

OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWSMAGAZINE **FREE COPY**

Jim Ferguson: Doing More Than Expected



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By Freddy Groves



OKLAHOMA VETERAN NEWSMAGAZINE

Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families

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MORE INSIDE

On The Cover: *Jim Ferguson's record spans three years of active duty during World War II and one year during the Korean War, 17 years in the Air Force Reserve, and 31 years as an Air Force civilian*

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Serving Active Duty Military, Veterans and Their Families



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On the Cover: Jim Ferguson Did More Than What's Expected

Some Americans serve their country for a chapter of their lives. Jim Ferguson wrote a book's worth. His record spans three years of active duty during World War II and one year during the Korean War, 17 years in the Air Force Reserve, and 31 years as an Air Force civilian engineer at Tinker Air Force Base - four decades devoted to national defense.

Ferguson's journey began after graduating from Siloam Springs High School, Arkansas. At age 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Signal Corps Reserve on October 22, 1942. He immediately attended radio technician school in Little Rock as a civilian civil servant before being activated by the Army Air Corps on March 10, 1943.

After completing basic infantry training at Camp Pinedale, California, Ferguson was assigned as a Classification Specialist and deployed overseas.

Duty at Bari, Italy

When he arrived on May 23, 1944, front-line fighting had moved north. He recalled, "Sunken ships littered the harbor...The noise and flak from the British guns are loud and heavy."

Assigned to the 420th Signal Company, 15th Air Force, Ferguson used a typewriter and spreadsheets to take aim at manpower shortages by comparing authorized manpower to assigned strength and reporting shortages to headquarters.

The work required visiting combat units. "On a typical day, I would get on a B-17 and fly out to one of our units and get information for my reports to be this worksheet that shows how many positions we've got that's vacant so that the system can send in the replacements..."

SS Charles Henderson blows up in Bari Harbor

On April 9, 1945, "In one of the greatest munitions disasters of World War II, the Charles Henderson was unloaded at Exit 14...when it was destroyed in a high-level explosion," according to the Puglia Reporter newspaper in Italy. "This detonation caused by [handling] 500 loaded bombs loaded with Composition B, killed 542 people and injured 1,800 others...The buildings along the waterfront were destroyed by 2,000 feet, the ships were badly damaged at 2,100 feet."

The blast left a lasting impression and later, PTSD. Ferguson remembered, "you could still see debris that...the gravity hasn't brought back to the ground...Our building was severely damaged with all windows and doors destroyed...I went up on the roof and found a piece of the ship that I could not lift that had been blown from the harbor to the roof of our building."

Given rest and recreation leave, Ferguson visited Capri, Rome - where he met Pope Pius XII - and Switzerland.

He received a Bronze Star for Italy's Rome-Arno Campaign and was discharged on Jan 28, 1946.

Korean Conflict

Service called again. "I spent one year on active duty and was discharged as a Technical Sergeant on 23 August 1951...During this period, I was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Air Force Reserve as an electronic engineer." He continued in the Air Force Reserve as an engineer, attaining the rank of Major before retiring on 1 February 1969.

Family

Ferguson met his future wife, Beverly Murry, at a church activity in Siloam Springs in 1946. Both attended John Brown University, where he earned a Bachelor of Engineering degree using the new GI Bill. After the Korean War, Ferguson resumed his friendship with Beverly and they married on Feb 16, 1952. He said, smiling, "She told me later that she would've married me a lot sooner if I'd asked sooner, but I wasn't too smart...Beverly had said, 'I was ready to get married long before you asked.' The best 70 years of my life." They raised two children: Bill Ferguson, who married Elette and live in Mount Vernon, Washington, and Gayle Davis, who lives in Oklahoma City with her husband, Michael.

Electronic Engineer

In 1951, Ferguson began his civilian Air Force career with the Airways and Air Communications Service, renamed the 38th Cyberspace Engineering Installation Group. The Group provided communications and navigational aids. His work included preparing "site concurrence letters and engineering documents...at different bases around the country..." His team identified locations for airfield infrastructure like air navigation systems and control towers and equipment to support them during the Cold War.

Ferguson's attention to detail and ability to work with people led to promotion as a Supervisory Electronics Engineer and eventually, GS-14 General Manager. He earned a Meritorious Civilian Service Award, among the Air Force's highest civilian honors. He retired Dec 30, 1982.

Reflections about life



James and Beverly Ferguson were married for 70 years and had a son, William, and daughter, Gayle.



Left: This photo was taken in 1944 when Corporal James Ferguson served the Army Air Corps in Bari, Italy.

Looking back on war, Ferguson remains thoughtful and direct. "I don't know why adults go to war. The outcome is always the same: somebody wins, somebody loses. A lot of people are killed. I still remember the burial grounds with the crosses, you know, driving by them in Italy."

His advice for living a good life? "I'd say the golden rule would be pretty good." His son, Bill, added, "You always told me, Dad, 'Do more than what's expected...Don't just do the minimum.'"

After Beverly died four years ago at age 90, Ferguson reflected on loss and companionship. "I'm just much, much happier when I'm around people and that was a thing I didn't recognize until I experienced living alone after my wife passed...The loss of a spouse was the worst experience I've ever had, you know..."

Longtime friend Bill Dooley summed up friendship simply: "He's a wonderful guy and I'm happy he's my friend." Ferguson is 101 years old and lives in Midwest City. ●
story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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Belmont Cove

Owens Family Builds Belmont Cove Into Premiere 50+ Independent Living Communities for Veterans

Gary Owens is a familiar face locally with his television commercials as owner of Galleria Furniture.

But Owens is also in the construction business where he and his son Justin have built Belmont Cove into one of the premiere 50+ independent living communities, with one located in Yukon at 1650 S Czech Hall Road, and the newest one in Oklahoma City, at 14604 Parkway Center.

Gary and his son, Justin, are owners and builders at Belmont Cove. Gary started construction in 1978, then added his son, Justin Owens and now grandson, Dawson Owens has been added, making this a great family-oriented team, all local to the area.

"We do probably 40% of the work ourselves, which allows us to pass the cost saving onto our residents, with about a 20% savings over the competitors' pricing," Gary Owens said. "We have a great full time construction crew, thanks to our leaders and building superintendents. Jake Sellers has been with us for 25 years, Edgar Escamilla 25 years, and Carlos Escamilla 25 years.

We have great office staff as well, with Carolyn Kulbeth assisting clients at the Yukon location and Claudia Escamilla taking care of the clients at the OKC North location."

Gary Owens said each location features maintenance free luxury high-quality homes with hardwood flooring, stainless steel appliances, and granite countertops.

He said their units come with a fire suppression system, security alarm, and a 1-car garage with door opener. These also come with a covered patio in the small yard with a stockade fence.

"Our Yukon location boasts easy access to I-40, dining and shopping areas and medical facilities. This community features walking paths, pet-friendly homes, and a clubhouse with a pool as well as regular scheduled activities. Each unit has 1,076 square feet of quality living space, hardwood flooring, stainless steel appliances, granite, ceramic tile, and so much more," Owens said.

Owens said each Belmont Cove North unit has 1,200 square feet of quality living space, fully furnished or unfurnished, with all the amenities of the Yukon location.

He said coming soon is a 7,000 square foot clubhouse and pool. The clubhouse will have an indoor pickleball court with 4 regulation sized courts in a heated and cool environment.

Owens said Phase 1 is now complete and leasing for units is open. The full development will hold 320 units when each phase is complete.

"Coming soon will be our location in Moore with all the same amenities as the first two locations. There will be a clubhouse with pickleball, a pool, walking trails, and so much more, making this a great place to live," Owens said.

Owens first got into senior independent living construction in the 1990s.

"We built one of these in the '90s in Mustang," he said. "And a guy called me one day and said, "Would you sell it? " And I did. I sold it to him, and I have regretted it ever since."

Fast forward about a decade later, Owens was looking for affordable senior living for his mother-in-law.

"My father-in-law was my building superintendent and he passed away. And so, I was looking for a place for my mother-in-law to move into," he said. "And we couldn't find anything new that she could really afford. And so, I thought, well, I ought to just build some of these and help myself and help the senior citizens. So, we did."

Owens said they started Belmont Cove about 9 years ago in the original Yukon location.

For more information call (405)-805-COVE or visit www.belmontcove.com or use your phone and scan this QR CODE. ● By Van Mitchell, staff writer



Gary Owens, right, is the owner of Belmont Cove with locations in Yukon and Oklahoma City. Pictured on the left is Claudia Escamilla, leasing manager at Belmont Cove North.



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By Freddy Groves

Changes to Community Medical Care

Veterans who get their medical care from civilian facilities need to keep an eye on what's coming. In 2026 the contracts (originally signed in 2018) between the VA and community health plan networks are expiring. An RFP (request for proposal) has gone out to solicit new contracts.

Some changes are coming: The five regions of VA health care are being reduced to two.

The new contracts will require the community providers to follow industry standards,

which is shocking. Is that not already included in any contract to provide medical care to veterans?

At this point, 40% of veterans get their care from civilian providers. That will likely increase, as the new plan contracts will open the door for more providers.

Veterans who want to pursue getting medical care at a non-VA facility need to meet eligibility requirements:

- Must be enrolled in VA health care.
- Live in a state with no full-service VA facility.

- The care needed isn't available through the VA.
- The VA can't meet quality standards.
- Qualifies under the old Choice Program: a 30-minute drive (or 20-day wait) for VA primary care or 60-minute drive (or 28-day wait) for specialty care.

Remember that the two-step rule changed in 2025, and if your doctor agrees you need to see a civilian doctor, a second doctor doesn't need to approve it. Depending on the care you need (there are 30 categories of medical care, such as cardiology and dermatology), you'll likely be approved for one year.

Here's where you come in, should you choose to do so. If you're getting civilian care, will their network administrators be putting in a proposal for the next round of contracts? In other words, will you be able to continue getting care there?



Do they know the deadline for their proposal is March 16? I would ask. This is part of being proactive in your own care ... asking questions. To learn more about community care, see <https://www.va.gov/communitycare/> or scan the QR CODE below.



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Davidson Served Roles in National Guard, Education, Ministry

Jim Davidson dreamed of joining the United State Naval Reserves, but his eyesight kept him from fulfilling that goal.

Instead, the Pittsburg County native found a home in the Oklahoma Army National Guard for over 30 years of service.

“My dad was a coal miner,” he said. “I was one of six kids and thought I had the best growing up years of anybody. My brother was two years older than me and was my hero. He joined the Naval Reserve when he was 17, and I thought they had the coolest uniforms. So, my ambition was to join the Naval Reserve as soon as I got old enough. I went up on my 17th birthday. I went up to sign up, and they were giving me my physical.”

Davidson, a resident at Villagio of Bradford Village Independent Living /Assisted Living, located at 300 Enz Drive in Edmond said when he went in for a vision test, an optometrist gave him disappointing news.

“When I walked in for the vision test, the doctor happened to be my optometrist,” Davidson said. “He said, ‘There’s no need for me even going any further. You can’t pass the Navy’s vision test.’ And I was so disappointed. He said, ‘Go next door and join the National Guard. They’ll take anybody.’ Well, in 1955, that was true.”

Davidson, (Ret.) Sergeant First Class said a cousin who was in the National Guard invited him to go on a National Guard drill.

“Before I left that night (after the drill), they had signed me up. And that started my military career,” he said. “I am a retired military. I receive an annuity, though I am not officially a Veteran due to insufficient consecutive active-duty service days. And there are probably not a whole lot of people like that. But I stayed in the Guard off and on from 1955 until 1996.”

Davidson served in the 45th Infantry of Oklahoma National Guard nicknamed the Thunderbirds. He served a variety of roles in service.

“The main thing they drilled into me was what an honor it was to be a Thunderbird,” he said. “I did a little of everything. We were an infantry unit to start with. And when I retired, we were MPs.”

During his time in the Army National Guard, Davidson



(Ret.) Sergeant First Class Jim Davidson served over 30 years in Oklahoma National Guard. He also had careers in education and ministry.

worked for Maj. Jimmy Burnett, who was the Unit Administrator of the National Guard Unit Company L in Hartshorne.

“All the years I was in the Guard, I worked for Maj. Burnett in one capacity or other, except for the last four years and he retired before I did,” he said. “He was a fine man to work for.”

Davidson said he only served overseas twice during his military career, and both times were in Panama.

“The only time I left the country, we went to Panama during the time that they were getting ready to retire, Mr. (Manuel) Noriega,” he said. “I was not sure what our duties were, but we got there and we discovered that we were what they called relieving active-duty soldiers. We were doing guard duty around the Panama Canal zone so the active-duty guys could do their business, preparing Mr. Noriega for retirement.”

In 1960, Davidson graduated from East Central University in Ada and then began his teaching career.

“At that time in Oklahoma it helped a great deal if a teacher had a secondary job and the National Guard was always my secondary job,” he said. Davidson taught in Kansas and Oklahoma before becoming an elementary school principal in McAlester.

My calling, I think, in the education business was to be a grade school principal because I loved the kids and I recall my years in grade school, I was afraid of everybody," he said. "And I felt my job was to make kids realize that the teachers and the school staff were there to make their life better."

Davidson retired from education at age 51, followed by a brief foray into selling insurance. He later started a second career as a child development specialist at the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant.

"They had a daycare center. I did not know the Army was in the daycare business. So, I went to work there," he said. "I tell people I went to work for civil service, and I got a \$10,000 a year raise because that's what the difference in the pay I was getting as a grade school principal."

Davidson worked at the daycare department for three years before transitioning to an employee relations position at the plant before retiring from that post.

Davidson added another job to his resume as a church pastor in Pittsburg County.

"All the churches in Pittsburg County were familiar with me because I went around speaking in different churches with the Gideons," he said.

Davidson said he began pastoring when a small church in Pittsburg County could not afford a full-time pastor anymore.

"They were looking for a pastor for that little church," he said. "They wanted to know if I'd come down and help them and fill in on Sundays. It developed into a full-time thing because I stayed there for 12 years."

After retiring from that, Davidson and his wife of 63 years Mary bought a motor home and started traveling before deciding to move to Edmond to be closer to one of their two sons.

"Our son had a pastor friend who lived here (Villagio of Bradford Village), and he liked it, so we came over and visited him, and that is why it appealed to us. The people are super friendly. As retirement communities go, we are one of the smaller ones, and so that gives us more of a community feel."

Davidson didn't abandon his ministerial hat completely after he was selected by an advisory committee as the Villagio of Bradford Village community chaplain.

"We have an advisory committee here made up of the residents and we came home (from seeing family in Michigan) and they said, "By the way, we elected you chaplain." I said, "Only if you get me a badge." And so that is where the badge came from. I've been the volunteer chaplain here ever since."

Davidson said what he enjoys most as community chaplain is helping send Christmas cards to Veterans.

"The residents donate Christmas cards signed a lot of times with a little message in it, and we collect them and we distribute them to all seven Veteran centers in Oklahoma," he said. "And this year there were 1,051 cards that we delivered to the Veterans homes. It makes me feel good because I have friends who were at the Veteran's home and many of them never have any company. They're just all but forgotten. It's just good to show somebody that somebody still cares." ● *story by Van Mitchell, staff writer*

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Moore Native Supports U.S. Navy's "Take Charge and Move Out"

Every sailor's story of naval service is unique. For Petty Officer 2nd Class Ciarra Norris, this story began in Moore, Oklahoma, where skills and values learned there would be foundational to success in the Navy.

"Growing up in Moore taught me a strong sense of resiliency and dedication," Norris said. "In the Navy, things are always changing, so you have to be prepared. Having resiliency and dedication helps you adapt to constantly changing environments."

Norris graduated from Moore High School in 2020.

Norris joined the Navy three and a half years ago.

"I felt like I was stuck where I was at," Norris said. "So, I joined the Navy to get out, meet new people, experience other cultures and have more job satisfaction."

Today, Norris serves as a naval air crewman (avionics) assigned to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Three (VQ-3) in Oklahoma City. Norris supports the nation's nuclear deterrence mission at Strategic Communications Wing One (STRATCOMMWING ONE). Its "Take Charge and Move Out" (TACAMO) mission provides airborne communication links to nuclear missile units of U.S. Strategic Command.

The TACAMO mission originated in 1961 when a Marine Corps aircraft was used to test the feasibility of an airborne Very Low Frequency (VLF) communications system. Once the test was successful, funding for the program was granted, and it has continued to grow ever since.

The U.S. Navy's presence on an Air Force base in a landlocked state may seem strange, but the position is strategic, allowing squadrons to quickly deploy around the world in support of the TACAMO mission.

The U.S. Navy is celebrating its 250th birthday this year.

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"I am most proud of becoming qualified and a second class petty officer,



Petty Officer 2nd Class Ciarra Norris is a naval air crewman (avionics) assigned to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Three (VQ-3) in Oklahoma City.

because it puts me in a better place to help those around me," Norris said.

Norris serves a Navy that operates far forward, around the world and around the clock, promoting the nation's prosperity and security.

"Serving in the Navy means endless possibilities for me," Norris said. "It opens doors that I never even thought were possible."

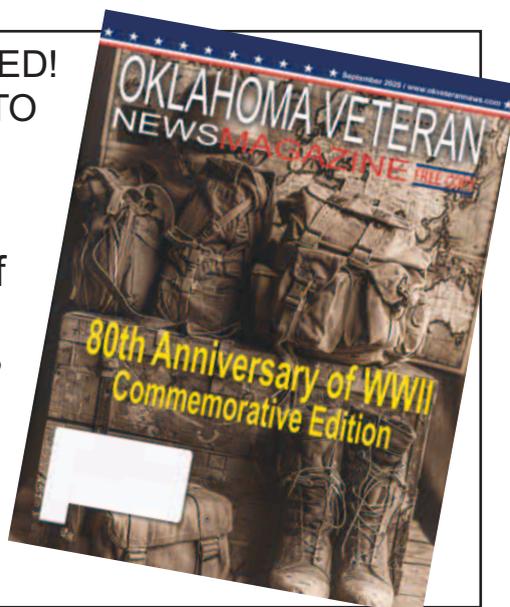
Norris is grateful to others for helping make a Navy career possible.

"I want to thank my mom, dad and grandparents for their endless support in everything I do and for giving me the confidence behind my decisions," Norris added. ●
by Megan Lemly, Navy Office of Community Outreach
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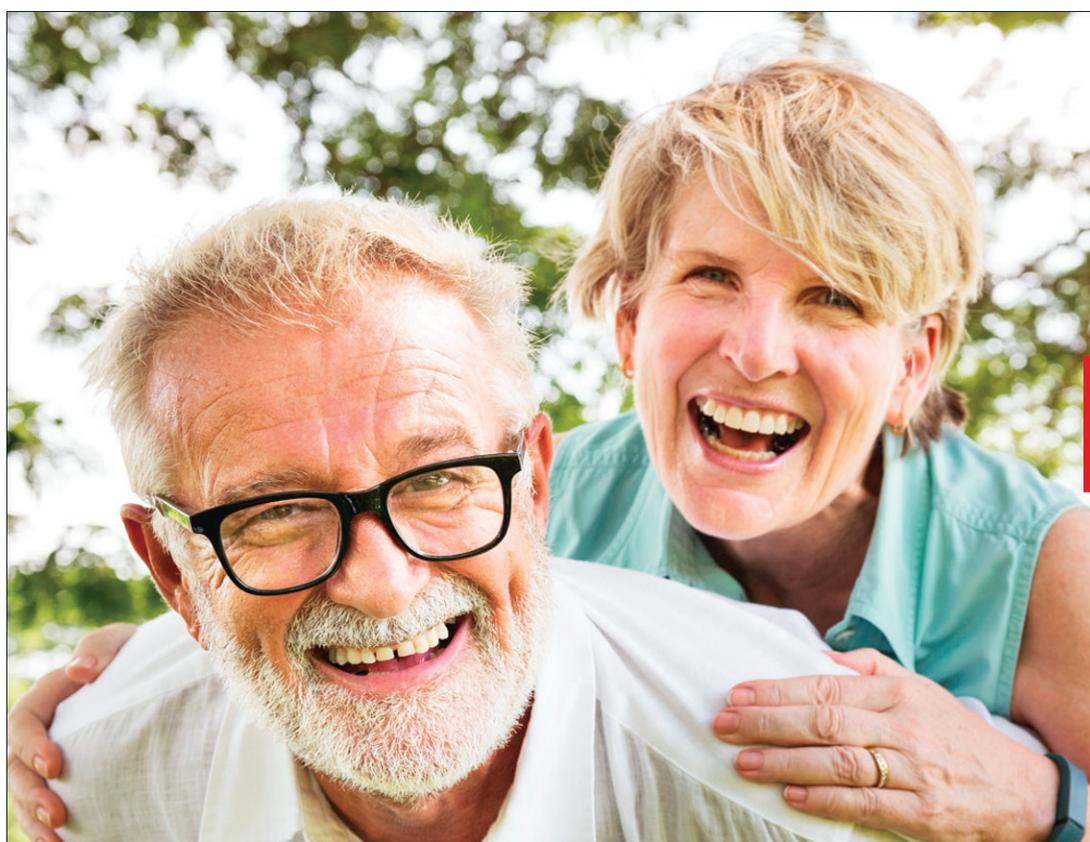
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BrightStar Care Expands Territories, Integrates Agencies

When Jarod Cannicott acquired two BrightStar Care territories in the Oklahoma City metro in 2021, his goal was simple: build a home-care organization that families can trust when they are in crisis.

By 2025, that same focus led him to expand across Oklahoma City and acquire the BrightStar Care location in Tulsa - a longtime office that had served the community for 17 years but was not consistently delivering care to the standard he expects.

"When we acquired the Tulsa location, the care experience wasn't meeting our standard," Cannicott said. "Fixing that required a full overhaul of staffing, training, and clinical oversight - and we've done that work."

Today, Cannicott operates five BrightStar Care locations as one integrated agency, with the scale to serve clients across Oklahoma.

"We serve clients statewide," he said. "We have clients as far west as Elk City, as far north as Ponca City, as far east as Grove, and then south down to Ardmore."

That reach is backed by a statewide caregiver bench - about 250 caregivers across Oklahoma - and a model designed for speed and reliability when families need help fast. "In many personal care situations, we can start the same day," Cannicott said. "And families get a live answer 24/7 from our own staff - not a call center."

A higher standard, with nurses built into the operation.

BrightStar Care is known nationally as an in-home care provider, and Cannicott believes the brand's biggest differentiator is how strongly it leads with clinical oversight and skilled care.

"Nurses aren't an afterthought here," he said. "Our company is nurse-led. We have registered nurses deeply involved in how we deliver care - including roles that most people wouldn't expect, like scheduling and community liaison work - so oversight is baked into the operation."

Cannicott points to Joint Commission accreditation as one-way BrightStar holds itself accountable to that standard.

The Joint Commission is a nationally recognized organization that accredits health care providers based on quality and safety standards, including many leading hospitals and health systems.

"We use that framework to keep our practices tight," Cannicott said. "It's about consistency and safety for families." That emphasis shows up in operational details as well. For example, Cannicott's teams reassess clients every 90 days, more frequently than the industry norm, because care needs can change quickly.

"Families deserve a plan that stays current," he said. "And reliability matters - the best care plan fails if shifts aren't covered. Our systems are built for coverage."

Like many home care agencies, BrightStar provides private-pay personal care with CNAs and caregivers.

Cannicott says the difference is the breadth of skilled and higher-acuity care his Oklahoma team delivers - services many agencies cannot safely provide.

"We do private pay personal care, but we also do higher-acuity work," he said. "That includes private-pay skilled nursing, catastrophic workers' compensation cases, skilled care for Veterans in the home for complex conditions like ALS, home infusions, and therapy."

Those services can be the difference between a patient staying safely at home or cycling back through the hospital.

"For a lot of families, the question isn't 'Do we want home care?'" Cannicott said.



BrightStar Care expands its imprint in Oklahoma serving veterans and

"It's 'How do we keep mom or dad safe at home, and who can actually manage what's happening medically?' That's where skilled support matters."

Serving Veterans and supporting the spouse Cannicott said it is a distinct honor for his caregivers and nurses to serve Veterans and their families.

In Tulsa and across Oklahoma, BrightStar works with the Veteran community through the Homemaker and Home Health Aide program, providing CNAs and caregivers to help with activities of daily living.

But he believes the most important story for many Veteran households is what happens when care needs become complex - and the spouse or family caregiver is carrying an unsustainable load.

"We work with the Veteran community through the Homemaker Home Health Aide program," he said. "And we also provide skilled care with Veterans in the home with help from the VA."

One example is ALS - they're currently taking care of ALS patients at home, and those families need a much higher level of support."

In progressive conditions like ALS, Cannicott says, the spouse is often under immense strain.

"We serve the Veteran by supporting the



cross the state.

spouse,” he said. “Respite and professional help can keep the household intact.”

Cannicott says the Tulsa acquisition was not about adding dots on a map - it was about delivering consistent experience statewide, including Tulsa.

“We wanted to bring the same level of service across the entire state and bring that level to Tulsa,” he said. “That work took real effort, but now we’re seeing results.”

One family’s review reflects what the team aims to deliver - a partnership that helps people remain at home as long as safely possible.

“Working with our nurse, we were able to keep my parents at their home of 57 years for as long as we possibly could,” a recent reviewer wrote.

For Cannicott, the mission is straightforward: scale through quality, responsiveness, and clinical oversight.

“We’re proud of what we’ve built,” he said. “And we’re focused on doing it even better.”

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Presidents Remembered Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt

The 26th president of the United States

President Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the Russo-Japanese War, the first American president to receive this honor. Roosevelt also believed that a powerful navy was key to maintaining peace.

With the assassination of President McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, age 42, became the youngest president in the nation's history. He brought new excitement and power to the presidency, as he briskly led Congress and the American public toward progressive reforms and an aggressive foreign policy.

He took the view that the president as a "steward of the people" should take whatever action necessary for the public good unless expressly forbidden by law or the Constitution. "I did not usurp power," he wrote in 1913, "but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power."

Roosevelt's youth differed sharply from that of the log cabin presidents. He was born on October 27, 1858 in New York City into a wealthy family, but he too struggled—with asthma and other health ailments—and in his triumph became an advocate of the strenuous life.

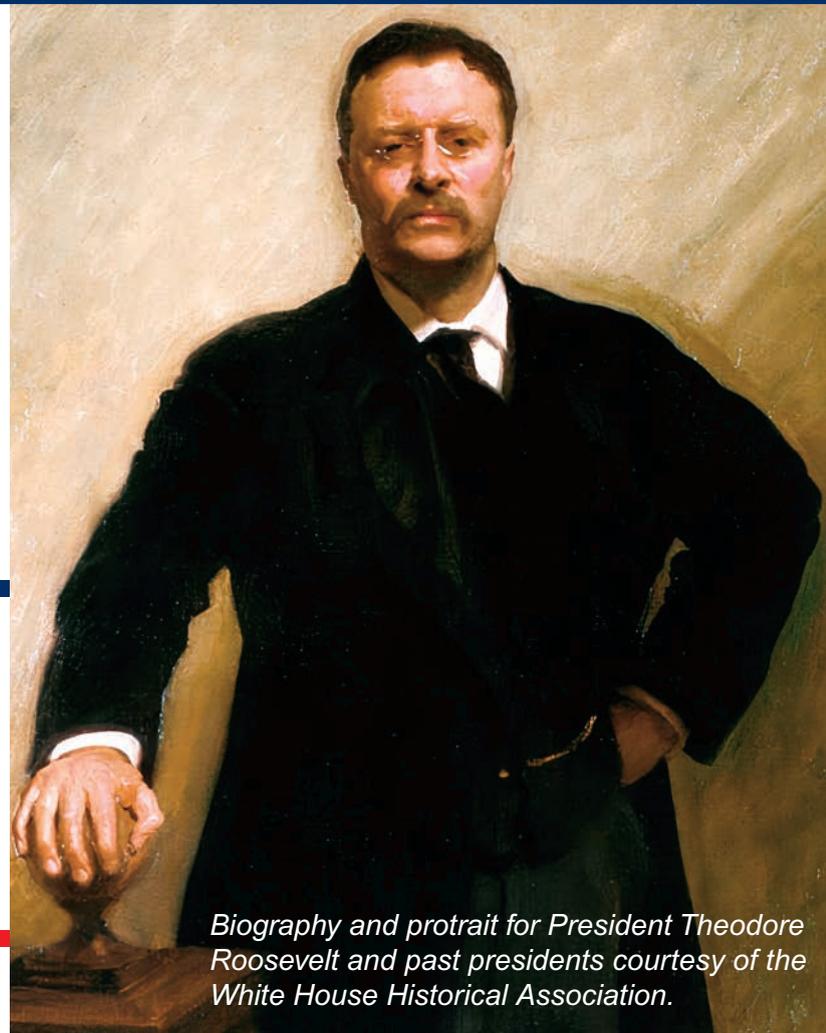
In 1884, his first wife Alice Lee Roosevelt and his mother Martha died on the same day and only two days after the birth of his daughter, Alice. Roosevelt spent much of the next two years on his properties in the Dakota Badlands. There he mastered his sorrow as he lived in the saddle, driving cattle, hunting big game—he even chased outlaws as a local sheriff. Feeling reinvigorated, Roosevelt returned from the West and began courting his childhood friend Edith Carow. The couple married in London in December 1886. They raised six children together, including Alice.

During the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt resigned his position as assistant secretary of the Navy to command the U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, more famously known as the Rough Riders. Roosevelt led his company's charge up Kettle Hill during the Battle of San Juan, and his military exploits brought him considerable attention, elevating his profile within the Republican Party. In 1898, he ran for governor of New York and won; he then was asked to join the 1900 Republican ticket as a vice-president under President William McKinley.

As president, Roosevelt held the ideal that the government should be the great arbiter of the conflicting economic forces in the nation, especially between capital and labor, guaranteeing justice to each and dispensing favors to none.

Roosevelt emerged spectacularly as a "trust buster" by forcing the dissolution of a great railroad combination in the Northwest. Other antitrust suits under the Sherman Act followed, and his willingness to take on corporations and monopolies enhanced his popularity with the American public.

Roosevelt also steered the United States more into world politics. He liked to quote a favorite proverb, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Aware of the strategic need for a shortcut between the Atlantic and Pacific for American vessels, Roosevelt facilitated the construction of the Panama Canal by sending naval ships to support the Panamanians' independence movement. Once Columbia recognized Panama's independence, the new government gave the U.S. control of the canal for \$10 million and a yearly payment. Additionally, the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine prevented the establishment of foreign bases in the Caribbean and arrogated the sole right of intervention in Latin America to the United States.



Biography and portrait for President Theodore Roosevelt and past presidents courtesy of the White House Historical Association.

He won the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the Russo-Japanese War, the first American president to receive this honor. Roosevelt also believed that a powerful navy was key to maintaining peace. In 1907, he sent the “Great White Fleet” around the world to demonstrate U.S. naval power and gain valuable experience on the open seas.

Some of Theodore Roosevelt’s most enduring achievements were in conservation. He added enormously to the national forests in the West, reserved lands for public use, and fostered great irrigation projects.

He crusaded endlessly on matters big and small, exciting audiences with his high-pitched voice, jutting jaw, and pounding fist. “The life of strenuous endeavor” was a must for those around him, as he romped with his five younger children and led ambassadors on hikes through Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C.

Leaving the presidency in 1909, Roosevelt went on an African safari, then jumped back into politics. In 1912 he ran for president on the Progressive Party ticket. To reporters he once remarked that he felt as fit as a “bull moose,” the nickname of his new party.

While campaigning in Milwaukee, he was shot in the chest by a fanatic. Roosevelt soon recovered, but his words at that time remained applicable at the time of his death on January 6, 1919: “No man has had a happier life than I have led; a happier life in every way.”

Edith Roosevelt

Wife 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt

Edith Kermit Carow was born on August 6, 1861, in Manhattan, New York. She was the daughter of Charles Carow and Gertrude Tyler. The Carows were neighbors of the Roosevelt family, and Edith was childhood friends with Corinne Roosevelt, sister of Theodore Roosevelt. Edith received most of her early education from tutors, and later attended Miss Comstock’s private school. As teenagers, Theodore and Edith saw each other often and exchanged letters—but before Theodore left for Harvard University, they stopped writing to each other. Shortly thereafter, Theodore met Alice Hathaway Lee and they married in 1880, but their time together was short-lived. In 1884, Alice Lee died from Bright’s disease after giving birth to a daughter, Alice.

Theodore and Edith rekindled their friendship after a chance encounter at the home of Theodore’s older sister Anna in New York. The childhood friends married on December 2, 1886, and began living at Sagamore Hill that same year. In addition to raising Alice, the Roosevelts had five more children: Theodore (Ted), Jr.; Kermit; Ethel; Archibald; and Quentin. Edith managed the Long Island estate, both in terms of finances and personnel. Her family was her priority, as well as being supportive of her husband’s rising political career.

The Roosevelts were vacationing in the Adirondack Mountains when word reached the vice president that President William McKinley, who had been shot a week earlier, was gravely ill. Vice President Roosevelt rushed to Buffalo, New York, where he later took the Oath of Office following McKinley’s death. Edith prepared to move her family to Washington, D.C., and the new first lady had little time to prepare for the upcoming winter social season.

Edith Roosevelt transformed White House operations and the home itself during her tenure. “While an abundance of help was always at hand, still she looked after every detail of the household herself,” noted Irwin “Ike” Hoover, a longtime White House employee.

Edith hired the first White House social secretary, Isabella “Belle” Hagner, to manage her correspondence, plan receptions, dinners, and musicales, and implement new procedures and protocol for White House events. This included social debuts for daughters Alice and Ethel, as well as Alice’s wedding to Nicholas Longworth in 1906. Mrs. Roosevelt also had two new colonial gardens created on the east and west sides of the house, using the outdoor spaces for larger gatherings and garden parties.

Her meticulous approach also applied to the 1902 renovation of the White House. Mrs. Roosevelt worked with architect Charles McKim and others to restore the neoclassical splendor of the president’s house and expand the family living quarters. To do so, the White House Conservatory and greenhouses were demolished to make way for a new executive office building—known today as the West Wing. By relocating the president’s workspace, this doubled the size of the residence’s living space to better accommodate the large Roosevelt family. Mrs. Roosevelt also ordered the creation of two cabinets to display pieces of different presidential china services. Edith viewed the White House as a home deeply rooted in the nation’s history; as such, she ensured that the building reflected some of that story. With the construction of the East Terrace to serve as the new visitor entrance, she suggested hanging portraits of the first ladies along the Ground Floor for guests to enjoy.

After leaving the White House, the Roosevelts retired to Sagamore Hill and welcomed a seemingly endless array of family, friends, and other guests. After Theodore passed away on January 6, 1919, Edith carried on as the matriarch of the family for almost thirty more years. During that time she traveled extensively, visiting countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. She supported various philanthropic causes and continued to enjoy reading and writing. She published two books, *Cleared for Strange Ports* (1927) and *American Backlogs: The Story of Gertrude Tyler and her Family* (1928). She died on September 30, 1948, and was laid to rest beside Theodore at Youngs Memorial Cemetery in Oyster Bay.



Chaplain's Corner

The 2:24 Intentional Discipleship Challenge

I became a believer in the Gospel at the age of 19 in the mid 70's while serving in the Air Force. Those who guided me through my born-again experience encouraged me to get baptized and start going to church. They were good people, however over time my discipleship experience seemed to be based primarily on what not to do. No adult beverages, no movies, no dancing, no more fun. Some things made sense, some didn't. Over time, what felt like a self-righteous lifestyle left me spiritually unfulfilled for years. Now, I refer to myself as an out of Egypt believer, who wandered in a desert place for over 40 years.

In 2018 all that changed. I got connected with a spiritually vibrant Christian community, focused on spirit filled worship, the Word of God, a rhythm of prayer, and personal discipleship. Over time I developed a daily plan for both prayer and reading scripture. I call it, "The 2:24 Discipleship Challenge." It is not based on a scripture passage. Two hours and twenty-four minutes is 10% of a 24-hour day. It is a recognition of spending prioritized time intentionally focused on my relationship with God.

How does the challenge look? It is making my Heavenly Father first in my life. He is the first one I want to talk to and the first one I want to listen to each day. I start with worship music, creating a focus on praise. In a brief prayer, I praise and acknowledge Him then close with this statement, "Bless me as I prayerfully

meditate in the Spirit of worship through your word, starting in the book of Psalms in Jesus name." I read a Psalm a day because I want to learn to pray like David. I continue praying with ongoing intentional requests and acknowledgement of God's work and will in my life. I close again, asking for God's wisdom, as I read from Proverbs daily, the one that corresponds to the day of the month. Our knowledge and experience is most effective when used in light of God's wisdom.

The third part of my prayer is a focus for each day. Sunday, I pray for the mission of my local and the global Church. Monday, for family members by name. Tuesday, for close friends who attend my local church community by name. Wednesday, I pray for our giving and the ministries of my local church by name. Thursday, I pray for friends, acquaintances, and co-workers by name. Friday, I pray for those I meet in passing who I feel a connection to or who may



*Steven Sibley- Retired
E7/Disabled Veteran,
Publisher OK Veteran News*

have a special need. Saturdays I pray for whatever/whoever is on my heart, a special need or person.

Next, I enjoy a light breakfast and continue reading scripture. I read daily from the New Testament. In addition, I read through the scriptures from beginning to end using a Chronological Bible. I start that every second January. It simply makes the stories of the Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles come alive as the events historically happened in chronological order.

During the day, I stay engaged with my Heavenly Father by listening to worship music whenever I drive and pray spontaneously when the opportunity or need arises. The 2:24 Intentional Discipleship Challenge has changed my life. My intentionality has prepared me for His spontaneity which I find during my daily walk as I engage with those He puts in my path. I challenge you to create your own Intentional Discipleship practice. ●
*Steven Sibley- Retired
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Fun Fact

The 24 “**Solar Terms**” are an ancient calendar system based on celestial movements and the position of the sun. It is an essential part of Chinese heritage that farmers rely on. Each solar term carries **unique meaning**, with titles such as Beginning of Spring, Rain Water, Awakening of Insects, Spring Equinox, Clear and Bright, Grain Rain, Grain Full, End of Heat and Frost’s Descent.

Source: www.thechinajourney.com/the-twenty-four-solar-terms/

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Oklahoma City Resident Supports U.S. Navy's "Take Charge and Move Out" Mission in the Heartland

Chief Petty Officer Bobby Long, an Oklahoma City resident, didn't have to look far to learn lessons that contribute to their success in the Navy. In fact, one of the most important lessons he learned comes from an annual celebration commemorating the Navy's birthday.

"A lot of local organizations come together to support the Navy Ball," Long said. "Seeing how they support us makes me want to strive to support Oklahoma City and Oklahoma. If I can support the city and state I love, I want to do that because they showed the Navy that same support in return."

Long joined the Navy 21 years ago.

"I joined the Navy soon after 9/11," Long said. "I remember watching it happen and knew at that point that I was going to join the military. I just didn't know what branch. I talked to a bunch of recruiters, and the Air Force said they weren't hiring. So, I joined the Navy."

Today, Long serves as a Navy counselor in Oklahoma City. Long supports the nation's nuclear deterrence mission at Strategic Communications Wing One (STRATCOMM WING ONE). Its "Take Charge and Move Out" (TACAMO) mission provides airborne communication links to nuclear missile units of U.S. Strategic Command.

The TACAMO mission originated in 1961 when a Marine Corps aircraft was used to test the feasibility of an airborne Very Low Frequency (VLF) communications system. Once the test was successful, funding for the program was granted, and it has continued to grow ever since.

The U.S. Navy's presence on an Air Force base in a landlocked state may seem strange, but the position is strategic, allowing squadrons to quickly deploy around the world in support of the TACAMO mission.

The U.S. Navy is celebrating its 250th birthday this year.

According to Navy officials, "America is a maritime nation and for 250 years, America's Warfighting Navy has sailed the globe in defense of freedom."

With 90% of global commerce traveling by sea and access to the internet relying on the security of undersea fiber optic cables, Navy officials continue to emphasize that the prosperity of the United States is directly linked to recruiting and retaining talented people from across the rich fabric of America.



Chief Petty Officer Bobby Long serves as a Navy counselor in Oklahoma City. Long has many opportunities to achieve accomplishments during military service.

"My proudest accomplishment is every time my action or mentorship results in a sailor achieving their goals," Long said. "The best part of my job is when I see others achieve their goals because that gives me a sense of purpose. It also shows that I am a part of something bigger than myself. Seeing others succeed is the best part of the job."

Long serves a Navy that operates far forward, around the world and around the clock, promoting the nation's prosperity and security.

"Serving in the Navy means a tremendous amount to me," Long said. "I didn't have a lot of opportunities that others have when they graduate high school, and I don't know what my path would have looked like without the military. I think about that a lot. I know the mindset and skills I have learned because of the military are unmatched."

Long is grateful to others for helping make a Navy career possible.

"I want to thank my wife, Marisol, for being there for me when times are hard," Long. "She has been through lots of deployments and lots of taking care of the kids when I am away. I also want to thank our kids, Emily, Eva and Korra, for all the support they have given me over the years. It has been hard on them, but they always seem to make me laugh and keep me happy throughout the years. I want to thank the Chiefs Mess as well for allowing me to be a part of a world-class brotherhood and sisterhood. Lastly, I want to thank all of the junior sailors who have helped me get to where I am today."

● by Megan Lemly, Navy Office of Community Outreach -Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Justin Johndro



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A Soldier Who Never Leaves His Post. Oklahoma's Capitol Memorial to Those Who Served and Sacrificed

Soldier Represents All Veterans

Is "The Big Guy," deep in thought? Does he wear the Thousand-Yard Stare - a distant or vacant look in the eyes of individuals who have experienced intense and often traumatic events? You decide.

Either way, the 8 ½ feet statue of a Vietnam soldier on a 3 1/2 foot pedestal that faces the State Capitol stops visitors at the Oklahoma Veterans Memorial. The memorial is located in the State Capitol Park on Lincoln Boulevard on the north side of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Walking through the area saddened me because the names of thousands of Oklahomans killed in action are listed throughout.

Other memorials

Behind The Big Guy stand four bas relief bronze panels mounted on rose granite walls. Each panel depicts scenes from four major wars fought since Oklahoma became a state: World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The names of Oklahomans killed in action are engraved on the back of the walls and were added in the mid-1990s with additional names from Operation Desert Storm to the present added in 2014.

A place that remembers every war

A memorial to the U.S.S. Oklahoma, the battleship sunk at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, is there with the names of the 429 sailors and Marines who died. It was added on December 7, 1999.

Flags of each branch of the Armed Forces, the MIA-POW flag, the Oklahoma State flag and United States flag are posted behind The Big Guy, next to the "Eternal Flame." The flame is meant to remind Oklahomans that "we will never forget."

How the memorial came to be

The State of Oklahoma donated the land for the memorial and people from around the country donated money to pay for it.

"After fundraising for the memorial stalled, Governor George Nigh appointed 44 leaders from across the state to the Veterans Memorial Task Force in April 1986" reported The Oklahoman on Nov. 10, 1986. The leaders got the job done: a well-attended ceremony dedicated The Big Guy, four blank rose granite walls and the grounds on 11 November 1986 - almost 40 years ago. Ceremonies included a speech by Governor Nigh and a flyby of F-4 Phantom II fighters.

On November 11, 1987, phase two was completed when bas-relief panels created by Jay O'Melia were dedicated.

A veteran's vision

Vietnam War veteran Sergeant Mike Mullings was the driving force for the memorial. A medic from Bethany, Mullings was permanently injured while jumping from a helicopter under fire in Vietnam. After he died in 2017, an inscription was added to the base of the Vietnam soldier, "In Remembrance of SGT J. "Mike" Mullings...He was truly a "Big Guy."

The Sculpturers

Jay O'Melia of Tulsa (died in 2022), a WWII and Korean War veteran, and Bill Sowell of Pawhuska (died in 2013), an Army veteran, designed, sculpted and cast The Big Guy from 1984-1986.

They chose 18-year-old Harrison Shackelford, an Osage Indian from Pawhuska, as the model for the Vietnam-era infantryman. "We wanted the sculpture of the soldier to be authentic in terms of age, dress and military equipment," O'Melia said in the same Oklahoman article, "especially since many of those who served in Vietnam were only 18 or 19 years old."

Their design was chosen from 44 entries in a sculpture competition in 1984 that included six Vietnam veteran judges.



Below: A memorial to the U.S.S. Oklahoma, a battleship sunk at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, lists the names of 429 sailors and Marines who died.



Left: Known as *The Big Guy*, the statue represents all Oklahoma veterans. It is part of the *Oklahoma Veterans Memorial, State Capitol Park*.

According to the Oklahoma Historical Society, "Artist Jay Philip O'Melia, born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on July 17, 1927, achieved recognition in Oklahoma and elsewhere as a sports painter in the 1950s. A graduate of Tulsa Central High School, he served in the U.S. Navy as an artist during World War II and in Korea." His work has been exhibited "at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., ...the National Cowboy and Western History Museum and the



This is the bas relief of World War I, created by Jay O'Melia. Memorials to WWII and the Korean and Vietnam Wars are next to it.

Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa."

Sowell studied at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. His works appear in Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Over 476,000 Oklahomans have served our state and nation in uniform - The Big Guy stands watch for all of them.

The memorial is worth a visit with friends or with a veteran's group. If you want to hold an event there, call Capitol Event Reservations, 405-521-2121, or see the Oklahoma Management & Enterprise Services Upcoming Events website at Upcoming Events (hyperlink).

For more information about the memorial, see Oklahoma Veterans Memorial | Oklahoma City, OK or scan this QR CODE. ●

story and photos by Lt Col Richard Stephens, Jr., USAFR, Ret.



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Faith Plays Integral Role in Life

Faith has long played an important role in Crystal McGee DePue's life in which she lost her father at age 12, and the loss of two husbands.

Born in Tehran, Iran, DePue's parents, who hailed from Edmond, served as missionaries with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in that country from the late 1940s until 1954 when they returned to the United States.

The Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) was organized in 1837 because of General Assembly (Old School) action. Its creation marked the culmination of a discussion covering a period of years as to whether missionary operations should be carried on by voluntary societies, or by the Church in its organized capacity.

"I had come to know the Lord and I had lost my father as a 12-year-old, and I knew that God had seen me and my brothers and sisters through that," DePue, a resident of Villagio of Bradford Village Independent Living /Assisted Living, located at 300 Enz Drive in Edmond said. "I (later in life) told my kids, God has promised to be a father to the fatherless and a husband to the widow, and we're just going to trust that that's what's going to happen even though it's hard."

DePue, 75, said her family moved to upstate New York upon returning home from Iran in what was supposed to be a year-long sabbatical.

"I moved first to New York City and stayed there for six months," she said. "Then we moved to upstate New York because we were back supposedly on a furlough. It was just supposed to be a year of being back in the States, visiting family, getting refreshed and ready to go back. But my father was found to have serious health problems, and the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions wouldn't send him back."

DePue said her father continued doing mission work in upstate New York and at a women's college in Ohio before moving their family back to Oklahoma where he worked as an accountant.

After graduating high school in Edmond, DePue attended a Presbyterian college in Clarksville, Arkansas before attending the University of Central Oklahoma.

It was at UCO where she met her first husband James "Rudy" McGee through a friend. Within two months of dating they were engaged.

"His name was James Brent, but his college roommate had a poster of Rudolph Valentino and thought he looked like that. So, they called him Rudy," she said.

DePue said Rudy served in the United States Marine Corps and was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. Her son Jameson, a retired U.S. Marine Lt. Col. also served at the same military base in Okinawa, Japan as his father.

After leaving the Marines Rudy became a teacher and taught at several schools in Kansas



Top: Rudy McGee (pictured) served in the United States Marine Corps, was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. His son Jameson McGee, a retired U.S. Marine Lt. Colonel also served at the same military base in Okinawa as his father.

Right: McGee Depue is a resident of Villagio of Bradford Village Independent Living.



before landing at his last school in Goddard, Kansas.

In 1985, Rudy was killed by a student in a school shooting along with several others left injured.

"He was shot and killed right after we found out I was pregnant with our fourth child," DePue said.

She later moved her family back to Edmond to be closer to family.

"We moved back here. I can tell stories of how God provided a house right behind my sister's house," she said. "I got Workman's comp because he was killed on the job. So, that and Social Security allowed me to stay home and have the baby."

DePue later worked as a secretary for an oil and gas company before retiring.

Faith continued to tug at DePue's heart, and she served a year as a missionary in Lyon, France.

"Faith gives meaning to life," she said. "I don't know how people make it in this world, particularly now without faith. God has proven himself faithful. As a single parent I had a choice of whether I can do it with God or without God. And I chose God."

DePue later remarried to the Rev. Dale DePue, who served as the pastor at First United Presbyterian Church in Guthrie, and later served as a State Representative in the Oklahoma Legislature.

DePue said her husband had developed several health issues and moved to Villagio of Bradford Village Assisted Living.

"They took such wonderful care of him, and since it was COVID, I couldn't go visit him. But when the weather was nice, they would let him come out and we could walk the community," she said.

DePue later moved into an Independent Living cottage in Villagio of Bradford Village.

She said she enjoys living there.

"They're very intentional about keeping us active and keeping our minds engaged and keeping us socially engaged," she said. "It's a great place to be. I keep telling people it's where I need to be." ●

by Van Mitchell, staff writer

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Faces of the Fallen - Tech SGT Marshal D. Roberts

By Jill Stephenson

Tech SGT Marshal D. Roberts, 28 of Owasso, was serving with the Oklahoma Air National Guard when he was killed on March 11, 2020. At the time, he was the first Oklahoma Air Guardsman KIA since September 11, 2001. Roberts was a member of the 219th Engineering Installation Squadron, 138th Fighter Wing, headquartered in Tulsa.

Roberts met his wife Kristie while they were serving together. They married after four years and sadly he was killed less than two years later. Roberts had a daughter from a previous relationship. He is remembered as a loving husband, devoted father and a brother in arms that many still salute with pride and admiration.

From his obituary: The United States Air Force has set out definitions of courage and spirit that all Airmen should aspire to achieve. Courage is defined as the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. Spirit is defined as an intense energy that empowers one to act when called to action. Marshal embodied these definitions - he placed God and others before himself always, even up until his last breath. Marshal will always be remembered for the love and sacrifice he made on behalf of his country and fellow wingmen.

A portion of Highway 20 between Claremore and Owasso is dedicated in his name. The post office in Owasso was named in his honor in 2023. Because Roberts was killed at the beginning of COVID, his funeral and any public ceremonies were limited. Kristie and Robert's mother spoke at the dedication and said it was the first time they spoke about him publicly since his funeral. Kristie described Marshal as a humble man who would blush at the thought of a building or highway being named after him. However, there is no question about the importance of having permanent structures like this for the public to honor his service and sacrifice.

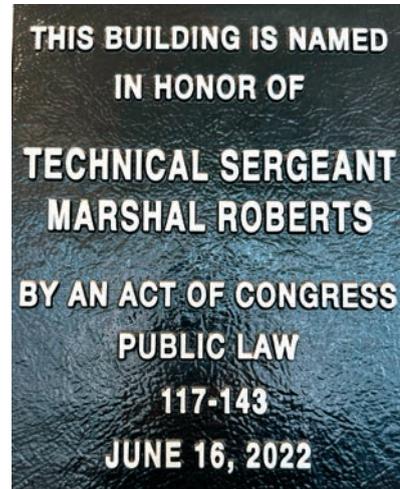
Because of COVID, Robert's funeral was delayed two months, causing additional emotional strain on the family. Kristie stated they never spoke about him being killed in action, but did speak about military honors and wanting them when the day came that they were called home to be with the Lord. She said it was difficult to put off honoring him. COL Mason, Commander of the base at the time, made sure that he was appropriately honored. His funeral was held at the Claremore Expo center where he received full honors with the missing man formation flown by 138th FW F-16s and a nine-round volley salute performed by the 138th FW Honor Guard.

Roberts loved watching movies. He had funny sayings and would randomly break out in Disney movie songs and make people laugh. They would play the animal game during long car rides when his daughter was with them. They would describe the animal without saying its name and they had to guess what it was. He loved going to the zoo or the aquarium to learn about new animals. These activities were engaging and educational and kept them off their phones while driving. Attending church as a family was very important to him. Christmas was his favorite holiday.

Roberts is laid to rest at Floral Haven cemetery in Broken Arrow. His grave marker is a bronze soldier's cross and includes a bench for

Tech SGT Marshal D. Roberts, Oklahoma Air National Guard.

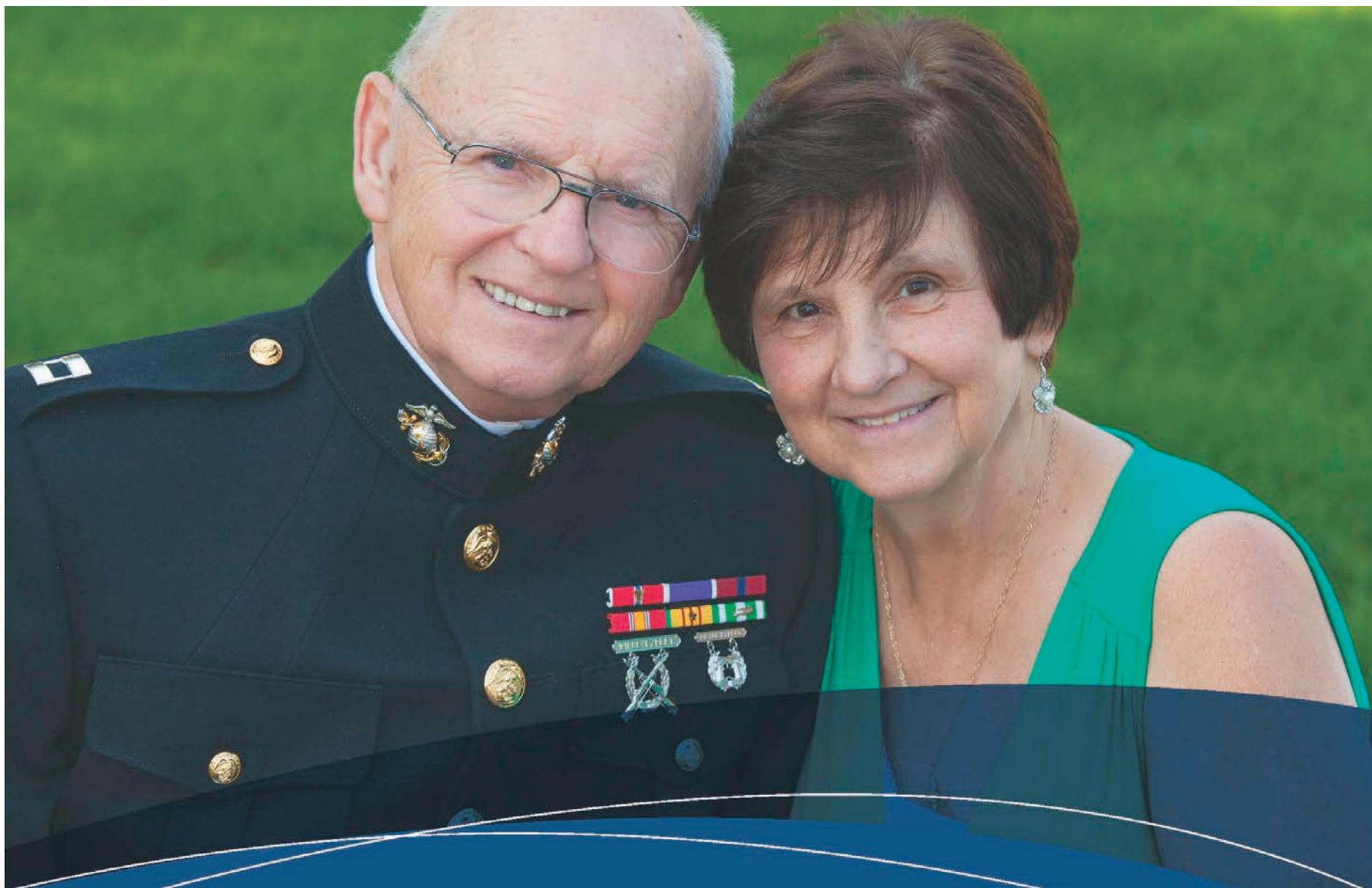
Below: Tech SGT Marshal D. Roberts, Marshal Roberts Hwy and post office memorial signage.



people to sit, pray and reflect. It sits next to a water feature where geese are frequent visitors. Kristie shared that when she and Marshal would see geese they would always count them together because they mate for life.

I asked Kristie what she wanted people to remember most about Marshal. She said, "That he wore his nation's cloth and served in the U.S. Armed Forces. He didn't feel worthy of people thanking him for his service and didn't feel as though he'd done anything worthy of being thanked. Deploying was his way of doing what he felt was worthy of this.

His love for his daughter was also incredibly important. He gave his all to be the most amazing dad he could be. Kristie still prays for God to watch over her. She is now in her 20th year of service and currently in residency training at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa. They were required to fill out a goal sheet in the Air Force. Medical school was one of hers. Marshal wanted to support her to get through her schooling. He was with her when she got in. Accomplishing this has helped her through her grief journey. ●



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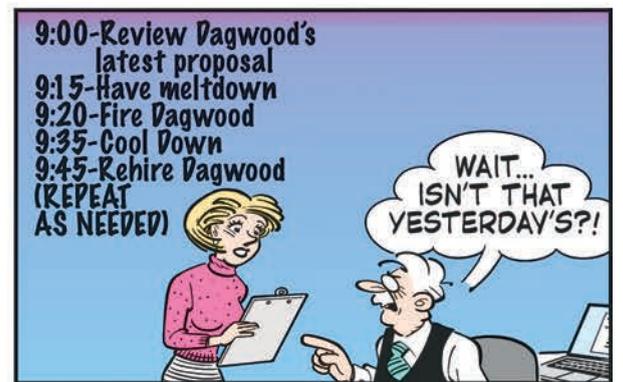
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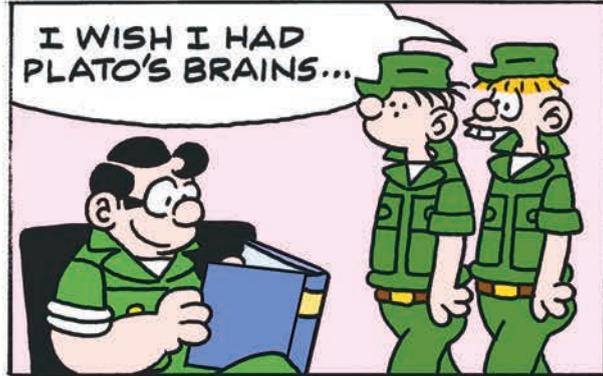
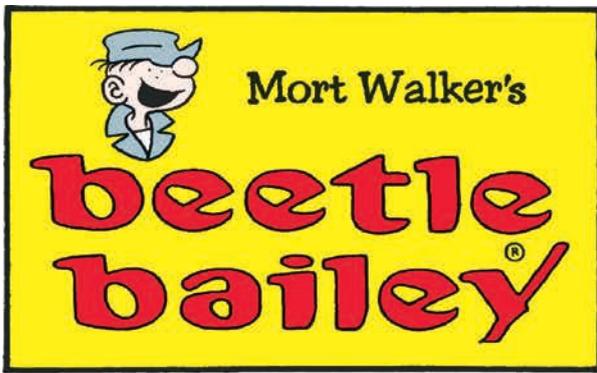
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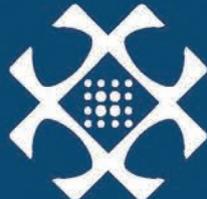
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