Editor’s Letter

To your health

DEAR SAGE READERS

We’re so pleased to be back up to full circulation for this issue of the Sage. Unfortunately, we don’t know if that will be the case in the future, so we encourage you to send an e-mail to sage@aarp.org so we can sign you up for a free e-subscription, which can be canceled at any time.

The holidays are just around the corner. This year, why not make your New Year’s resolution early and pledge to help your family and friends who may need a little extra assistance? On page 7, read about the new Create the Good program that provides you with tips and checklists to help older family and friends make their homes safer and more energy efficient.

Another way to assist older relatives and friends is to help them navigate the annual process of selecting a Medicare prescription drug plan. A selection must be made between Nov. 15 and Dec. 31. You can compare plans online at medicare.gov, and in-person consultation is available through the Wyoming State Health Insurance Program. Read page 5 for more details.

If you’ve been worried about the flu and wondering whether to get a seasonal or swine flu shot, read page 4 for advice from the director of the state health department.

And, if you thought you were too old to try something new and exciting, read page 10 to see what one 60-year-old with a familiar face did recently.

As always, we welcome your comments about the Sage. Please let us know how you plan to make 2010 the best year yet.

Enjoy the holidays!

Sincerely,
Joanne Bowlby

Revved up and ready to go

Let AARP Wyoming keep you informed on the issues you care about. Change is possible if we stand together. Get national and state policy updates at www.aarp.org/getinvolved.

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With more than 100,000 members, joining AARP Wyoming can make your later years your best years yet. Give us a try. Call (866) 663-3290.

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By Sage Staff

To some people, “vacation” means sleeping in, seeing the sights, reading novels, enjoying an umbrella drink or two. Not to Ann Bowers of Bellbrook, Ohio.

“I like to do hands-on stuff,” said Bowers, 69. “Taking a tour isn’t really my kind of thing – I’m not ready to do that.”

Instead, Bowers – and many like her – spent some time in Jackson recently taking advantage of Elderhostel (now known as Exploritas), a nonprofit organization offering a series of educational travel programs to promote lifelong learning. In Jackson, most available Elderhostel programs are hosted by the Teton Science Schools. Bowers joined one of the organization’s service programs, which had her transplanting flora to create wetlands, tearing out fence lines to open rangeland for deer and banding migratory birds.

Relaxing? No. Exactly what she was looking for? Yes.

“I love the West and the outdoors and their whole approach of getting out and getting into it,” Bowers said.

The Teton Science Schools Jackson campus hosts about 15 week-long Elderhostel programs a year. Prices per program range from $598 to $990 per person, with the average cost for most programs being around $850. The price includes all meals, lodging, transportation during the program, experienced instructors and guides and all activities during the week.

To register for an Exploritas (Elderhostel) program, call 1-800-454-5768, or for more information about Teton Science Schools, call 307-734-3750 or visit www.teton-science.org.

Elderhostel participants in Teton National Park this summer.
The flu: What you need to know

BY DR. BRENT SHERARD

Most years, the Wyoming winds and noticeable nip in the fall air can be a reminder that influenza season is on the way. Around this time, public health officials generally begin encouraging people to get immunized before the full force of the flu hits.

This year is different. The full force of flu is already in Wyoming. It’s early, and it’s due to the new swine (novel H1N1) influenza strain that began circulating around the world in April. We are seeing widespread flu across the state right now with levels of activity near the peaks we sometimes see in the winter due to seasonal influenza.

And there is no reason to expect that seasonal influenza won’t also start circulating out there as the flu season continues. The 2009-10 influenza season will not be business as usual and will certainly be a challenge as our Wyoming healthcare providers look for the best solutions to keep us as healthy as possible.

Vaccines are the single most effective weapon we have in fighting influenza. This year because of the new flu strain, we will be part of one of the largest vaccine campaigns ever planned in the United States. For the best possible protection, people will need to get a special novel H1N1 flu vaccine and a seasonal vaccine.

In Wyoming, distribution of the special novel H1N1 flu vaccine began in October and will continue for several months. The vaccine is being sent to approved providers around the state with amounts based on population. The Wyoming Department of Health has ordered the vaccine, and local public health officials coordinate much of the distribution. The federal government is paying for the H1N1 vaccine itself; some providers may charge small administration fees.

While we believe enough swine flu vaccine will eventually be available for all our residents who wish to be immunized, it’s important to note the first shipments will be relatively small. Certain individuals are at higher risk for complications from this flu strain, and we recommend that these people should be first in line for the available vaccine. Target groups include:
• Pregnant women.
• Persons who live with or provide care for infants under the age of 6 months. (This includes parents, siblings and day-care providers.)
• Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
• Persons aged 6 months through 24 years.
• Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications.

I’ve been asked by many people about the safety of the new vaccine. Influenza vaccines have been available for many years and have a proven track record of safety. Novel H1N1 vaccine is essentially no different. No corners were cut in its development. Clinical trials have not shown any unusual problems or side effects. I have no concerns about ensuring my five-year-old granddaughter will be receiving the vaccine as soon as it’s available to her.

I understand there have been rumors that swine (novel H1N1) flu immunizations will be mandatory, but this is not true. The Wyoming Department of Health will not force anyone to receive this vaccine.

With the spotlight focused on swine flu, we need to ensure that seasonal flu vaccines are not overlooked. In a typical year, approximately 5 to 20 percent of the population gets the seasonal flu, and about 36,000 flu-related deaths are reported. Seasonal flu vaccine is already available around Wyoming, and I recommend getting immunized against seasonal flu as soon as possible.

Learn more at www.health.wyo.gov.

Nurses focus of workforce program

BY SAGE STAFF

America is facing a nursing shortage, and it’s being felt here in Wyoming, too. A group of organizations came together under the guidance of the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation to see what could be done to recruit and retain more nurses in Wyoming.

The Wyoming Center for Nursing and Health Care Partnerships is a new initiative aimed at assisting current nurses and those interested in the profession. Five nursing facilities in Wyoming agreed to test some innovative recruitment and retention policies.

Those pilot projects are being studied for their effectiveness, and results should be available in 2010.

The Center is in the process of creating a Web site to serve as a clearinghouse of information for those interested in entering nursing, as well as those who want to advance their nursing careers or come back to the profession, manage, mentor or instruct others within the field.

For more information, visit wynursing.org or call 307-766-6715.
Oral health care for life

BY DR. RANDY HANCOCK

From children to seniors, all Wyoming residents are susceptible to diseases, and often these illnesses can begin in the mouth.

The medical facts of oral health are clear: Your mouth is integrally related to your whole body and its health. Quality oral health can lead to healthier, longer lives.

Research has shown there is a significant link between a healthy mouth and a strong body. Bleeding gums, visible root surfaces and loose teeth are not normal at any age—and are usually signs of an infection called periodontal (gum) disease.

Increasing medical evidence even suggests that an unhealthy mouth may worsen serious medical problems, like heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Unfortunately, Wyoming seniors can sometimes face greater risks and obstacles to ensuring their oral health.

To help minimize these difficulties, Wyoming dentists are reaching out to seniors in senior centers and other facilities where populations can be especially vulnerable.

Wyoming dentists are talking directly with seniors in order to educate them about oral health and overall health.

Additionally, there are programs in Wyoming to help seniors who cannot afford dental care to get it.

The Wyoming Department of Health has a program for adults age 65 and older. With proof of need, the program pays 85 percent of treatment costs up to $800 per year. You can reach the program at 307-777-7945.

There is also the Donated Dental Services program for adults with disabilities. The program helps find you a dentist in your area who will donate services. The number for DDS is 1-888-449-9670.

Research has shown there is a significant link between a healthy mouth and a strong body.

Wyoming Equality Care has an adult dental program that provides an annual exam and cleaning with X-rays, some restorative work, extractions, removable partials and an once-in-a-lifetime denture. You must be eligible for full Medicaid coverage to be eligible for dental services.

Remember to tell your dentist about your overall health, not just your oral symptoms, especially if you have had any recent illnesses or have any chronic conditions. Be sure to give your dentist a health history including medication use, both prescription and over-the-counter products, and let your dentist know when there are changes.

Dentists are here to help you. The well-being of every Wyoming citizen matters. We want to do everything we can to help seniors get the care they need and deserve.

Help make the streets safer

Demand for the AARP Driver Safety Program is high. Instructors are needed in Evanston, Laramie, Newcastle, Rawlins and Rock Springs, as well as Lincoln, Teton and Sublette counties. Training, necessary materials and expenses related to teaching the classes are provided by the AARP Driver Safety Program. Call Mike Varney in Torrington at 307-532-3230 if you are interested in becoming a classroom instructor.

News briefs

It’s that time of year again

All existing Medicare recipients must choose a 2010 prescription drug plan between Nov. 15 and Dec. 31, 2009. Plans change from year to year, so Medicare recipients are encouraged to review their options, even if they are happy with their current plans. Unbiased confidential help is available through the Wyoming State Health Insurance Information Program (WSHIIP). Call 1-800-856-4398 to set up a free in-person appointment with one of more than 80 Medicare counselors across the state.

Pay as little as $2.40 for Medicare Prescription Drugs

For years you did your part by paying into Medicare. Now it’s your turn to get the most out of the benefits you’ve earned. If you have limited income and resources, there’s a Medicare program where you pay no more than $2.40 for each generic drug and $6 for each brand name drug.

If you qualify, this program helps pay your prescription co-payments plus other drug costs like monthly premiums and annual deductibles. Many people qualify and don’t even know it.

Individuals who make less than $16,245 and married couples who make less than $21,855 may qualify. Resources also must be limited to $12,510 for individuals or $25,010 for married couples. Resources include things like bank accounts, stocks and bonds, but not your house or car.

Applying for this program is free. Apply at socialsecurity.gov or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778) and ask for the Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs. All information provided is confidential. You know that sometimes making ends meet means making tough decisions. That shouldn’t mean going without your medications. Apply now to make sure you have the prescription drugs you need to stay healthy and keep doing what you love.

To learn more about Medicare prescription drug plans and when you can join, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227; TTY 1-877-486-2048) or visit medicare.gov.

Don’t slip into the hole

Use the AARP Doughnut Hole Calculator to see if you or a loved one might slip into the gap in Medicare Part D coverage for 2010. Several prescription drug plans provide coverage in the gap. See if you need one. Visit aarp.org/doughnuthole.

Make your wishes known

AARP Wyoming provides a free guide and forms to help you make your wishes known to family, friends and your physician. In 2005, Wyoming legislators passed a law to create a standard advance health care directive form. To download a copy of the guide and form, visit aarp.org/wy and look for the link to Make Your Wishes Known or call the AARP Wyoming office at 1-866-663-3290.
Your Money, Your Future

Coming in from the cold

Two programs help to relieve the financial pinch of home heating

BY JULIETTE RULE

They worked hard. They raised a family and participated in retirement saving programs. It just wasn’t enough for one Wheatland couple.

The retirement plans of Jim and Marilyn Livers were interrupted by the combination of an ever-expanding cost of living and a serious health matter about 20 years ago. Home heating bills and medical costs along with limited opportunities to earn income complicated matters for the Livers. To ease their burden, their son handed them an application for the tax-payer-funded LIEAP and Weatherization programs.

LIEAP, the low-income energy assistance program administered by the Wyoming Department of Family Services, helped the Livers cover the monthly cost of their natural gas bill. And because Marilyn Livers checked the box on the application asking for Weatherization Services, the Livers will see a much-needed benefit this winter – a more comfortable home requiring less fuel to keep the couple cozy this winter.

While the Livers’ modest Wheatland home suits them just fine, they knew it could use some insulation, Jim Livers says.

The process didn’t take long for the Livers, who applied, then got a letter telling them they were accepted into the program. The payments made to their natural gas provider were managed electronically with no impact or extra work for them. The following month, they saw the benefit – a much lower payment to their natural gas provider.

In a matter of days after applying for LIEAP and Weatherization last year, Wyoming Weatherization Services had a crew at the Livers’ home, assessing the work that needed to be done. The process is called an energy audit, and it’s required before any weatherization work is done at a home under this program. The crew used some high-tech equipment to test for leaks and other household hazards to find out what kind of work they would do. The Livers watched as the crew put weather stripping on the doors, additional insulation in the older part of the home, tested the kitchen stove, water heater and furnace. The crew added two smoke detectors and a carbon monoxide detector and even a few energy-saving light bulbs, called CFLs.

“They were really nice,” Marilyn Liver says. “They came in one day, said where they were from, and three weeks later, they had all the stuff they needed to do the work.”

They weren’t surprised to see additional insulation added to their home.

“I knew the older part of the house needed insulation because the walls were cold in the winter,” Jim Livers explains, noting his own career in construction and the hours of work he put into their home’s remodeling job decades ago.

Jim’s health issue, Kennedy Syndrome, has symptoms similar to Multiple Sclerosis, but it has a genetic link. The condition requires him to use a wheelchair, and it leaves him sensitive to the cold. Even with extra insulation and weather stripping, the Livers aren’t exactly looking forward to winter, though they already have experienced the benefits of the program.

“We immediately felt a difference,” Marilyn says. “The house was cooler this summer.”

The Livers didn’t have to wait long for their home weatherization. Waiting times are based on a priority points system, which tallies disabilities and ages of the household members. This year, those who qualify will experience a benefit of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a part of which has authorized the state’s weatherization contractors to spend significantly more on homes when it’s needed.

LIEAP is accepting applications now. To learn more about the program, see the income guidelines or print an application, go to http://lieap.state.wy.us, or call 1-800-246-4221 to ask that an application be mailed to you.

Accepting the help wasn’t easy, Marilyn Livers explains, referring to the “tiny stigma” attached to applying for tax-payer-funded programs. In their thank-you note to the LIEAP and Weatherization Program, the Livers’ gratefulness is clear.

“How can we say thanks for all the help you have given us?” they wrote, and this year they’re encouraging others in similar situations to apply for the help.
Small jobs difficult for some

BY SAGE STAFF

As winter approaches in Wyoming, thoughts often turn to Thanksgiving turkeys, Christmas presents, school breaks and ski vacations. AARP Wyoming is hoping to add drafty window frames, slippery back steps and leaky gutters to that list in an effort to spur community service and take care of challenges like those for its members.

AARP recently launched a community service program known as “Create the Good.” Wyoming Director Tim Summers says that the organization has heard from members for years that there are small tasks that they need done in order for them to stay in their homes and age with dignity. Some of these tasks are difficult because of physical or financial limitations, and the jobs are often too small to entice a contractor.

At CreateTheGood.org, a variety of “toolkits” that include checklists and fact sheets are available to support neighbors helping neighbors with this work. In Wyoming, AARP is focusing its efforts on the Operation Energy Save toolkit and the Home Safety program.

“Many of us live far away from family and are unable to stop by Mom or Dad’s home on a frequent basis to help them with these tasks, so we are encouraging people to take some time this holiday season while visiting family and friends to see if you can lend a hand to make their life a little easier,” Summers said.

Cheyenne Light, Fuel & Power’s Energy Service Manager Rob Morris says he receives a number of questions from seniors about low-cost or no-cost efforts to conserve energy and save on their heating bills. Morris says caulking and weather-stripping around doors and windows — where many leaks can be found — is a good place to start, and he suggests it be evaluated every three to five years. Caulking is needed around all openings into the home, which are not limited to doors and windows but might also include pipes and wiring. Morris also suggests residents ensure that proper home insulation has been installed.

“We also encourage customers who are purchasing new windows, furnaces or water heaters do their homework and buy the most energy-efficient product available,” he said. “Many utilities offer rebates on some energy-efficient furnaces, water heaters and thermostats.”

Some of the most-needed assistance, AARP’s Summers said, might be less involved than that. “Even seemingly small jobs like installing more energy-efficient and brighter light bulbs or adding weather-stripping to doorways and windows can make a big difference in the comfort of a home, but often it’s those small jobs that are a barrier for older people who can’t climb ladders or bend over to plug gaps in cracks around outlets,” Summers said. “Taking a few minutes this holiday season to do those tasks for a relative or friend could help them lower their heat bill and keep them warmer this winter.”

Good with numbers?

AARP Tax-Aide, the nation’s largest free, volunteer-run tax preparation service, is seeking volunteers across the state to help Wyoming taxpayers who need help completing their 2010 tax returns.

Volunteers do not need to be AARP members or retirees to participate.

AARP Tax-Aide volunteers get free training and are reimbursed for qualified program-related expenses. They help taxpayers at sites around the state and learn new skills while giving back to countless communities.

“Last year, we assisted more than 2,700 people prepare and file their tax returns,” said Wyoming Tax-Aide Coordinator Vern Ellis. “We couldn’t do it without the 41 volunteers, who make an indelible mark on the 14 communities they help.”

For more information on joining the AARP Tax-Aide team, visit aarp.org/taxaide or call our toll-free number, 1-888-OUR-AARP (1-888-687-2277). Deadline for application is Nov. 20, 2009.

Help is just a phone call away

It’s not a new program, but you can expect to hear more about it this year. The Telephone Assistance Program, also known as TAP, helps Wyoming households pay for telephone service.

Qualifying is an easy process. You need proof you’re already participating in one or more of these programs: Medicaid (including SSI), Equality Care, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps), Prescription Drug Assistance, POWER, Child Care and LIEAP (the home heating help program).

Getting an application is easy, too. Call your telephone company and ask them to send you one or visit the Wyoming Public Service Commission at psc.state.wy.us, and print an application. Your area telephone company might also have the application online.

TAP can save a household as much as $13.50 each month on the telephone bill. Telephone service providers also offer a significant discount on home phone installation to those customers who qualify for the TAP benefit.
Folks who ‘Create the Good’ in Wyoming

Making a difference in the lives of others is essential to these award winners

AARP Wyoming is honoring six outstanding individuals who have made life a little easier for others. If you would like to nominate someone for next year’s awards, please call the AARP Wyoming office in Cheyenne toll-free at 1-866-663-3290.

“‘There are many needs in our community, and Christianity teaches that we should serve others.’”

with the organization more than a decade ago.

“AARP gave me the opportunity, the support and the tools to work with for projects that benefitted others, and I know I didn’t do it alone,” said Arnold. “There are many needs in our community, and

NAOMI ALLEN

Ask Naomi Allen what the highlights were during her decade advocating on behalf of her fellow AARP Wyoming members, and she’ll have a hard time telling you what wasn’t a highlight. She is being honored this year with the 2009 AARP Wyoming Advocacy Award.

From 1998-2007, Allen lobbied members of the Wyoming

BESS ARNOLD

Anyone familiar with the senior scene in Wyoming is likely familiar with Bess Arnold. The 76-year-old Cheyenne resident has been a fixture in local community service efforts for many years and shows no signs of slowing down. But with the 2009 Andrus Award for Community Service, Arnold’s story is going national.

AARP’s Andrus Award recognizes seniors who have generated positive social change in the world around them and who bring lifetimes of experience and leadership to serve all generations.

“AARP gave me the opportunity, the support and the tools to work with for projects that benefitted others, and I know I didn’t do it alone,” said Arnold. “There are many needs in our community, and

Christianity teaches that we should serve others. God has blessed me with good health and whatever I need to serve.”

And give she has: Since retiring from the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle as a reporter in 1993, Arnold’s volunteer experiences have included the American Cancer Society, Meals on Wheels, Wyoming Coalition for the Homeless, R.S.V.P., Cheyenne C.A.A.R.E.S., the Governor’s Residence, Vision 20/20, the Governor’s Advisory Council on Aging and the Laramie County Senior Advisory Council.

AARP Wyoming Director Tim Summers said Arnold was the first volunteer he met when he started

NAOMI ALLEN

Ask Naomi Allen what the highlights were during her decade advocating on behalf of her fellow AARP Wyoming members, and she’ll have a hard time telling you what wasn’t a highlight. She is being honored this year with the 2009 AARP Wyoming Advocacy Award.

From 1998-2007, Allen lobbied members of the Wyoming
“It was always long hours, but it was a challenge to see if I could help change minds.”

Legislature and other elected officials on bills addressing issues ranging from health insurance to tax relief to assisted living. She still laughs when she recalls the day her efforts brought in 600 phone calls in one day to a group opposing one of the bills she supported.

“It was really fun,” said Allen, 74. “It was always long hours, but it was a challenge to see if I could help change minds.”

VERN ELLIS

Vern Ellis has been working with the AARP Tax Aid program since 1995 – the last five years as the Wyoming State Coordinator. Ellis, who became a certified public accountant in 1970, has earned the 2009 AARP Wyoming Tax Aide Award.

“We keep helping more people with their tax returns each year,” Ellis said. “With my accounting background, this is one way I can help, especially those with low income [who] can’t afford to go to a paid preparer.”

Ellis, who hails from Allen, Neb., spent most of his professional life with Husky Oil Company of Cody, Wyo., finishing his time there as general manager of accounting.

MEL GILLISPIE

(Photo not available)

For more than a decade, Mel Gillispie has been a steady consumer advocate on utility issues before the Wyoming Public Service Commission. Gillispie, who is receiving this year’s Wyoming AARP Advocacy Award, began monitoring utility and consumer issues for AARP Wyoming in 1996.

“He has put in ‘countless hours’ sitting through long Public Service Commission meetings, lobbying state legislators and standing up for Wyoming’s residential consumers,” said AARP Wyoming Director Tim Summers.

In 2002 and 2003, Gillispie was part of the AARP Team that helped save Wyoming consumers more than $100 million in potential rate increases through strong advocacy and diligent oversight. AARP greatly appreciates Mel’s service and contributions over the years, Summers said.

“WILLIAM ‘BILL’ KING

Bill King spent more than a decade as a volunteer instructor for the AARP Driver Safety Program, and AARP Wyoming Director Tim Summers said his legacy to the program – from which he is “retiring” for a second time – is tremendous. AARP Wyoming is recognizing King with the 2009 Driver Safety Award.

“His classes nearly always filled to capacity, and it wasn’t just the auto insurance discount that kept students coming back,” Summers said. “Bill’s knowledge paired with a warm smile made his age 50+ students feel comfortable asking questions – even embarrassing ones – and helped make learning fun.”

“LOISJEAN HALLBERG

As Wyoming State Health Insurance Information Program Coordinator, Loisjean Hallberg helps people find their way through their insurance options in Wyoming at no charge. With the Wyoming Outstanding Community Partner Award, AARP is recognizing Hallberg this year for the many hours she has spent with the organization’s members explaining the Medicare Part D benefit and how to navigate the Medicare system.

“We have so much to be thankful for, and I try to share my education and help seniors who need assistance with insurance, billing and Medicare problems,” said Hallberg. “Our program covers the entire state, so it’s big job, but I love it.”

Want to do some good?

Whether you have five minutes or five days to share, there are many ways that you can help make someone else’s life a little easier. Visit CreateTheGood.org to see a listing of opportunities in your area. Additional opportunities are available through Serve Wyoming. Call 1-800-556-0242 to find a project near you, or start your own using one of the Create the Good Group Organizer toolkits.

“We have so much to be thankful for, and I try to share my education and help seniors who need assistance with insurance, billing and Medicare problems.”
By Bob Geha

You’re never too old to fly ... in an F-16 that is. And that’s what I had the privilege of doing with the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds during Frontier Days 2009 at the ripe young age of 60.

Of course, I needed a doctor’s note stating that I was in good health and confirming that flying six times the force of gravity was not going to jeopardize my back, which had undergone surgery a year earlier.

However, there was one more hoop to jump through to get qualified. I had to get checked by the Thunderbirds’ flight surgeon, Major Charla Quayle, the first woman to hold that position.

During the examination, she advised me to keep an eye on the horizon. That way, I could see what was going on, and it would make sense to my brain, which would send a signal to my inner ear that everything was all right. And it worked. I never got that balance disorder called vertigo. Vertigo is the sensation of spinning or swaying while the body is actually stationary with respect to its surroundings.

Major Quayle checked me out thoroughly and gave me the thumbs-up. I was good to go!

I got to ride with Major Tony Mulhare, whose call name is “Split.” Split wanted to be a pilot since he was a kid. His late father also was an Air Force pilot, so Split grew up around fighter jets, runways and the smell of jet fuel. As a child, he said all he dreamt about was flying like his dad. He told me he would look at the clouds and fantasize about his future as a pilot.

Before my flight, Split briefed me on what to expect. He said to just have fun when we got up there. I decided I would, I wasn’t going to be scared, and if I got sick, so be it.

Split told me everything we were going to do before we did it. There were no surprises. We took off and climbed straight up and then did a barrel roll, which is a smooth 360 degree side-to-side roll. Then we did a loop and a clover loop, which points you straight down followed by a 90 degree turn and an exit to the left. We flew inverted (upside down) and did an end-over-end roll before heading back to the runway.

I decided I wasn’t going to be scared, and if I got sick, so be it.

I can tell you that flying upside down at 600 miles per hour, pulling about four or five Gs (four or five times the gravitational pull of the Earth) and then doing a vertical roll looks like you are at heaven’s gate!

The 140 airmen and women who make up the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds (about half were in Cheyenne for the air show) are all accomplished professionals and are wonderful ambassadors to the world. It was indeed a privilege — and the experience of a lifetime — to fly with them!
A day does not go by that I don’t get a question about the health care debate. AARP members in Wyoming are particularly interested – for themselves, for their children and for their children’s children.

AARP is fighting to make those voices heard. No issue is more important to this association than fixing this broken system. We’re very actively pressing Congress and the president to arrive at fair and common-sense solutions that will lower costs, improve quality and protect and improve Medicare.

Progress on health care is far too important to be derailed by myths and scare tactics perpetrated by special interest groups that will benefit from the status quo.

You might have heard some outrageous claims in the media from those opposing healthcare reform. Unfortunately, the truth is too often getting lost in the frenzy of negative and sensational press reports. It is indeed a complicated issue, so it’s critically important to get the facts straight and realize the good that will come of this historical effort to fix health care in America and in Wyoming.

Common myths and claims:

We can’t afford it. We cannot afford the status quo – any one of us could be one pink slip or one serious illness away from financial ruin. If we do nothing to fix health care, families with Medicare or employer-based health coverage will likely see their premiums nearly double again in the next seven years.

Reform proposals will cut Medicare benefits. None of the major health care reform plans being considered would cut Medicare benefits. The measures being considered will lower prescription drug costs for people in the Part D “doughnut hole,” protect access to doctors, prevent costly and avoidable hospital readmissions, improve quality of care and eliminate billions of dollars in waste.

It’s a government takeover. Health care reform will not be a government takeover. All of the main proposals currently being debated by Congress would preserve the employer-based health care system, meaning an estimated 200 million Americans will continue to get their coverage through their employers.

Health care reform is rationed care. Health care reform will not give the government the power to make important health care decisions, regardless of a person’s age. Those decisions will be made by individuals, their doctors and their family.

What about mandatory end of life counseling/government euthanasia? Not only is that completely false, it is a misleading and cruel scare tactic. Health care reform will not give the government the power to make life-or-death decisions for anyone, regardless of their age.

AARP believes health care is not a Democratic or Republican issue. Nor should it be about political gamesmanship. It’s about people’s lives. Health care reform must fix what’s wrong and preserve what’s right. It must strengthen and improve Medicare; protect people’s choice of doctor and insurance.

Les Engelter is president of AARP Wyoming.
Wellness programs get Wyoming healthy

BY MARJORIE KORN

While Washington spent the summer debating what to do when people get sick, programs in Wyoming worked to keep them healthy.

Wellness programs have gained popularity as a way to encourage people to lead healthier lives, including eating better, exercising and using preventative medicine. For businesses that provide insurance, such programs can control health care costs and keep employees healthy.

State-sponsored wellness programs, too, have proven successful by providing health information and incentives to those whose insurance is subsidized, in part, by the state.

Healthy Together is a program through the Wyoming Department of Health that launched in 2004. It is open to those enrolled in Wyoming EqualityCare – the state’s federal-state Medicaid program for lower-income people, though it focuses on patients with chronic illnesses and pregnant women, said Dr. James Bush, state Medicaid medical officer.

From a fiscal standpoint, for every dollar Wyoming spends, the Department of Health sees $4.82 in cost avoidance, Bush said. But the program’s success is calculated also by its popularity and use. Member satisfaction was 96 percent, and Medicaid providers had a 97 percent satisfaction rate, Bush said.

The program has many different aspects, including patient outreach, wellness and prevention activities, and medical support and planning for people with complex illnesses.

Wellness programs don’t focus solely on illness prevention, but help patients get better more quickly for a sustained period of time. Recovery or living with a chronic problem can be complicated, involving numerous doctors and multiple regimens.

“More people are seeing their doctors, doing very simple things to live healthier, and learning about their personal health risks. We’re investing in our employees, but we’re saving money too.”

Healthy Together provides special support for these people, Bush said.

“Health Coaches coordinate care with members’ respective health care providers and reinforce information and treatment plans provided by those providers,” Bush said.

State employees can enroll in Healthier Wyoming, which has been in place for a little more than a year. It gives participants a discount on insurance premium costs if they complete activity programs and visit their doctors for check-ups. More than 4,300 state employees have completed the requirements, said Wendy Curran, a spokeswoman for Gov. Dave Freudenthal.

While it’s too soon to know the program’s monetary return on investment, Curran said more people are getting wellness exams, screenings and generally improving their lifestyles.

“More people are seeing their doctors, doing very simple things to live healthier and learning about their personal health risks,” Curran said. “We’re investing in our employees, but we’re saving money too.”

A nonprofit established last year has a slightly different take on how to control health care costs. The Wyoming Business Coalition on Health, which began last year, seeks to bring together many different businesses that will address health care issues with a unified voice, said Anne Ladd, executive director.

“We’re buying blind in health care right now,” Ladd said. “This is going to have to be a collaborative effort between the business community and the health care delivery system.”

When the organization hits its stride, Ladd envisions it will compel health care providers – such as hospitals and doctors – to be more transparent in what patients can expect when they seek medical attention.

So far, the coalition represents about 12,000 people. Among its members are Arch Coal, Peabody Energy, Natrona County School District, the City of Casper and the Wyoming Tribune Eagle.

The first step toward that goal will be Project SPUR, a program that businesses can enroll in to provide their employees with chronic illnesses a coach to help improve their wellness and cut down on their medical costs. Ladd said she expects as many as four businesses to begin coaching next year.
State legislators looking ahead to the upcoming budget session early next year already are considering how to keep Wyoming running on less money.

The state, which until recently has benefitted from record-high energy prices, has suffered from a subsequent downturn in mineral values. That decrease in revenue has been coupled with a nationwide recession and record-high unemployment. Still, Wyoming is faring better than most places—California, for instance, is nearly bankrupt—and the State Legislature socked away millions of dollars in the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund when commodity prices were at their peak.

Earlier this year, Gov. Dave Freudenthal, a Democrat, instructed state entities to cut 10 percent of their budgets for Fiscal Year 2010. Offices and agencies were given the flexibility to cut as they saw fit, according to a spokesman for the governor.

“That reduction is being factored into the governor’s budget recommendations for the next biennium, and the savings will most assuredly help deal with the anticipated revenue shortfalls,” said Chris Boswell, the governor’s chief of staff.

Freudenthal will make a 2010-2011 budget proposal on Dec. 1, which will then be reviewed by the Joint Appropriations Committee, led by Sen. Phil Nicholas, R-Laramie and Rep. Rosie Berger, R-Big Horn. Then in February, the Wyoming Legislature will convene its budget session.

Nicholas said Wyomingites shouldn’t be concerned that essential programs will get cut in the budget.

“I’m not worried about maintaining services at the existing levels,” he said.

But Nicholas warned that legislators may not be preparing people for tighter times ahead.

“Legislators are making promises to constituents that we can’t bank,” he said. “All the agencies—Departments of Family Services and Health, Medicaid, those special groups—none of them think they have enough money and they’re going to want to have pretty significant increases.”

But Rep. Bryan Pedersen, R-Cheyenne, is among those warning of the economic realities ahead.

“Expect the budget to be lean for the upcoming biennium,” said Pedersen, a member of the Joint Appropriations Committee. He blames much of the state’s revenue problems on a dip in demand for commodities, such as coal.

Nevertheless, Wyoming must continue to offer essential services, such as Medicaid, which is projected to cost $100 million more, according to a forecast Freudenthal announced in September.

Medicaid recipients have less to worry about, Pedersen said. Higher unemployment has put a strain on this program that helps lower-income people, but because it leverages state dollars with federal funds, Wyoming would be reluctant to make reductions, he said.

“It is more likely that we would take money from other areas that do not have a match or are further down the ladder of health services,” Pedersen said.

And Boswell said funds from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or stimulus bill, will help address most of the increased Medicaid enrollment costs.

“Legislators are making promises that we can’t bank.”

No one doubts that legislators will have to make tough and painful choices. Still, Pedersen said the 10 percent budget cuts positioned the state well.

“I believe that we will be able to maintain the 10 percent budget cuts the Governor implemented without going deeper at this point,” Pedersen said.
By Sara Neyer

So we’re different. After nearly 40 years of marriage, that’s a given. We long ago settled the over-or-under toilet paper and squeeze-from-the-middle-or-the-end toothpaste issues (separate bathrooms!), but computers have renewed our disagreements.

Compared to my parents, we are completely computer savvy. My late father once asked me, “What about these computers? Do I need one?”

“Do you want to track every cent of your spending?”

“No.”

“Do you want to correspond with people without waiting for the mail?”

“I call people, or your mother writes letters.”

“Do you want to find information from around the world immediately?”

“Nope.”

“Then I don’t think you need a computer. But, if you decide you do, I’ll give you one of our old ones to try.” He never asked and didn’t miss computers.

We can’t imagine life without them, but see their use differently.

It’s not the Mac vs. Windows thing. It’s more fundamental. I use computers as way-cool phones — to write, keep in touch with people, follow the news, and buy a few necessities.

I joined Facebook, I’d see baby pictures. I’d heard of Facebook and MySpace, but had never participated. Why did I need to? Now that I had a reason, I immediately complied and “friend” said student.

Meanwhile, my Carpe Diem husband continued his scouring of eBay, which we joined a few years back. If he’s always wanted something, he’s decided he should buy it while he still has time to enjoy it. What stuff does he seek? Mainly clocks. It seems one can never have too many clocks.

When my mom visited in 2004, she counted more than 30 in our house, not including ones in the microwave, stove and VCR. Since then the number may have doubled.

So, what’s the conflict? It’s friends vs. clocks! I now have more than 200 friends on Facebook. Many former students, colleagues, and friends have found me, and I look for people I think should be there, but can’t be found. First I find someone who’s related and check that person’s friend list; then someone else I find on that list leads to another list. It takes a lot of time. Add the “Wall.” Some people apparently keep Facebook up all the time and jot quick notes throughout the day. Until I learned just to scan, that took a lot of time, too. Some days I spend an hour on Facebook learning what’s happened to people who were important in my previous life.

In contrast, Mr. Carpe Diem uses his time seeking interesting clocks on eBay. He determines the proper bid and monitors the auction to see what’s happening. Add all the e-mail questions and answers about whether each clock keeps accurate time and is genuine or a copy. After all that, the end of the auction – with its waiting and watching to swoop in and place the final bid – can consume up to an hour.

My collecting of friends on Facebook elicits a question: “If you lived without knowing what these people were doing before, why do you care now?” while his collecting of clocks makes me ask, “How many clocks does one man need?”

Vive le difference!
How many clocks does one man need?

BY TOM NEYER

How many clocks does one man need? He needs one for each room where he spends much time unless he always wears a watch. I obviously need more, as I will explain later.

First, let me say I do not understand the appeal of Facebook. Although I am an introvert, I have friends and enjoy visiting with them. What puzzles me is the need to be in nearly constant contact, especially with those we barely know, rarely see or seek out, and probably wouldn’t contact were it not for easy electronic wizardry.

This probably goes back to elementary school. I was not one of the popular kids, probably mid-pack. I didn’t receive the most Valentines or the least. On the day we traded individual school pictures, I was never the first approached by the popular kids but always hoped for an exchange with those “special” kids. Facebook smacks of this kind of false popularity. I suppose one reason I haven’t joined is that fifth-grade fear of being left out or having insufficient friends.

As to the clocks, I don’t really collect them. That would imply a goal or some master plan. I acquire clocks. I buy those that are interesting mechanically, are charming or pretty and, usually, inexpensive.

Time fascinates me because it’s become so complicated over the last century. Historically we ate when hungry, worked in light and slept in dark. Now clocks and the schedules they allow manipulate our very existence.

Monks invented clocks to regulate prayer times. Time obsession snowballed with non-agricultural work; train, bus, plane, radio and TV schedules; and leisure activity commitments to self and kids. Had they foreseen the stress caused by their invention, would monks have suppressed this knowledge instead of cultivating it?

Clocks fascinate me because all serve the same function but use millions of variations of the basic time-keeping pattern.

I especially like older wind-up clocks. Think not only of the springs that store energy, the shafts, escapements, cogs, bushings, balance wheels and other parts that transfer that energy to the hands, but also the craftsmanship required for all the intricate bits and pieces to work properly. A carefully regulated 100-year-old or older clock can keep time as accurately as the atomic clock hanging on our wall. Whether they are contemporary, art deco or intricately carved wood, their faces and cases are beautiful also.

Any clock surviving more than 50 years in very nice condition deserves a good home. Sara doesn’t always think it has to be ours!

Look, I don’t golf, hunt, fish, boat or hang out in bars or with loose women. I have chosen not to collect many antiques. Clocks really seem pretty innocuous.

Nor do I look at my clocks and measure a life well spent, missed opportunities or ponder my remaining days. I enjoy listening to their ticks, chimes, clanks and clunks as well as gazing at their faces and cases.

No, we do not have double the clocks Sara mentioned.

Did she mention that part of the impetus that started this was a couple of cool clocks she bought me?

Did she mention that the most interesting clock we have is one she was enthusiastic about and wanted more than I?

The weather outside is frightful. We think that’s a good place for it.

With the cold weather upon us, learn simple things you can do now to make your home more energy efficient and lower your home heating bills this winter. Visit CreateTheGood.org to learn how you can help make a neighbor’s home warmer this winter.

For more information, please call AARP Wyoming in Cheyenne at 1-866-663-3290 or visit CreateTheGood.org.