family, and staff watch for signs that indicate it might be time to consider assisted living – for example, appetite and poor nutrition, physical struggles, self-isolation, confusion over medication, and cognitive decline. "We find that residents who were reclusive in independent living tend to become more social and confident when they move to assisted living," Shari says.

Just another of the many advantages of life at Blue Skies – the continuum of care that nurtures wellness and independence at every stage of life.



Shari Proctor lends a caring, attentive ear when she visits with residents and their families — always aiming to provide the optimum living situation that will support wellness, independence, safety, and comfort.

The staff makes your bed, does your laundry, manages your medications, schedules your medical appointments, and more. Families are grateful that their loved ones are in a safe, secure, friendly environment, and residents love it, too.



Newsweek Ranks Blue Skies #1 in San Antonio, #3 in Texas, #14 Nationally!

Newsweek Magazine has compiled a ranking of “American’s Best Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC),” with Blue Skies of Texas leading as #1 in San Antonio, #3 in Texas, and #14 nationally out of some 2,000 CCRCs in the U.S.

Lt Gen Darrell Jones, Blue Skies President and CEO, commented, “We’re proud of this distinction as one of the top CCRCs in the U.S., and the only one in San Antonio to make *Newsweek’s* top 250 list. This recognition attests to our wonderful staff and their dedication to making Blue Skies of Texas a truly special place.”

In partnership with the respected global research firm Statista, *Newsweek* announced their top 250 as “places

where residents not only live but thrive.” A score was calculated for each CCRC in the analysis, with the total score based on national online surveys of medical professionals, acquaintances of residents/residents living in CCRCs, and accreditation data.

Medical professionals recommended notable CCRCs and assessed each care level – independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, and memory care. Acquaintances of residents and residents gave their recommendations based on accommodation, commercial services, community services, financial factors, food, overall care, overall safety measures, and overall staffing. CARF International accreditation also was given consideration on each CCRC’s total score.

Blue Skies Volksmarch Attracts 120+



Volksmarchers have been trekking through urban, rural and natural areas worldwide since the sport was founded in Germany in the 1960s. But until now, they’d never earned a credit for walking the trails and pathways of Blue Skies.

On a chilly Saturday, January 13, more than 120 walkers, including the Seasoned Soles of Blue Skies, members of San Antonio Pathfinders Volkssport Walking Club, America’s Walking Club, Blue Skies residents and prospective residents assembled for fun, fitness and friendship – the American Volkssport credo. Walkers could opt for a 5K, 10K or any variation.

BST residents Betty Overacker and Suzanne Yarbrough spearheaded the effort, which included a tour of Blue Skies, snacks, maps marking the distances, and a popular food truck. The air was filled with positive energy, lively conversation, and communal determination to achieve fitness – a great way to begin 2024.

Charitable Gift Annuities

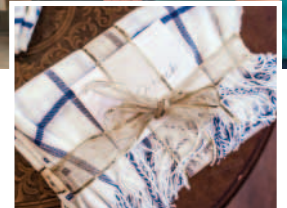
*Income for You, and
a Lasting Legacy*

Charitable Gift Annuities (CGAs) offer a way to receive an excellent financial return during your lifetime, while leaving a legacy to a charity that is meaningful to you. CGA rates are fixed at the time your contract is established and allow you to earn a high interest rate for yourself (or yourself and an additional beneficiary) for life. A CGA, established with the AFV Charitable Foundation, may be designated to a charitable fund of your choice, e.g., the Air Force Widows Fund, the Covenant Fund or Freedom House.

As an example, currently, the rate for a CGA is 7.0% for a 75-year-old investor. A CGA is established with an irrevocable, \$10,000 minimum amount. Rates are based on the annuitant's age / annuitants' ages. Rates are lower for a joint annuity since payments are distributed over two lifetimes. After the first person passes, the second continues to receive the full quarterly payments.

A CGA also entitles you to a one-time charitable tax deduction (usually equivalent in value to about 40% of the CGA amount), and payments through the calculated life expectancy of the annuitant are partially tax-free.

CGAs provide income payments while you are living and keep your memory alive by supporting the mission of the Air Force Villages Charitable Foundation. We are available to chat with you about a CGA and help you assess whether this is a good option for you. Please call Mitch Millar at 210-568-3211.



BLANKETS FOR EAGLES

Each fall, a festive dinner honors new and existing Eagle Donors who have made gifts totaling \$25,000 or more to the AFV Charitable Foundation. Some Eagles who reside in our licensed facilities – Liberty House, Arnold House, The Mission, and Freedom House – were unable to attend this year's dinner. In special tribute, we delivered custom, embroidered blankets featuring the AFVCF logo. It was fun for the Development office staff to visit with these generous residents and thank them in person. Here, Mitch Millar and Daniel Casillas present blankets to Liberty House residents Patsy "Pat" Jacobs and Dr. William "Bill" Jacobs.

A promotional banner for the Freedom Golf Tournament. The background is a blue sky with white clouds and green grass at the bottom. The text "Save the Date" is in large, bold, white letters with a blue outline. Below it, "Friday, March 22, 2024" is written in blue. "The Quarry Golf Course of San Antonio" is in a smaller blue font. The logo for the "PLAY FOR 2024 Freedom GOLF TOURNAMENT 30TH ANNUAL" is prominently displayed in the center, featuring a golf ball and a flag. To the right, it says "Presented by AIR FORCE VILLAGES Charitable Foundation" with an eagle logo. At the bottom right, it says "Join us for our annual tournament to benefit Freedom House, our memory care facility." A dark blue box at the bottom contains the contact information: "For more information, contact Daniel Garcia Casillas at 210-568-3290 or danielcasillas@blueskiestx.org".



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Blue Skies West
(210) 677-8666

Alzheimer's Care &
Research Center
(210) 838-6300

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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