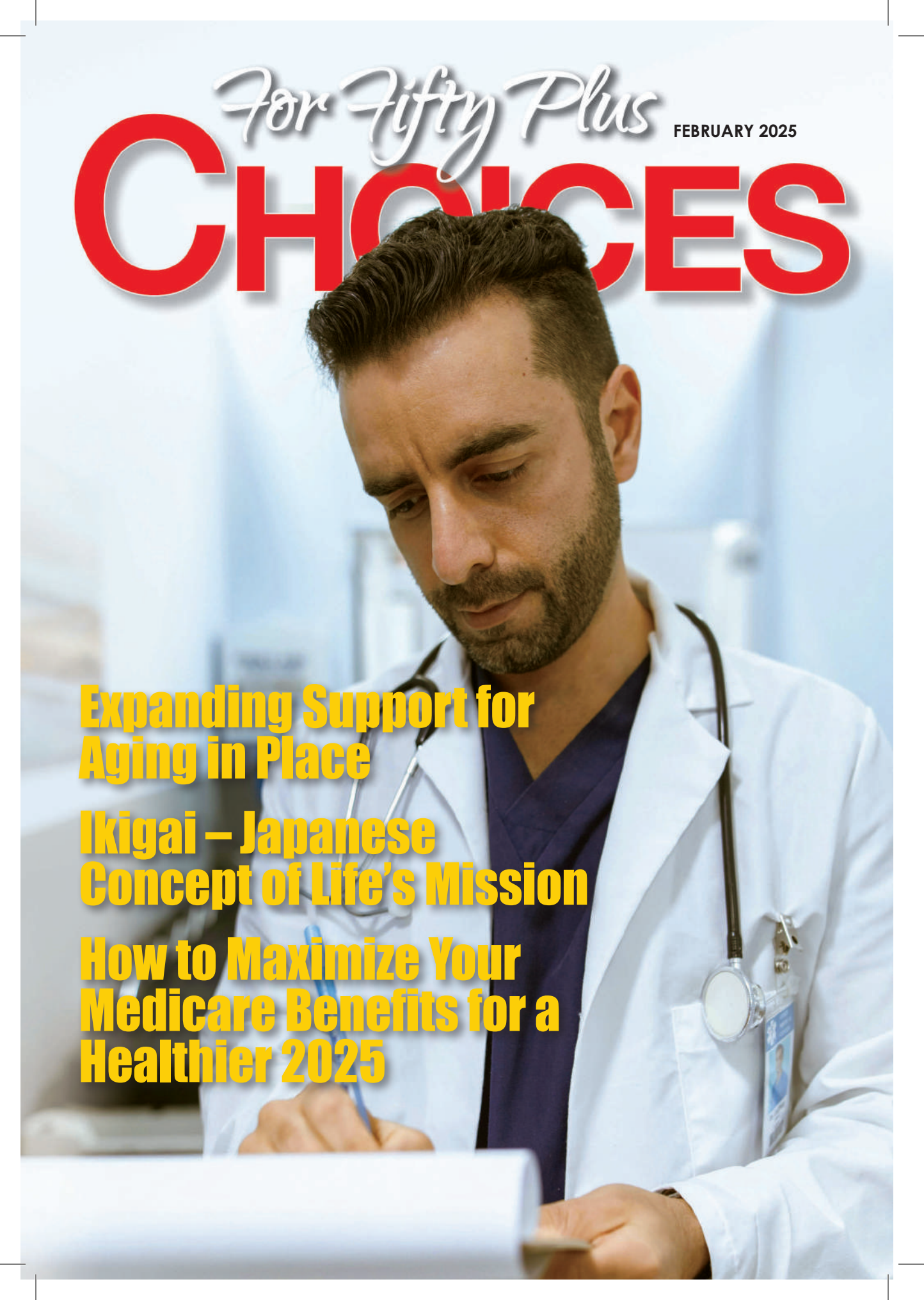




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Sue Becker socializes
with Barry, who was ad-
opted from the Dubuque
Regional Humane Society.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY TRACEY RUSH

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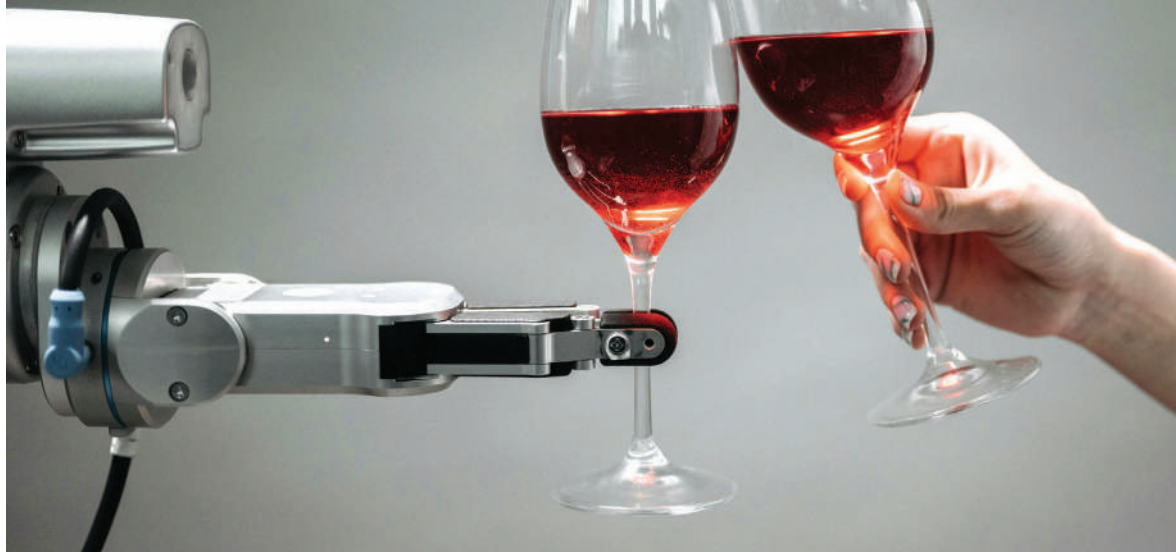
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From Skeptic to Savvy: Incorporating AI into Your Daily Life & Lifestyle



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

by Dr. Carolee Duckworth

Elena sits at her kitchen table, warming her hands around her coffee mug while snow falls outside. On her laptop screen, she's deep in conversation with her AI assistant, Claude, planning her upcoming winter escape to Delray Beach, Florida.

“Claude, what activities would you suggest for active seniors in Delray Beach? My husband loves tennis, and I enjoy art,” she types.

Within moments, Claude responds with a curated list of tennis clubs with senior programs, local art galleries, and even a suggestion for a watercolor class on the beach. “And don’t forget the Delray Beach Open tennis tournament in February,” Claude adds to Elena’s delight. She hadn’t known about the tournament.

Elena shakes her head, amazed. Husband, Tom, looks up from his morning paper as Elena explains: “Claude’s plan for us at Delray Beach is already better than I could have come up with scroll-

ing through endless websites for hours!” She shares the exciting ideas Claude has suggested so far. “It’s like having an all-knowing friend who is always on hand and eager to help.”

Tom nods. “It’s hard to believe we were so gun-shy at first about using AI. Now it’s hard to imagine life without it.” Elena takes another sip of coffee while asking Claude about the best water-front restaurants within walking distance of their rental condo... and where they can go for live music.

At 70 and 73, respectively, Elena and Tom have embraced AI as their silent partner in living vibrant, connected lives. “Technology isn’t just for the young,” Elena often tells her life drawing students at the community college. “It’s for anyone who stays engaged and curious.”

Let’s explore how you too can incorporate AI into five key areas of your life: 1) Addressing your day-to-day **needs**; 2) Supporting your current and future **interests**; 3) Engaging your **mind**; 4) Increasing your sense of **connection**; and 5) Capturing your **legacy**.

• MEETING YOUR DAILY NEEDS WITH AI

Think of AI as your personal assistant, quietly working in the background to keep your life running smoothly. Smart watches do far more than tell time – they monitor your heart rate, track your daily steps,

and can even detect falls. Elena’s watch gently reminds her to move when she’s been sitting too long at her easel.

Home management becomes effortless with AI. Voice commands adjust lighting and temperature, while smart security systems provide peace of mind. AI also simplifies financial management. Banking apps with AI can flag unusual transactions and predict upcoming expenses. Transportation apps plan optimal routes and provide real-time updates, making travel less stressful.

• NURTURING YOUR INTERESTS THROUGH AI

Whatever interests you pursue, AI can enhance the experience. Tom’s passion for photography has been transformed by AI-powered cameras that automatically adjust settings for perfect shots. Elena’s garden thrives with help from an AI app that tracks watering needs and suggests optimal plants and planting times for her climate.

Cultural exploration reaches new heights through AI. Virtual museum tours feature AI guides that adjust to your interests and pace. Music lovers can discover new artists through sophisticated recommendation systems. Travel enthusiasts can explore destinations through virtual tours before planning their next adventure.

• ENGAGING YOUR MIND AND ADVANCING YOUR PURSUITS

AI tools open new avenues for creativity and learning. Elena uses AI art programs to experiment with different styles and techniques before applying them to her physical paintings. “It’s like having an infinite canvas,” she explains. Language learning apps adapt to your progress, while writing assistants help craft clear, engaging messages.

Brain training apps powered by AI provide personalized cognitive exercises, adjusting difficulty based on your performance. Research becomes



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

more accessible with AI tools that summarize complex articles or explain difficult concepts in simpler terms.

• STRENGTHENING YOUR CONNECTIONS

Staying connected with family and friends becomes richer through AI-enhanced communication tools. Video calls with automatic captioning ensure you never miss a word. Photo sharing apps use AI to organize and find specific memories instantly. Community engagement flourishes with AI-powered platforms that connect you with others sharing your interests. Elena uses these tools to coordinate her outdoor art classes and find lo-

cal cultural events.

• PRESERVING AND SHARING YOUR LEGACY

Perhaps most meaningfully, AI helps preserve and share your life stories. Digital storytelling tools make it easy to record, transcribe and organize memories. Elena uses AI to create engaging presentations of her travel adventures and family history. “I’m creating a digital scrapbook for my grandchildren,” she explains.

• AND SO...

Remember, incorporating AI into your life isn’t about replacing human connection or traditional methods – it’s about enhancing them. Start with one area that interests

you most, and gradually explore others as your comfort level grows.

Take the leap by setting up a free account with the friendly AI assistant, Claude, created by *Anthropic*, a U.S.-based AI startup founded in 2021. Anthropic researches and develops AI to “study safety properties at the technological frontier and use this research to deploy safe, reliable models for the public.”

Follow these three steps to meet Claude as your first AI assistant:

1. Go to [Claude.ai](https://claude.ai) and enter your email address.
2. Anthropic will create your



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free account and send you a temporary login code.

3. Copy your temporary login code into the required box.

Now you are ready for your first dialog with Claude. Introduce yourself and tell Claude a bit of background “context” about yourself and the task you want help to accomplish. The clearer you are with Claude, the better he’ll be able to respond in useful ways. Perhaps start by having Claude help you gather ideas for your own winter escape.

As Elena says, “AI is like any other tool. It’s not about how much technology you use, but how well you use it to live your best life.” Approach AI with curiosity and openness, letting it support your interests and needs while maintaining your own independence and authenticity –using it wisely to enrich the life you choose to lead.

Carolee Duckworth is an expert on retirement living. Her bestselling book, *Shifting Gears to Your Life and Work After Retirement* (available on Amazon), guides retirees in navigating this life transition. She is currently working on two new books: *AI for Seniors: Embracing AI, Lifelong Learning & Discovery after 60* and *Senior Travel to Europe: Exploring Bucket List Destinations through Gentle Travel & Virtual Journeys*. ♦

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HOW TO PROVIDE THE BEST CARE TO SENIORS LIVING AT HOME



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

by Lisa Crawford

As Iowa's population rapidly ages, our state faces considerable challenges in providing adequate services to support older adults. The demographic shift is marked by a substantial increase in the population over 65 years old, with projections indicating that the 85+ age group, which is most likely to require aging services, will grow by 90% by 2040. This growth requires an expansion or shift in aging services to accommodate the needs of a vulnerable, high-risk population.

Although Iowa has a higher ratio of nursing home beds to residents over 65 than any other state, Iowa also grapples

with the second-highest institutionalization rate in the nation. This overutilization of long-term care results in higher medical costs to both individuals, organizations and governments.

Despite Iowa's position at the top of this list for institutionalization, approximately 94% of seniors aged 65 and older reside at home. Most prefer their familiar surroundings and the autonomy of living on their own. Others may not have the financial means to pursue long-term care. In either situation, there are risks and challenges that jeopardize the safety and well-being of individuals who choose to age in place.

ISOLATION

- Many older adults live alone. They can easily become isolated due to mobility issues or a lack of social interaction, which can lead to depression.

LACK OF TRANSPORTATION

- Those unable to drive or navigate public transportation have limited access to social activities, healthcare, and essential services.

DECLINING HEALTH

- Chronic health conditions can complicate daily living activities, making it difficult for older adults to manage their own care effectively. They can also make older adults more vulnerable to common illnesses and infections.

- Memory impairment, whether age-related or a symptom of dementia or Alzheimer's, can result in poor nutrition or hygiene, missed medications, or accidents.

- Falls and accidents are common risks for older adults living alone, and without proper support, can lead to severe injuries.

To both reduce the rate of long-term care utilization and improve health outcomes for individuals aging in place, there is a clear need to expand and enhance the wellness services available to the aging population. Such services include:

HOME CARE SERVICES

In-home caregivers can pro-

vide essential assistance with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, and meal preparation, as well as companionship to alleviate feelings of loneliness. Fortunately, there are a variety of medical and non-medical home health-care options available in the Dubuque area. It is important to contact home care service companies before an emergency or crisis. Planning ahead for additional support can help older adults maintain their independence safely.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

Iowa's Area Agencies on Aging can offer guidance on available community services, ensuring that older adults can access the resources they need.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Devices that allow older adults to call for help in emergencies can enhance their safety and provide peace of mind. There are a variety of technology options that provide different levels of functionality from fall detection to voice-activated communication.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Offering transportation solutions can help older adults maintain social connections and access necessary services, reducing feelings of isolation. DuRide and The Jule provide transportation throughout Dubuque, East Dubuque, and Asbury for residents 65 years old or older who cannot or choose not to drive.



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HEALTH MONITORING AND TELEHEALTH

Regular health assessments and telehealth services can provide older adults with necessary medical attention while allowing them to remain at home. There is also a growing market of personal health monitoring technology.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Engaging older adults in local activities and social programs can foster a sense of belonging and improve mental health. Volunteer programs through Volunteer DBQ and AmeriCorps are a great way to stay connected and active.

As Dubuque's 65+ population continues to grow, the need for effective home and community-based aging services becomes increasingly important. By implementing comprehensive support services tailored to the unique needs of older adults living at home, we can enhance their safety, promote independence, improve their quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving government agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations committed to supporting the aging population. Fortunately, Dubuque

has a wide variety of aging services providers ready and willing to adapt and embrace the changing landscape.

Lisa Crawford is the Director of Assisi Village at Stonehill Communities. Over the past 16 years, Lisa has worked on a variety of projects and expansions that have modernized and enhanced Stonehill's Assisi Village to include assisted living and assisted living memory care in addition to independent living options. She has worked with many families as they navigate changing health needs. She can be reached at lcrawford@stonehilldbq.com. ♦

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Ikigai – Japanese Concept of Life's Mission

by Dr. Richard Houston

Research published by the National Institutes of Health concludes that having a mission in life is associated with improved health outcomes like lower inflammation, better glucose regulation and fewer chronic diseases.

The Japanese have a term called 'Ikigai' that refers to doing what you love, what gives meaning to your life. Population segments in Okinawa have been highlighted for living past age 100.

Ikigai plays a prominent role in the life of this special group of centenarians.

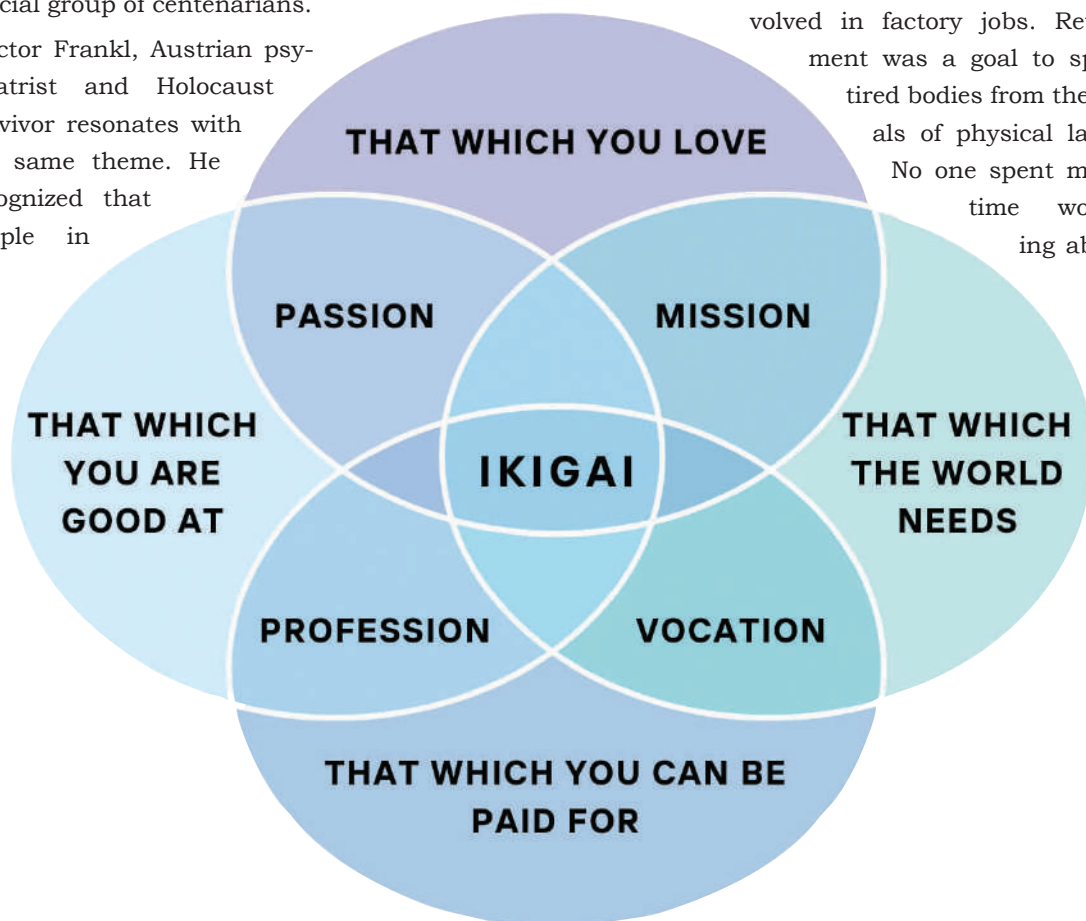
Victor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor resonates with the same theme. He recognized that people in

the Nazi concentration camps who had an enduring sense of purpose fared better than those without a personal mission. Frankl observed that people with a passion were able to endure the suffering more successfully.

Fortunately, aging adults in Iowa are not asked to tolerate suffering – unless the Hawkeyes lose on Saturday* - but the power of a personal sense of mission has relevance to successful outcomes in the aging process.

In the mid-20th century, many 60-year-olds were worn out by exhausting labor involved in factory jobs. Retirement was a goal to spare tired bodies from the trials of physical labor. No one spent much time worrying about

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS





finding a sense of meaning after retirement.

In the Information Age that dominated work routines in the later 20th century, more people retired from desk jobs where boredom was a greater problem than physical exhaustion. Jobs in our 30's, 40's and 50's years with persistent routine and little mental challenge are associated with a 66% increased risk of cognitive decline and a 37% increased risk of dementia.

Mature adults in the U.S. can often look forward to decades of life after retirement and they confront the challenge of finding a meaningful sense of purpose. Many people look for-

Jobs in our 30's, 40's and 50's years with persistent routine and little mental challenge are associated with a 66% increased risk of cognitive decline and a 37% increased risk of dementia.

Ikigai embodies the notion that finding what makes your heart sing is a personal quest.

ward to playing golf several times a week but, frequently, golf does not qualify as a personal life mission.

Research on cognitive acuity in later life decades focuses attention on the importance of challenging our brain to learn new things to prevent cognitive decline. Aging adults without a connection to an organization or a mission are left to meet this challenge themselves. Book clubs and similar activities may help but still fall short of defining a purposeful life mission. No one can prescribe a solution to this challenge for someone else.

Ikigai embodies the notion that finding what makes your heart sing is a personal quest.

Some people find a sense of mission in volunteering for a cause. Others pursue clubs that promote skilled compe-

tence in chess, bridge or hand-crafts. The options are endless, but the bottom line is clear: adults who progress into retirement typically capture better physical and behavioral health outcomes when they are engaged in pursuits that involve a sense of meaning and purpose.

We recommend that readers explore learning options on Coursera, edX and Kahn Academy for free learning experiences that challenge brains to build new neural circuits. However, that cognitive challenge may not qualify as a sense of purpose for aging adults. We urge aging adults to identify a pursuit that makes their heart sing.

*p.s. An intriguing Sports Illustrated article published research that tracked the probation decisions of judges in Louisiana. When the LSU Tigers lost on Saturday their probation sentences were more severe than when their football heroes prevailed over opponents.

Dr. Richard Houston is an active and curious 'senior' who strives to get outdoors for a brisk walk on a daily basis. He is a graduate of Brown University and earned advanced degrees at Clark University. He was licensed by the Massachusetts Board of Psychology in the early 1980's. Check out his web site at Senior-Psych.com where readers can find his contact information. ♦

How to Maximize Your Medicare Benefits for a Healthier 2025

by Stefan Johnson

Early in this new year is a great time to prioritize your health and well-being and Medicare can be a great part of that. Medicare offers wonderful benefits designed to help you to stay healthy... here are several tips to make the most of your Medicare this new year:

KNOW YOUR PLAN

Know which type of Medicare plan you have: Cost? Advantage? Supplement? Prescription Drug Plan? Or are you on Original Medicare only (Parts A and B)? Knowing which type of coverage, you have will give you a strong starting point in knowing which health-related benefits you are eligible for.

START WITH A WELLNESS VISIT

All Medicare beneficiaries are provided with a free annual wellness visit. This is an excellent opportunity to begin or update a personalized health plan. During this appointment, the doctor will look at your medical history, analyze your risk factors, and talk through immunizations and screenings. Make use of this benefit soon, to stay ahead of possible health issues, and to discuss questions regarding your health goals for 2025.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PREVENTIVE SERVICES

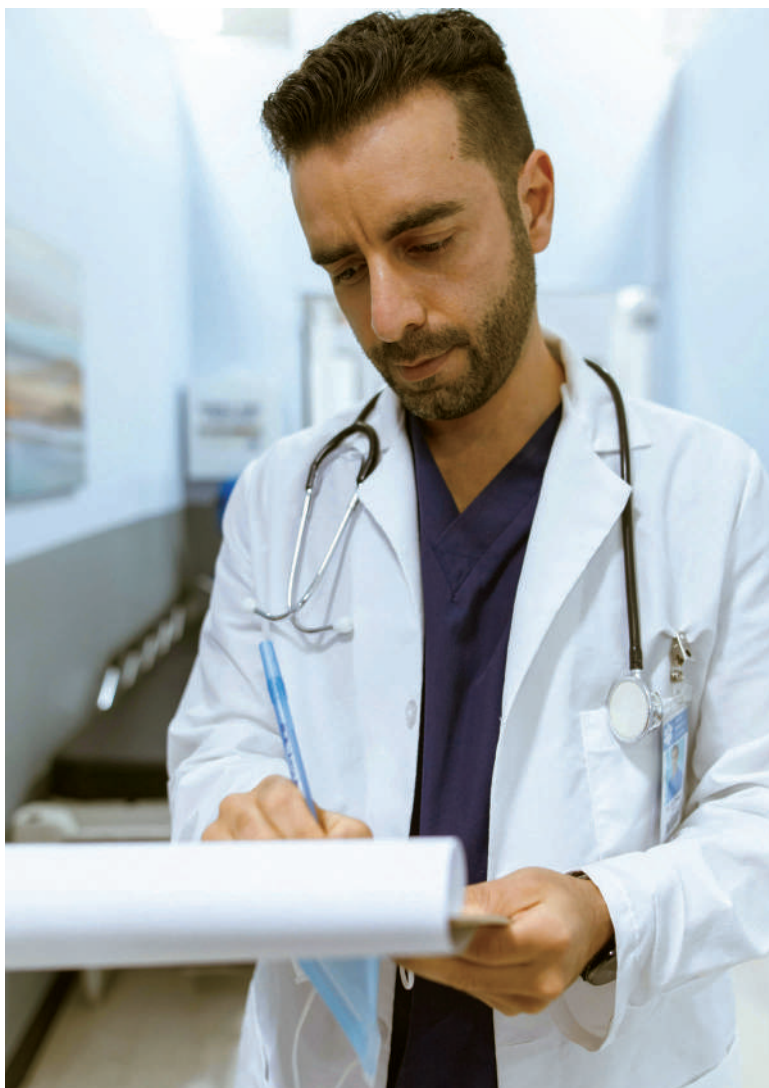
Know Your Opportunities for Preventive Services. Medicare has a good range of preventive care for no additional cost. This includes:

- Screenings and tests for

concerns such as blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, and certain types of cancer.

- Various vaccinations, including COVID-19 boosters and flu shots.

- Counseling for various physical and mental health needs.



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SCHEDULE PREVENTIVE CARE EARLY IN THE YEAR

This allows you to take full advantage of the offerings of your plan. And, if follow-up care is needed, you will have time schedule appointments during the year.

IF YOU HAVE A MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLAN

Understand what Your Plan Covers

Each Medicare Advantage plan is unique, offering an assortment of benefits designed to meet various health-care needs. Look through your plan's Annual Notice of Change (ANOC) or Summary of Benefits to understand specific offerings.

Use Your Plan's Extra Benefits

Most MA plans include one or more services like dental care, eye exams (and glasses), hearing aids, post-hospitalization meals, transportation to appointments, over-the-counter products, and chiropractic or acupuncture services. Becoming familiar with these benefits can help you to avoid pay-

ing out-of-pocket for services already covered by your plan.

Utilize Wellness Programs and Perks

Medicare Advantage plans often include wellness perks in the hopes of encouraging people to live healthy lives. These can include gym memberships, nutrition counseling, and telehealth services. Making use of these programs can help you to stay fit and active, take care of chronic conditions, and support mental health.

Be Proactive Regarding Chronic Conditions

Your plan may offer programs for managing diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, or heart disease. These programs might include:

- Health Coaching: personalized counsel to take care of your condition.
- Specialized Supplies: this can include items such as blood pressure cuffs, glucose monitors, and more.
- Meetings with Specialists be connected with experts to help

manage your condition.

Watch for Opportunities to Switch Plans If Your Plan Doesn't Meet Your Needs

The Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period is January 1 through March 31. During this time, you have opportunity to switch MA plans if your current plan isn't what you need.

No matter which Medicare plan you have, it can greatly help you to get and stay healthy. Happy New Year and let your Medicare benefits help you to have a healthy 2025!

Since 2018, Stefan Johnson has been helping people in the Tri-States region and beyond to choose Medicare Advantage, Supplement, Cost, and Prescription Drug plans. He is licensed in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota. He represents several companies providing Medicare-related products. He can be reached at (563)581-9341 or sj@retiringease.com. Stefan is not affiliated with Medicare, nor with the government. ♦

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SMART DEVICES ARE FOR EVERYONE

by Alison Vanderpool

Smart devices offer great potential, but their complexity can be daunting. This article highlights a couple user-friendly apps designed to simplify and enhance your digital experience.

APPLE APP STORE AND GOOGLE PLAY STORE

You can find these listed applications by searching in your device's app (application) store. For iOS or Apple devices, you'll find a blue icon labeled "App Store." If you use an Android device, the application is called "Google Play" Store, displaying a white icon with a multicolored triangle.

App Name: BARD Mobile

Purpose: Audio Books Player

Software: iOS and Android

Cost: Free (with use of NLS Talking Book Service)



ACCESSIBILITY

This app is designed with users with visual impairment in mind. It is compatible with features such as Zoom and Voiceover. The layout is simple and easy to navigate.



BARD is an app connected with a free talking book service provided by the National Library Service and the Library of Congress. To qualify for this service, you only must have something physically or mentally that limits your ability to access print in a traditional way. This may be related to

your visual ability, your attention, or another physical difficulty, like tremors. An application can be submitted to your state's appointed library. If you want assistance to access this service for you for your someone else, you can contact Alison, the writer of this article (info at the end).

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App Name: Dice World Yatzy and Farkle

Purpose: Dice Games

Software: iOS and Android

Cost: Free (in-app purchases optional)



ACCESSIBILITY

This game is more compati-

ble with voiceover compared to similar apps. The screen reader can detect buttons and read them so one can navigate without being able to see the screen. Bright colors, ads, and moving pictures would make this app difficult to utilize if those are elements that make it difficult for a user to see or otherwise focus.

Dice World is an app that contains 6 games able to be played both online and offline. It is known as a popular choice for inclusive gaming. Games include Farkle, Yatzy, Balut, Pig, Threes, and 1-4-24. Players can play independently against computer opponents or participate in an online community of other like-mind-

ed gamers.

App Name: Messenger

Purpose: Communication

Software: iOS and Android

Cost: Free (in conjunction with Facebook account, also free)



ACCESSIBILITY

This app has a clean layout, easy to navigate, and is compatible with screen reader software. Messenger does not have pop-up ads or other distracting moving graphics.

Facebook Messenger provides an all-in-1 communication app for Facebook users, allowing for video calling, audio calls, instant messaging, sharing files, videos, photos, and more! It is easy to use and an account many people have.

Messenger is a good way to keep up with friends and family.

Alison Vanderpool, M.S.Ed. is a Realtor with EPIQUE Realty. She can be contacted at 815-275-5114, AlisonVanderpool@epique.me.

You can visit her Facebook page at [Facebook.com/yourkey-2access](https://www.facebook.com/yourkey-2access). ♦



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Dubuque Orthopaedic Surgeons, PC

Dubuque Orthopaedic Surgeons, PC, is a leading orthopedic clinic in the Tri-State area. They are dedicated to providing advanced, cutting-edge care to the community. The clinic's team of board-certified surgeons: Doctors Stephen Pierotti, Ryan Cloos, and Bryan Trumm along with John Burgmeier, PA-C specialize in a comprehensive range of orthopedic services, ensuring personalized treatment plans for each patient.

Dubuque Orthopaedic Surgeons, PC was founded in 1966

by Dr. Julian Nemmers. The clinic was founded to have a profound impact on the health and well-being of local residents because many communities lack specialized care, leaving patients to travel long distances for treatment. Dubuque Orthopaedics Surgeons keeps patients local and close to home because community is important and all the providers that have worked here over the past 59 years love their profession and helping their patients!

The clinic offers a wide array of orthopedic services, including:

Ankle & Knee Care: Treatment for conditions such as fractures, ligament injuries, and arthritis, utilizing both surgical and non-surgical approaches.

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Robotic Joint Replacement: Utilizing advanced robotic technology for precise joint replacement surgeries, enhancing outcomes and recovery times.

Same-Day Surgery: Offering outpatient surgical procedures that allow patients to return home the same day, promoting convenience and comfort.

What sets Dubuque Orthopaedic Surgeons, PC apart is their commitment to personalized care and the utilization of ad-

vanced technologies. The surgeons are not only highly qualified but also deeply invested in the well-being of their patients, often treating individuals of all ages and a variety of joint problems. Their approach includes:

Patient-Centered Care: Developing individualized treatment plans that cater to the specific needs and goals of each patient.

Community Engagement: Many of the surgeons are natives of the area, fostering a strong connection and dedication to serving the local community.

Advanced Surgical Techniques: Implementing minimal-

ly invasive procedures and robotic-assisted surgeries to improve precision and reduce recovery times.

This combination of personalized care, community involvement, and technological advancement distinguishes Dubuque Orthopaedic Surgeons, PC as a premier provider in the region. They also support small rural communities and treat patients in Maquoketa and Guttenberg.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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TAKE A HIKE! – TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

by Nick Thomas

Admired for its dramatic mountainous beauty, diverse wildlife, and range of outdoor activities, Rocky Mountain National Park is a top destination for tourists. Each year, millions flock to the Colorado park and navigate the winding Trail Ridge Road just to experience the scenic beauty of the seemingly endless 2-mile-high mountains towering over the pristine region.

Some are also drawn to the various challenging trails stretching throughout the park's fields, forests, and lake areas. For a gentle introduction to exploring at least some of the 215-square-mile park on foot, hikers should head straight for

Sprague Lake, just a few miles down Bear Lake Road past the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center when approaching from the eastern town of Estes Park. The 0.7-mile lake trail loop is completely flat, beginning with a short boardwalk before transitioning into an easy-to-navigate gravel path.

But be warned – it's one of the most popular U.S. National Park destinations for visitors of all ages from all over the world. As a result, in addition to the standard park admission fee, timed park entry reservations are required from late May through mid-October between 9 AM and 2 PM. A separate timed entry reservation is required for the Bear Lake corridor (where Sprague Lake is located) between 5 AM and 6 AM. These may be reserved online for a small additional fee.



If you're wondering why a timed entry to Sprague Lake is required at such an early hour, there's a good reason – sunrise. As breathtaking as dawn itself can be, when the sun climbs above the mountains on the lake's east side and its first light illuminates the peaks of the western range, the view

may leave you speechless. If the mountains are still snow-capped in late spring and the sky is clear on a calm morning, it won't be the cool air that takes your breath away. "It's just magical," I heard one lady softly remark to a friend as she admired the mountains and lush vegetation perfectly re-

flected on the tranquil lake.

Arriving early not only helps to avoid crowds – there were only about 15 cars in the Sprague Lake car park when we arrived at 5:30 AM – but may also allow visitors to witness wildlife at its most active time of the day. After just a few steps onto the boardwalk, we spotted an adult male moose about 150 feet away feeding on aquatic vegetation by the lakeshore. Everyone on the boardwalk, mostly seniors, respectfully gave the massive creature space. This courtesy proved wise when the moose suddenly merged onto the walking path, trotting nonchalantly just a few feet away from several surprised but enthralled onlookers.



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If you are seeking more of a challenge, venture further down Bear Lake Road to the Alberta Falls trail – the falls and lake taking their names from Abner and Alberta Sprague who were among the first settlers in the area in the 1860s. The 1.2-mile round trip to Alberta Falls features an elevation gain of 160 feet with some brief steep sections. When we visited, snow was still melting making the trail slippery in places.

On the trail, we met a lady in her seventies wearing a red jacket, white broad-brimmed hat, and wisely wielding a pair of hiker's walking poles and navigating the slick ice with great



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

skill (we foolishly left ours in the car!). Explaining she was a veteran hiker with experience walking all over the park, she said the 30-foot Alberta waterfall cascading into Glacier Creek at the end of the trail made it worth the extra effort and just another reason why she loved Rocky Mountain National Park. We couldn't agree more.

Nick Thomas teaches at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama and has written features, columns, and interviews for many newspapers and magazines. His "Take a Hike!" column describes short trails, hikes, and walks from around the country that seniors might enjoy while traveling. His website is GetNickT.org. ♦

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VOLUNTEER SUE BECKER SHARES HER LOVE OF ANIMALS

by Tracey Rush

When Sue Becker is not working at her full-time job as a pharmacist, playing violin in the Dubuque Community String Orchestra, playing saxophone in the Big Band Express, or singing in Heartland Harmony, the 68-year-old animal lover can be found volunteering at the Dubuque Regional Humane Society.

Much of her time at the DRHS is spent doing laundry and washing dishes, tasks she finds quite relaxing. Often another worker will hand her a cat that needs a little extra TLC and Sue will drop what she's doing and snuggle with the animal. "That's my favorite part of the job – 'socializing the animals,'" says Sue. There are a lot of animals that need snuggling: as of December 2024, the head count was 480 animals in their care.

The Dubuque Regional Hu-

mane Society currently has 250 active volunteers, with a core of 35 who come in on a regular basis. Cede Angel, who coordinates the volunteers, says, "We encourage anyone of any age to volunteer here. It's a 'choose your own adventure' set-up.

Besides the cleaning cages and litter boxes and mopping the floors, volunteers walk dogs, brush them, and may also help with events." To qualify for being a volunteer, there is a short training session and after so many hours, one can be trained to be an animal handler.

In her over 10 years of volunteering, Sue has been known to bring some of her work home with her. She and her husband Hans have fostered close to 50 kittens, in addition to the four cats they have at home. "I love getting them going in life. Once they weight two pounds, they

can be spayed or neutered." At her home, Sue had to keep the fosters in a separate room because her own cats were not always welcoming to the "intruders."

Cede also recommends seniors consider fostering animals. "It is almost as rewarding to the humans as it is to the animals. By the end of the day you have unconditional love."

Does Becker recommend volunteering at the DRHS? "Definitely! I'm only there one morning a week but once I retire, I will probably go a lot more. They are great people to work with. Nobody who works at an animal shelter is a bad person."

Tracey Rush came to Dubuque in 1984 with her husband John, the librarian of Emmaus since 1983. She has taught and performed music in the tri-state area and in 2001 founded the Northeast Iowa School of Music. ❖



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY TRACEY RUSH

Sue Becker socializes with Barry, who was adopted from the Dubuque Regional Humane Society.

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